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Agriculture and Natural Resources | California Institute for Water Resources

Outreach and Extension Programs for Co-management of Food Safety and Ecosystem Services in Fresh Produce

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Project Summary

Growers and distributors of California's fresh produce have long realized that reliably safe products and responsible use of resources inspire brand trust and consumer loyalty. Balancing food safety and sustainability goals has become a vital element of produce management. On their farms, growers are active stewards of the land, protecting soil and water quality as well as supporting wildlife populations by preserving their habitat. At the same time, growers must ensure that their crops are free from contamination by fecal matter, which may introduce pathogens that can cause food borne illnesses. Balancing these unique management objectives while maintaining a sound bottom line is a central challenge for California's fresh produce producers and distributors.

Co-management offers a solution. Co-management minimizes the risk of fecal contamination and the resulting microbiological hazards associated with produce production while simultaneously conserving soil, water, air, wildlife, and other natural resources.

Information Transfer/Outreach Program

Since organizing the seminal co-management research conference in 2007, ANR advisors and specialists have participated in outreach, extension and research efforts. In cooperation with the Farm Food Safety and Conservation Network, ANR academics have organized and participated in biennial Co-management Forums on the Central Coast to bring the latest research information to policy makers, conservation and food safety professionals including FDA, EPA, USDA, DFG, USF&WS, and CA LGMA. ANR academics have received more than \$1.5 million dollars in research funds to answer some of the critical research questions regarding microbial contamination in the production environment

Recognizing the need for a widely distributed and science-based description of co-management, ANR produced an Issues Brief in 2012, presented to the Food Science and Technology and the Sustainability Committees at the United Fresh 2012 meetings in Dallas Texas. This Issues Brief, "Balancing food safety and sustainability: Opportunities for co-management," has been distributed to federal and state policy makers as well buyers and distributors of fresh produce.

Co-management is widely recognized as a necessary consideration in fresh produce production. Consideration of co-management is included in the California and Arizona Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement and the 2011 Food Safety Modernization Act. By working together, food safety and sustainability managers can build understanding of how food safety practices may affect natural resources and how conservation practices affect food safety. Building understanding of co-management into all levels of management - from farm to fork - will ensure that the fresh produce industry continues to lead the way to successful balance of food safety, sustainability and a sound bottom line.

Regarding the Co-management Forums - Hank Giclas, senior vice president for strategic planning, science and technology at Western Growers said "despite the challenges, growers are committed

to providing safe food while ensuring conservation of vital natural resources and these forums are important settings in which a free flow of ideas and experiences are exchanged to further both objectives”.

We are continuing to work with stakeholders to identify and engage appropriate produce buyers and food safety professionals. These audience members have helped us to design appropriate and effective mechanisms of ongoing outreach and actionable training materials for outreach to industry decision makers.