

Environmental Stewardship Campaign

Project No.: 07-ENVIR1-Looker

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Objectives:

1. Keep growers informed about environmental issues and regulations
2. Promote the industry's environmental stewardship efforts
3. Advance almond industry efforts in sustainability

Interpretive Summary:

The Almond Board of California launched its Environmental Stewardship Campaign in November, 2003. The key elements of the campaign have been: 1) a web-based database focusing on environmental issues and providing up-to-date information on Almond Board sponsored research in air quality, water quality and crop and environmental protection, 2) a pro-active public relations campaign highlighting environmental stewardship activities among almond growers, and 3) grower newsletters and articles to highlight environmental issues impacting the almond grower community.

Major accomplishments for Year 4 ('06-'07) of the Stewardship Campaign included publishing four grower newsletters. These newsletters' topics were:

- Grower Matt Billings and his sustainable farming practices,
- Focus groups exploring the definition of sustainability for almonds
- Use of the term "sustainability" vs. use of the term "conservation",
- A summary of an International Conference on sustainability,
- The Board's funding of environmental research,
- Deadlines for joining watershed coalitions,
- New air quality regulations concerning Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs),
- The phase-out of Guthion.

Five press releases were produced in '06 –'07:

- Board serving as a role model in public-private partnerships resulting in environmental solutions.

- Extension in conditional ag waivers for irrigated lands to meet water quality regulations.
- Almond growers urged to comment on new soil fumigant rules
- Burn ban for almond orchard removal in San Joaquin Valley takes effect this June
- June workshops will discuss ag engine replacement rules

Advancing almond industry efforts in sustainability have included: refining the definition of sustainability for specific use in almond production, articulating five possible levels of sustainability that could be attainable by the almond industry, incorporating a “whole systems” approach to almond industry sustainable efforts thereby aligning with food quality, food safety, and production research areas of Board involvement, and participating in joint sustainability efforts with other California commodities.

Some of the allied partners and projects the Stewardship project is partnering with to advance efforts in sustainability include Roots of Change (ROC), Sustainable Production Systems Action Network, Ecosystem Services, California Roundtable for Agriculture and the Environment (CRAE), UC’s Agricultural Sustainability Institute (ASI), and Community Alliance of Family Farmers (CAFF).

ROC is concentrating on promoting the vision of a sustainable food system for California by the year 2030 by providing resources and opportunities to a diverse alliance of leaders within the food system sectors. Those sectors include research, food production and distribution, food security, public health, government, labor, and energy. ROC initiatives are now being formed around the three key elements of a sustainable system – social, economic, and environmental goals. One initiative coincides well with the Almond Board’s stewardship program, and that is the initiative to “celebrate farming”. This initiative is meant to change the public mindset of farmers and farming by creating a public relations campaign that holds farmers and farming in the highest esteem. It includes encouraging youth to seek a meaningful vocation in agriculture. Additionally farms are promoted as contributing significantly to social well-being due to their premier value as agricultural use - held for purposes of food production and sought after as an inheritable commodity for the next generation.

The Sustainable Production Systems Action Network is a partnership that includes commodity representatives from some of the largest agricultural commodities, top regulatory officials, UC’s ASI and ROC representatives. The goal of this effort is to engage large commodities towards sustainable practices.

The Ecosystem Services effort involves an accounting approach to measuring benefits from sustainable efforts. In the larger picture, society needs to be shown the benefits growers provide in addition to food and fiber, while farmers should know the benefits and sometimes costs of their farming practices. If a system evolved where environmental benefits could be accounted for, this metric system could then measure changes in habits and practices and possibly be used to develop incentives for growers. Representatives from this group will seek opportunities for funding a project that could

develop baseline data on current ecosystem services, and then evaluate the benefits and costs of alternative practices.

CRAE is working to develop a set of environmental standards that could be adopted into commodity-specific sustainability programs. This effort involves participation by regulatory agencies and is pursuing possible avenues for regulatory relief based upon an objective assessment of sustainable efforts.

In addition to the pursuit of these partnerships, each year a highlight for the year is a Almond Environmental Stewardship Tour, which was held on March 2, 2007 at Travaille and Phippen Inc. in Manteca. Participants included Mary-Ann Warmerdam, director, California Department of Pesticide Regulation, Steve Shaffer, director of the CDFA's new Agriculture and Environmental Stewardship office, and Cindy Wire, Region 9 representative for the U.S. EPA,

For Year 5 ('07-'08), the Stewardship Project will continue to monitor regulatory and environmental issues of importance to the almond industry, supply website updates, provide newsletter briefs for 10 proposed monthly newsletters, do in-depth newsletter features promoting stewardship efforts, and press releases promoting stewardship and sustainability efforts. Another Stewardship Tour will be planned for key media and regulatory contacts. A draft document of BMP's and GAP's will be assembled with the purpose of evaluating in a single document, sustainability efforts. This document would also be useful when interfacing with the regulatory community. Possible avenues for attaining regulatory relief based upon sustainability efforts will be pursued. CAFF and UC IPM will submit a proposal to the Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) for the continuation of the Almond Pest Management Alliance (PMA). PMA II provides a framework for advancing sustainability efforts in collaboration with UC IPM and DPR while providing the means to commit to successive years of outreach and demonstration to achieve maximum success. PMA II builds upon PMA I by committing to a thorough analysis of trends as available in the Pesticide Use Reports, expanding outreach to target pest control advisors, and by maintaining a dialogue with chemical suppliers for development of more reduced risk options for growers.