



# Carbon Farming

OCTOBER 2015 UPDATE

## THE COMING OF BIG SOIL

We are celebrating the International Year of Soils 2015, with the Governor supporting the Healthy Soils Initiative as one of the five pillars to mitigate climate change.

World leaders are considering soil security as one of the great global issues of our time – along with food security, water security, energy security, biodiversity maintenance, and climate change; soil security is increasingly acknowledged as fundamental to the majority of these other important issues.

With the empirical science from the Marin Carbon Project driving AB 761 (Levin) and sustainable agricultural promoting SB 367 (Wolk), there will eventually be cap-and-trade revenue to support the Healthy Soils Initiative. Traditional agriculture has been fighting AB 32 for years, not fully understanding the role that agricultural could play in climate mitigation.

However, the California Climate and Agriculture Network (CalCAN) is a coalition that instead advances policies to support California agriculture in the face of climate change. CalCAN believes that agriculture can play a constructive role and help to ensure the long-term viability and security of our food and farming system, and is the sponsor of SB 367.

The forest sector embraced AB 32 early on and has received carbon credits and fame. Agriculture is finally catching up where **Big Soil** may be an even greater carbon sink than our forests and sequester compost and biochar into our working lands.

## HEALTHY SOILS INITIATIVE

CDFA continues to develop strategy and prioritize policy goals on the Healthy Soils Initiative (HSI) through their Environmental Farming Act Science Advisory Panel (EFA SAP). The HSI establishes both short- and long-term actions for enhancing soil health and compost is front and center of several elements outlined in preliminary program documents. The EFA SAP met in Sacramento focusing on compost use and the soil health benefits of increasing soil organic matter.

At the first meeting, CDFA Deputy Secretary Moffitt stated that the term “Healthy Soils” is equivalent to ensuring adequate soil carbon content. Dr. Horwath, a UCD professor, provided a detailed science-based discussion of Soil Organic Matter, and said that there is the potential to store up to 39 million Metric Tons CO<sub>2e</sub> in California soils over 10 years if all harvested, irrigated lands received consistent organic inputs. The principal obstacles to this are supply and transportation costs.

Dr. Anderson from Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory said the production of synthetic fertilizers has reached a plateau due to high cost and pollution, and that 90% of such fertilizer isn't even used by the plants. Dr. Levenson of CalRecycle discussed policy drivers, research efforts and funding available to increase compost production and said CalRecycle is working on a calculator for farmers on compost cost, coverage and nutrient supply.

## SB 367 (Wolk)

TOPIC: The Agriculture Climate Benefits Act will expand the scope of the existing CDFA Environmental Farming Program to include an explicit focus on reducing on-farm greenhouse gas emissions and/or increasing carbon storage in soils and woody biomass with \$25 million in funding from the cap-and-trade revenue. It will also amend the list of services and support to be provided to growers by CDFA to encompass: low interest loans, technical assistance, educational materials and outreach, permit assistance, and funding of on-farm demonstration projects.

STATUS: Held at Assembly Appropriations. **SUPPORT**

## AB 761 (Levine)

TOPIC: In accordance with the Governor's Healthy Soils Initiative, AB 761 (Levine) provides incentives for using California's working lands to capture and sequester harmful greenhouse gasses (GHGs) to help meet the state's AB 32 GHG emission reduction goals and fight climate change with funds to be named later.

STATUS: Held at Senate Appropriations. **SUPPORT**

## CAP-AND-TRADE ALLOCATION

At a time when climate politics has heated up with over \$2 billion in the bank, the Legislature and the Governor have abdicated their responsibilities to deploy projects, and instead will sequester the cap-and-trade money until next budget year. Governor Brown's plans to allocate up to \$20 million in cap-and-trade revenue to healthy soils have been stymied – along with a significant proportion of spending proposals, including CalRecycle's allocation for \$30 million.