



Agricultural Council
of California

AG COUNCIL HOSTS SUCCESSFUL 106TH ANNUAL MEETING

Ag Council hosted its 106th Annual Meeting in Napa, March 17-19 in conjunction with CoBank's Pacific West Customer meeting. The event featured presentations from prominent legislative and regulatory decision-makers, as well as business leaders.

The event kicked off with an Annual Dinner and a keynote address from Assembly Majority Leader Cecilia Aguiar-Curry (D-Winters). Drawing on her roots in a rural, farming community, Aguiar-Curry said, "We can never forget our people. Affordability is important to everyone, whether you are a consumer or grower," she said. "But every region is different, and there is no solution that fits everyone." Her address recognized the role that agriculture plays in California's economy, and the importance of creating a path for the next generation.

Ag Council President Emily Rooney delivered her annual breakfast address and discussed the organization's advocacy work with legislators and regulatory agencies. She thanked outgoing Chairman Darren Hoff for his "thoughtful leadership." She added, "Ag Council's membership creates meaningful change in California. We have had several successful wins, whether it is defeating the statewide minimum wage ballot initiative or funding climate-smart ag programs -- the leadership on those issues has come from this group."

Jackson Gualco of The Gualco Group, served as emcee during the General Session that followed breakfast. The session kicked off with a testimonial video featuring Ag Council board member and Butte County Rice Growers Association (BUCRA) President and CEO, Carl Hoff, and BUCRA members Steve Rystrom and Greg Stephens. Hoff encapsulated the opinion of many of Ag Council's members when he said, "Our work is not just about winning the battle, but about constantly watching for issues and staying in front of them on behalf of the members."

To better understand some of those issues that are critical to California's farmer-owned businesses, the General Session began with remarks from California Natural Resources Agency Secretary Wade Crowfoot. The agency oversees a vast array of land use and water issues in the state. Water and wildfire have become critical to shaping California's future. "We have always had droughts in California, and we have always had floods. We have to do a better job of capturing rain when it comes and we have to simplify what it takes to run a business in California when it comes to environmental policy," Crowfoot said.

A unique panel discussion focused on the statute to reduce single-use packaging in California and featured CalRecycle Director Zoe Heller, CA Retailers Association CEO Rachel Michelin, and Circular Action Alliance Executive Director Rachel Wagoner. California Department of Food and Agriculture Undersecretary Christine Birdsong moderated the panel.

“We need regulatory agencies that talk to each other,” Michelin said. “There are too many statutes that compete with each other.”

As panel moderator, Birdsong discussed new administration initiatives to “make America healthy again,” but observed how those efforts can be hindered by not providing convenient, easy-to-use products and packaging. “Consumers want to do the right thing when it comes to eating healthy and recycling, but we have to be able to provide them the solutions.”

The General Session wrapped up with a presentation by Merlot Marketing CEO Debi Hammond on the power of storytelling, key ingredients for farmers to share their story, as well as insightful information about utilizing artificial intelligence. She advised, “People don’t buy what you do, they buy *why* you do it.”

The 106th Annual Meeting concluded by recognizing Jeanna Hultquist as the recipient of the prestigious 2025 California Cultivator Award. “Jeanna has been a vocal proponent for agriculture—advancing the interests of producers at both the state and federal level,” Ag Council Chair Darren Hoff said. “She has left an enduring mark, and we are indebted for her many years of service, tenacious spirit and inspiring leadership.”

Ag Council appreciates all who attended and thanks our sponsors for their support.