

Commentary: Fresno State explores new opportunities in agriculture

California Farm Bureau Federation

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By Joseph I. Castro



Joseph Castro

At the end of my first 100 days as president of California State University, Fresno, I announced the formation of the President's Commission on the Future of Agriculture and charged it with the task of identifying opportunities and strengthening industry partnerships to make Fresno State's agricultural programs and facilities among the best in the nation.

There is no doubt that California agriculture has transformed itself over the decades, born of a necessity to address endless challenges such as the current, devastating drought. Fresno State, located in the heart of the No.1 producing region in the nation, is geographically poised to take the lead in making sure the agricultural industry has the tools it needs to be cutting edge and remain economically successful, whatever the challenges that lie ahead. I created this commission to fulfill my vision for Fresno State to become the front-runner in providing California agriculture with its future employees, industry leaders and innovators in production agriculture and food processing.

Fresno State's Jordan College of Agricultural Sciences and Technology is proud of its programs that provide quality education and applied research in agriculture and food technology, but we can do more. We must help our students excel in a changing agriculture and food industry, and ensure Fresno State will be even stronger for the next generation of students. My commission is designed to do just that: identify industry needs and make recommendations on how Fresno State's agricultural programs—defined to include intersections with science, math, engineering, business and other areas—can be among the very best.

Co-chaired by dairyman, attorney and industry leader George Soares of Hanford and Fresno State Interim Provost Andrew Hoff, the commission includes agribusiness and industry leaders from throughout the valley, plus university representatives, who are charged specifically to:

- Review Fresno State's academic, applied research and public service programs that are focused on agriculture and/or serve the needs of the agricultural industry;
- Identify areas of opportunity where Fresno State's agricultural programs and facilities can be among the best in the nation;
- Recommend strategies to strengthen partnerships among Fresno State, government agencies, private foundations, individual philanthropists and the agricultural industry in support of campus agricultural programs.

Commission members include Darius Assemi, Granville Management Inc., Fresno; Kim Ruiz Beck, Ruiz Food Products Inc., Dinuba; Barry Bedwell, California Grape and Tree Fruit League, Fresno; Carol Chandler, Chandler Farms, Selma; Octavia Diener, Fresno State Foundation Board, Fresno; Ryan Jacobsen, Fresno County Farm Bureau, Fresno; David Mas Masumoto, Masumoto Farms Inc., Del Rey; Marvin Meyers, Meyers Farming, Firebaugh; Dennis Parnagian, Fowler Packing Co., Fresno; Pat Ricchuiti, P-R Farms Inc., Clovis; Mario Santoyo, Friant Water Authority, Lindsay; Bill Smittcamp, Wawona Frozen Foods, Clovis; Peter Weber, Regional Job Initiatives, Fresno; and Dennis Nef, Susan Elrod, Ram Nunna and Lynn Williams, all of Fresno State.

The commission has met and is actively engaged in examining ways for the Jordan College to achieve its full potential. A preliminary report of the commission's findings and recommendations will be available in early May.

This is an exciting time for Fresno State agriculture, its students, faculty, alumni and industry partners. I encourage our alumni and friends of the university, in particular, to become part of this very important effort. I hope you will contact me with your ideas and suggestions.

(Joseph I. Castro is president of California State University, Fresno. He can be contacted on Twitter via @JosephICastro.)

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