

CALIFORNIA AGRICULTURAL NEIGHBORS

Work Group: Scientific Engagement and Communication

To help achieve positive outcomes for:

Accelerate translation of new information from the California Longitudinal Study into action through engagement of additional partners and new work products and outreach plans.

CHARTER

Purpose

This charter establishes the California Agricultural Neighbors (CAN Work Group) that will champion and help facilitate clear producer and industry information, next steps, and action regarding food safety practices given emerging scientific information from the California Longitudinal Study (CALs) and previous research. The primary task of the Work Group will review food safety risk co-management (One Health) strategies for nearby or adjacent lands dedicated to the production of fresh produce and livestock. The review will also incorporate the necessary conservation practices for wildlife and grazing areas. Second, the Work Group will provide recommendations for neighbor-to-neighbor management strategies for compost managers and their nearby fresh fruit and vegetable producers.

Work Group Objectives

This Work Group will help bridge the information presented in the CALs and other available scientific literature into clear, distilled field level recommendations and co-management needs.

Work productions may include talking points and guidance documents that are aligned with appropriate public health regulatory authorities, tools, or summaries to aid in opening a broader dialogue with producers, industry, and retailers, and updates of key elements of the CAN work, such as but not limited to the Research Roadmap, QMRA, and outreach and education materials as applicable.

Work Group Goals

- The first goal of the Work Group will be to establish a broad group of stakeholders who can help critically review and pragmatically apply the results of the CALs research data outcomes in the context of known science and current agronomic and livestock practices. Based on this review, the Work Group will publish guidance on how Southwestern U.S. agricultural producers can consider the CALs outcomes in their operations. The guidance document will focus on food safety co-management strategies for regional agricultural landscapes that include both fresh fruit and vegetable producers and livestock operations and appropriate for regional conditions and influences. Recommendations will also be provided that include food safety risk reduction best practices for wildlife while upholding natural resource conservation. Lastly, within this effort the Work Group will address fresh produce operations that are nearby or adjacent to compost operations through best practice recommendations regarding neighbor-to-neighbor food safety risk reduction strategies.
- The second goal of the Work Group is to identify the resources, pathways, and necessary sustained collaboration for outreach and education of the information developed.
- The Work Group will determine what key next steps are critical to building long term success, and other work products that will serve the broad agricultural community, including the nexus needed to bolster the University of California Cooperative Extension capacity in California.
- Finally, the Work Group will communicate to the CAN Steering Committee what key questions the Work Group is addressing and when it is best to interact with the other CAN Work Groups in order to keep efforts aligned, informed, efficient, and productive.

Work Group Background

This Work Group will support the 2024 CAN Action Report, specifically Next Step #3 as highlighted in the report:

- #3. Engagement of additional partners and collaborative, including the California Longitudinal Study, to accelerate translation of new information to action and work products that will serve the broad agricultural community.

This will be accomplished by building a collaborative network necessary for input and impact, including the clear messaging essential for continuous learning and focused action. The California Agricultural Neighbors unique contribution towards enhanced food safety is the collaboration between and among neighbors, and thus the whole community, to take actions resulting in reduced risk of microbial contamination. Prioritized actions are expected to be science-based, clearly delineated, and compelling for addressing factors relevant for improving food safety. The work that CAN accomplished in 2022-2024 filled gaps that previously were difficult to define, collaborate on, and identify progress for as the solutions cannot be solved by a single entity alone, instead requiring intense collaboration, vision, and an innovative One Health approach. As part of the next steps, CAN established with stakeholders an understanding that information should continually evolve and progress. The key areas for action and progress became evident through the process of diverse stakeholder input, including the critical interplay between each of the next steps (as detailed below), ultimately building and sustaining a system that fosters a proactive food safety culture.

More specifically these next steps include:

- 3.1. The California Longitudinal Study (CALs) is expected to share an update in winter 2025 and together CAN and CALs forge a valuable partnership of science and collaboration in the next steps ahead of enhanced food safety.
- 3.2. The CALs effort aims to provide an extensive data set to evaluate trends or changes over time, including metagenomics¹ that may yield important clues to the changes taking place in the microbial community in response to the changing environment of the California coastal region. This will help aid in proactive next steps towards enhance food safety, including building upon the Quantitative Microbial Risk Assessment modeling efforts of Work Group #3.
- 3.3. Engage research organizations and/or policy partners to help ideate funding opportunities and potential solution-based outcomes that respect the diversity of agricultural production and public health with a vision towards proactive food safety outcomes. This includes engagement of leadership at both FDA and USDA to work across agencies in partnership knowing that the products produced by the diversity of agriculture are cornerstone to diets centering on whole foods necessary to advance the health of the nation.

Work Group Team

The Work Group will consist of Strategic Partners from federal, state, and local agencies, associations, private industry, academia, nonprofit, advocacy groups, as well as farmers (growers), ranchers, vineyard managers, and compost suppliers.

Chair: De Ann Davis

Co-Chair: Jack Rice

Work Group Operations

The Work Group chair and co-chair will define the approval mechanism for project objectives.

This Work Group will meet regularly to formulate concepts, ideas, and recommendations into a working draft document.

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metagenomics>

The charge to the Work Group will be to propose draft next steps and appropriate guidance documents to the CAN Steering Committee that aid in operationalizing the learnings or next steps of CALS. This will include providing monthly updates to the Steering Committee during the development process.

Assumptions:

- Existing CAN engagement functions can serve as a helpful outreach platform.
- Reach will likely need to exist beyond just the CA Central Coast growing region as the CALS results may have bearing and input to other growing regions.
- This will be a process that works in parallel to the CALS Communications group and serves beyond the timeframe of the CALS Communications group.
- Individuals who participate on the work group will be key conduits for helping share information or engage participants.
- This Work Group will be attentive to parallel engagement and communication efforts, including, but not limited to those of the Sustainable Alliance for Food Ecosystems (SAFE), CDFA One Health, and the Reagan Udall Foundation Roadmap to Produce Safety: Summary Report of the Produce Safety Dialogue.
- Regionality of differing agricultural production areas will be a priority consideration.

Strategies if the Assumptions Above Are Determined to be True:

- Re-engage the CAN Town Hall group as necessary
- Broad association engagement will likely be necessary and may need to go beyond just growers and ranchers
- Engage researchers and extension partners with the Work Group to determine best ways to communicate information and guide next steps, including where extension resources may be necessary additions to support on the ground efforts and learnings.
- There should be guidance developed or standardized documents that can help provide a uniform messaging platform.

Work Group Deliverables

- Draft Work Group product will be presented to the CAN Steering Committee for final approval, date to be determined.
- The efforts of this Work Group will parallel the roll out of the CALS project findings and likely commence during 2026.