

Brown's budget includes boosts for CDFA, ag education

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — Gov. Jerry Brown's \$122.5 billion initial state spending plan for 2017-18 calls for a slight boost for its main agriculture agency to fund efforts to regulate marijuana, fight plant pests and manage antibiotics in livestock.

Brown would provide \$284.4 million to the California Department of Food and Agriculture, up from its \$253.9 million in the current budget, and add nearly 300 new positions for a total of 1,752.1 full-time-equivalent employees, according to his Jan. 10 proposal.

The CDFA's overall budget would be \$411.5 million, down slightly from the \$414.5 million allocated to the agency in the 2016-17 budget. Federal funds and fee programs also contribute to the CDFA's finances.



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

From left, farm manager B.J. Macfarlane puts a castration band on a goat held by student Colton DeBerry as student Hunter Allen stands ready with an inoculation Jan. 9 at Shasta College in Redding, Calif. Gov. Jerry Brown's proposed budget includes a \$23.6 million boost for community colleges statewide.

The governor's proposal would include nearly \$22.4 million in new spending to regulate cannabis production, which voters legalized for non-medical uses in November, and about \$2 million apiece to

implement the Produce Safety Rule and new antibiotics controls.

One key expenditure would be \$4.4 million for a pest and disease prevention program, which would devote about

190 employees to such tasks as combating the spread of the Asian citrus psyllid and huanglongbing, the deadly tree disease it can carry.

The budget devotes an additional \$1.75 million and 20 positions to an emergency exotic pest response unit. Some currently seasonal employees would be switched to full-time to address the citrus issue, CDFA secretary Karen Ross said.

"Not only have we seen the spread of the agent itself (the psyllid), but now we're seeing the disease," which has been found in 30 trees in Southern California, Ross told reporters in a conference call. "We need to continue the program to beef up our quarantine and work with the citrus industry. ... It's more crucial now than ever."

The citrus industry has been trying for the past two years to get state money for the psyllid and HLB, for which the indus-

try has allocated \$15 million toward research and education and received \$11 million from the federal government.

California is strengthening its quarantine for the psyllid, which now covers roughly one-third of the state's total land mass.

The cannabis funding is part of \$57.2 million shared by five agencies to license and regulate the drug, which would be funded by cultivation taxes and license fees. The CDFA's role would include issuing the licenses and developing a program to track the movement of medical marijuana through the distribution chain, according to a budget summary.

Among the other elements of Brown's spending plan that could affect agriculture:

- The governor proposes increases of \$146.7 million for the University of California, \$76.3 million for the California State University and \$23.6

million for community colleges statewide.

Some of the UC's new money would likely go to the Agriculture and Natural Resources division, which runs Cooperative Extension. The division plans to add 26 positions to extension, which now has 173 advisers and 115 specialists, said Lucas Frerichs, UCANR's government and community affairs manager.

"This new ... release continues our commitment for hiring to exceed projected turnover, thus achieving our goal of academic growth," Frerichs said in an email.

- The budget includes another \$178.7 million in one-time funding for drought response, including \$91 million for enhanced fire protection, \$52.7 million for disaster assistance, \$5.3 million for water rights management and \$5 million for local assistance for small communities.

Agencies tout progress on state's blueprint for water efficiency

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press



John Laird

SACRAMENTO — Water recycling, farm irrigation efficiency projects and implementing the new groundwater regulations were among the state's accomplishments under Gov. Jerry Brown's Water Action Plan in 2016, officials said.

Several California agencies are reporting they made "significant progress" in the past year toward achieving the goals set out in the five-year plan that Brown initiated in January 2014.

The plan's major goals include making conservation "a way of life," increasing regional water self-reliance, preparing for droughts and providing safe water for communities, according to a summary. It is also a blueprint for non-reservoir spending under Propo-

sition 1, the \$7.5 billion water bond approved by voters in 2014.

"We will continue the 'all of the above' water supply strategy we have, which is embodied in the Water Action Plan," Natural Resources Agency Secretary John Laird told reporters in a conference call to discuss Brown's proposed budget. "We've made major progress in the 10 major tenets that are there."

"Given this budget, it contemplates making even more progress in the coming year," Laird said.

The governor on Jan. 10 proposed spending \$248 million of Proposition 1 funding

on local projects, an increase of \$15 million to the Department of Water Resources to provide technical assistance and \$2.3 million to the State Water Resources Control Board to enforce diversion recording requirements, he said.

Water officials believe they have momentum going into 2017 based on their work of the past year, according to a summary of accomplishments prepared by the Natural Resources Agency, the state Environmental Protection Agency and the state Department of Food and Agriculture.

"This plan is critically important beyond the year-to-year fluctuations we experience in precipitation," CDFA Secretary Karen Ross said in a statement. "Looking ahead, we know that we must work together to make every drop of water count for California."

Strawberry production stabilizes

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

WATSONVILLE, Calif. — After several years of modest declines in acreage and production, California's strawberry industry appears to be stabilizing, just as China opened its doors to the berries.

Growers expect to plant 36,141 acres of strawberries this year 2017, up slightly from the 36,038 acres planted statewide last year, according to a California Strawberry Commission survey.

The survey comes as the state's production returned to its record-setting ways in 2016, as growers filled more than 196.4 million flats, the commission reported. Production vaulted over the nearly 194.8 million flats produced in 2013, when growers enjoyed their seventh record-breaking season in the previous eight years.

Industry representatives see

the rebound as good news for growers, as global demand for strawberries is already increasing and new market access to China portends even more exports, said Chris Christian, the strawberry commission's senior vice president.

"It's kind of nice to see it leveling off after a couple of years of declining acreage," Christian said. "The varieties we're seeing now are much higher yielding, and everyone sees this as a good opportunity to take advantage of the good demand."

Per-person consumption of strawberries in the U.S. has been increasing over the last two decades, reaching a record at 7.9 pounds in 2013, according to the USDA-funded Agricultural Marketing Resource Center. California's exports have been decreasing with production, as shipments totaled 279.2 million pounds in 2015 compared to nearly 331 million

pounds in 2013, according to the commission's latest annual exports report.

But exports could ramp up again with access to China, as that nation's General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine has set up a pest-detection protocol to begin accepting California berries after 11 years of negotiations with the USDA.

"Only a couple of very small shipments have gone over so far, but we expect within a couple of years the China market in the summer months to be a significant opportunity," Christian said. "In China, there aren't any domestically produced strawberries in the summer months."

Strawberry acreage in California had been on a downward trend from 40,816 in 2013, and production suffered a couple of years of declines, to 192 million 8-pound flats in 2014 and 190 million in 2015, the commission reported.

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