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Opinion

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Our View

When it comes to water, Newsom 'gets it'

Whatever else you might think about California's governor, Gavin Newsom understands water.

More importantly, he understands the value of water to the state's economy, particularly agriculture.

Instead of standing around wringing his hands, as "leaders" in neighboring states have done, Newsom has set into motion a comprehensive plan aimed at assuring the state will have adequate water for decades to come.

It's not perfect but it's a far sight better than nothing, which is what some other states have.

California's legislative leaders have also put their money where their mouths are. During the past three years, they have earmarked \$8 billion to improve water infrastructure and management. That's in addition to designating \$2.8 billion for drought relief.

State managers estimate the water supply will shrink by 10% during the next 20 years because of hotter, drier weather associated with climate change. That's an estimated 6 million acre-feet of water that will disappear. For comparison, Shasta Lake,



California Gov. Gavin Newsom

the state's largest reservoir, holds 4.5 million acre-feet.

What California's doing:

- Building 4 million acre-feet of water storage above ground and in aquifers to retain rain and snow runoff. This includes increasing aquifer recharge by 500,000 acre-feet. An additional 2.2 million acre-feet of recharge projects are on the drawing boards. The state also plans to raise and rehabilitate other dams to increase their capacities.

- Recycling 800,000 acre-feet of wastewater, most of which is now treated and dumped into the ocean.

- Finding 500,000 acre-feet of water through efficiencies and conservation.

- Desalinating ocean and brackish groundwater. This has already been successfully done in California, Israel and other parts of the world.

By doing all of that, the governor estimates the state will increase the water supply by 5 million acre-feet in 2030 and 7 million acre-feet in 2040.

In the plan, the governor and his

administration acknowledge that California has always been prone to a drought-storm cycle. Instead of trying to hang all of their efforts on climate change — as some other politicians like to do — they recognize that cycle will continue.

Two areas addressed in the plan raise red flags for us. The first is the assumption that agriculture in California will shrink by 500,000 to 1 million acres as groundwater management is changed.

Those numbers give us pause. Researchers in California and elsewhere are developing varieties of crops that will produce bigger yields using less water. Because of that and other efficiencies that are continuously under development, we think Mr. Newsom and others will be surprised. As the world's population passes 8 billion, more food, not less, will be needed. Paring down farmland in one of the nation's most productive states hardly seems prudent.

Another concern is the plan to reduce the use of turf grass in the state. We wonder whether the ability of grass to absorb atmospheric carbon — a key factor in climate change — was considered. It seems self-de-

feating to get rid of carbon-sequestering grass to save water, particularly as "less thirsty" turf varieties continue to become available.

Other steps in Newsom's plan include upgrading the state's water transfer systems and the water rights system that dates back to the 19th century. The plan also includes expedited permitting for water-related projects, a key to speeding up this important work.

Also on the docket is upgrading the state's water supply forecasting system.

A wildcard is how environmental groups will react to the plan and the projects it includes. It seems as though some of those groups have never seen a construction project they liked, so stand by.

The goal of the plan is to stabilize and bolster the state's water supply. While we can take issue with portions of it, the need for a plan is clear and demonstrates that Newsom, his department heads and legislators "get it" when it comes to managing the state's water supply.

Other states' leaders would do well to follow in those footsteps and develop plans of their own.

Our View



123rf

An initiative in Massachusetts attempts to set production requirements for hog farms nationwide.

The Bay State seeks national animal welfare reform

We've written extensively about California's Prop 12, a measure approved by voters in 2018 that bans the sale of eggs, pork and veal products in California unless production facilities meet animal-confinement standards dictated by the state — regardless of the state in which production takes place.

It is bad law that hopefully will be struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court later this year.

Somehow, we missed a similar and equally bad initiative passed by Massachusetts voters in 2016 that has now landed in the federal courts.

Question 3 — passed by 77.6% of voters — predated Prop 12, but had its genesis in an earlier failed attempt in California to regulate chicken cages.

As in California, the real purpose of Question 3 was to force production changes throughout the country. The Bay State had only one farm at the time of the vote that would have been impacted by Question 3. Under the measure, all products sold in Massachusetts must be produced according to the state's rules.

But, what rules? Voters vested the attorney general with the authority to establish the rules by Jan. 1, 2020, which were then to go into effect Jan. 1, 2022. That would have given farms and processors two years to adapt.

The AG missed the deadline. In December 2021 the legislature transferred responsibility to the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources, and extended the deadline for producers to comply to Aug. 15, 2022.

The rules were not issued until June 10, giv-

ing producers, processors, distributors and retailers about six weeks to upend the national supply chain to segregate Massachusetts-compliant meat and eggs from all others. Because of how the rules were written, it would be a minimum of 10 months before any pork products could possibly meet the regulations.

And as an added wrinkle, pork sold to wholesalers within the state for sale to customers outside the state will also have to meet the requirements. Virtually all the commercial pork products sold in stores and restaurants in New England are distributed by companies in Massachusetts.

As in the case of Prop 12, the National Pork Producers Council and a group of restaurant and hospitality trade groups have filed a federal lawsuit to block the rules. They argue that compliance on such a short deadline is a near logistical impossibility, given the complex realities of pork production, processing and distribution on a national scale.

They also argue that Question 3's extraterritoriality runs afoul of the Constitution's commerce clause, which gives Congress exclusive authority to regulate commerce between the states.

The U.S. Supreme Court is scheduled to take up that question in the Prop 12 lawsuit in October. Plaintiffs in the Massachusetts case have asked the district court to block enforcement of Question 3 until at least 30 days after the Supreme Court rules.

Though the efforts are often misguided, we recognize a state's right to regulate production methods within its borders. But they don't have the right to force a dubious animal rights agenda onto the rest of the country.

Coming together to secure our water future

GUEST
VIEW

The Oregon Agricultural
Water Alliance

Oregon agriculture continues to persevere amidst historic drought conditions, worldwide supply chain issues, burdensome and unnecessary regulation and global food insecurity at a level not seen in recent memory.

As an industry we can do a lot, but it's time to recognize that things must change. As droughts increase in severity and intensity, we must position ourselves to be resilient and adaptable when it comes to changing conditions.

Our members are consistently looking for innovative new ways to get the work done in an efficient and sustainable manner while continuing their significant role in feeding and clothing the world and making substantial contributions to the statewide, national and global economy.

If we are going to continue to be part of the solution, it is essential that we are able to access our most basic need: Water.

Recently, our organizations partnered together to form the Oregon Agricultural Water Alliance, which will focus on strategic water investments and common-sense policies to promote sound water management and agricultural sustainability throughout our beautiful state. The need for this work has never been greater.

Collectively, our organizations represent a broad spectrum of individuals and entities that serve nearly 600,000 irrigated acres and represent over 14,000 producers of food and other agricultural products in Oregon.

The future of irrigated agriculture and the survival of family-owned and operated farms and ranches in Oregon is at risk like never before. As organizations with diverse memberships throughout the state, we can no longer afford to work separately if we hope to bring much needed change to the state's water management. We recognize that together, we are stronger, and this is how we will operate as we look ahead to a critical legislative session and key election cycle in the months to come.

Our state cannot risk continuing down the path of disinvestment in water storage. State and federal agencies must be accountable for effective and efficient water management. Oregon needs outcome-focused partnerships, not regulatory roadblocks that penalize creative problem solving. As opportunities arise, we need to be prepared to leverage federal funding for state and local infrastructure projects.

Moreover, the State must facilitate opportunities as part of its own water resources strategy. Unfortunately, we are already behind on this front.

As an alliance, we will work to shift state water policy to prioritize maintaining an adequate, safe, and affordable food supply, creating more water storage both above and below ground, creating drought resilient programs and projects, increasing interstate cooperation in water supply and management, demanding more agency accountability, and reducing costly and unnecessary state agency litigation.

Together, we plan to create positive change by developing viable pathways for water projects implementation, advocating for needed changes to agency processes and administration, conducting tours for legislators and agency staff to highlight opportunities to improve or create water projects, and proactively supporting innovation.

We believe it is critical that the public be informed about the importance of irrigated agriculture for the State's future health and prosperity. A recent poll asked Oregonians about the importance of the agriculture and livestock sectors to Oregon's economy; a whopping 70% of Oregonians, across a wide range of ages, political parties, and geographic areas, responded that the industries are "extremely important."

Without the proper investment in water storage, and a shift in water policy and management, it will be a matter of time before we lose significant portions of our distinctive and diverse agriculture industry — a critical piece of what makes our state the exceptional and unique place that it is.

To learn more about the alliance, please visit: www.oawa.info

Signatories to this column are: Todd Nash, president of Oregon Cattlemen's Association; Mike Miranda, president of Oregon Dairy Farmers Association; Angi Bailey, president of Oregon Farm Bureau; Josh Robinson, president of Oregon Association of Nurseries; Jake Madison, president of Northeast Oregon Water Association; Rex Barber, president of Water for Life Inc.; and Brian Hampson, president of Oregon Water Resources Congress.