



Policy Resolution 2020-06 Western Agriculture

A. BACKGROUND

1. Agriculture in the western states and territories is significantly different from that in other regions of the country. The West has greater variations in soil, climate, terrain, commodities, production practices and water availability. That difference is even greater for Alaska, Hawai'i and the U.S. territories.
2. Farms and ranches are important contributors to the economies and quality of life of western states. Among other important values, western agricultural lands are primary sources of open space, wildlife habitat, water supplies, and diverse rural economic opportunities in the recreation, food, fiber, energy and bio-based product industries.
3. Agriculture and food industry members support vibrant local economies and robust and stable food security systems across the West.
4. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), through the National Agricultural Statistics Service, conducts the Census of Agriculture every five years. Census of Agriculture data provides valuable insights on the average age of producers, new and young entrants to the agriculture sector, net cash income, crop insurance payments, specialty crop production and other useful metrics. State-acquired data must also be considered when evaluating industry metrics.
5. The 2017 Census of Agriculture includes many useful findings regarding the agricultural workforce in western states. Notably, only 6 percent of primary producers are age 35 or younger, while over 25 percent are between 65 and 74 years old. Additionally, approximately 14 percent of primary producers in western states have served or serve in the U.S. military. Women's role in agriculture has grown substantially as well, constituting over 38 percent of the agricultural workforce in 2017, versus under 33 percent in 2012. Minority communities and seasonal and temporary workers also make significant contributions to agricultural production and distribution across the West.
6. The 2017 Census of Agriculture illustrates the importance of specialty and high-value crop production in western states. In terms of total cash value of agricultural production, the top ten producing counties are all located in western states.
7. Trade promotion plays an important role in ensuring that western agricultural products have an opportunity to compete with products produced and subsidized internationally. The United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement and programs offered by USDA and the Small Business Administration (SBA) all help improve international market opportunities for American growers and value-added product manufacturers.
8. The West's network of land-grant universities and colleges, as well as Cooperative Extension Service programs and Agricultural Experiment Stations, provide national leadership in research to develop more resilient seeds and crops, manage soil health,

improve the health of public lands, advance technology deployment in the bio-based economy and conduct on-farm experiments that help farmers and ranchers be more effective and efficient.

9. Precision agriculture technologies are helping deliver increased crop yields and farm productivity while reducing the use of water, fertilizer, pesticides and other agricultural inputs. Certain advanced agriculture technologies require fixed or mobile broadband connectivity while others utilize Global Positioning System tools.
10. Proper integration of many advanced agriculture technologies requires producers to have robust broadband connectivity at both their residences and across their operating areas. Wireless technologies and access to wireless spectrum can help support cost-effective technology adoption by agricultural producers. USDA and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) have recently launched efforts to promote on-farm connectivity and the growth of the precision agriculture sector.
11. Beyond the integration of advanced technologies, broadband access allows producers to conduct necessary agricultural business functions like online advertising and livestock auctions.
12. Western agricultural cooperatives perform many important functions for their members and rural communities. These include provision of seed, feed and fertilizer to growers; product storage, processing and transportation; trade and market promotion; and education and technical assistance.
13. Western Governors recognize that nutrition assistance programs are necessary to meet the needs of children and the most vulnerable, while creating economic opportunity across the agriculture supply chain – from the store where food is purchased, all the way back to the farm.
14. Agricultural production throughout the West requires integrated water management and robust state, federal, and private cooperation and investment in water delivery infrastructure, predictive and adaptive capabilities for extreme weather variability, and data relating to water resource availability.
15. The COVID-19 pandemic has created significant issues across food supply and distribution networks. Growers, value-added businesses, processing facilities, distribution companies and food retailers, including farmers markets, have all faced costly disruptions to their standard operations.
16. Without governmental action, the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on growers, farmworkers, manufacturers, delivery networks, and other agricultural entities are likely to be long-lasting and severe. Circumstances that are likely to affect the economic viability of producers, farmworkers and agricultural businesses include: restaurant, hotel and school closures; reduced consumer spending; seasonal and migratory workforce disruptions; and disease outbreaks within the agricultural community.
17. The COVID-19 pandemic is stressing state departments of agriculture and the Cooperative Extension Services and Agricultural Experiment Station networks. Many state agricultural and food programs which are relied upon for food safety and market development are likely

to be disrupted or canceled due to COVID-related challenges. The Cooperative Extension Services and Agricultural Experiment Station Networks are facing similar impediments to important agricultural and food network research projects due to data collection interruptions, personnel changes and other issues associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

18. USDA launched the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program and Farmers to Families Food Box Program in order to address challenges facing producers, agricultural businesses, and food insecure families as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
19. As western communities struggle to cope with disruptions to our food supply chains and historic job losses due to COVID-19, Governors continue to pursue solutions to connect surplus agricultural products with the growing number of food insecure families in our states. State and local leaders are best positioned to strategically direct food purchasing and distribution due to their understanding of unique challenges facing farmers and food assistance providers in their communities.
20. Local communities and food banks can face capacity issues, such as staffing shortages and refrigeration and storage challenges, while managing the preparation and distribution of emergency food supplies. Many are also adjusting to new packaging and distribution strategies, including grab-and-go meals and home deliveries.

B. GOVERNORS' POLICY STATEMENT

1. Western Governors support funding for the USDA Market Access and Foreign Market Development Programs and SBA State Trade Expansion Program to promote opportunities for western producers to increase export revenues and encourage trade agreements that maximize benefits for the West's farmers and ranchers. Western Governors appreciate the increased alignment between USDA and SBA agricultural trade promotion programs.
2. Western Governors support adequate funding for the USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, which provides critical research, education, and promotion tools to fruit and vegetable producers with an annual re-evaluation of funding formulas and eligible crops.
3. Western states have experienced sharp declines in farm income and farm prices since their peaks in 2013. Western Governors support a farm safety net that recognizes past deficit reduction contributions of the agricultural sector and maintains funding for other key commodity, conservation, crop insurance, research, energy, and export promotion programs.
4. Western Governors encourage the expansion of programs that can meet the unique educational, training, technical and financial needs of new, beginning and veteran farmers and ranchers and other USDA programming that can help returning veterans develop and expand business opportunities in rural communities.
5. Western Governors emphasize that the agriculture industry has a growing need for workers with science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) skills. We support efforts to develop a diverse and skilled agricultural workforce, by increasing awareness of career opportunities, expanding education and training programs, and other means, in order to meet the needs of this increasingly high-tech industry.

6. Western Governors support the expansion of research and implementation funding to address drought, a changing climate and extreme weather risks facing western producers.
7. Western Governors encourage the effective use of Cooperative Extension Services, Agricultural Experiment Stations and other partnerships to deliver practical tools, technologies and information to farmers, ranchers and forest landowners. We support Congressional and Administrative efforts that provide support to the Cooperative Extension Services and Agricultural Experiments Station networks as they address research, staff capacity, and agricultural and food system challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.
8. Western Governors emphasize the importance of supporting the growth of the precision agriculture sector and highlight the substantive policy recommendations contained in our policy resolution addressing broadband connectivity issues.
9. Western Governors support funding for federal programs that provide assistance to agricultural cooperatives across the West. These include USDA Rural Cooperative Development Grants and Value-Added Producer Grants, and programs administered by USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service and National Institute of Food & Agriculture.
10. Nutrition assistance programs should continue to provide flexibility for states to respond to unique economic conditions, serve all eligible participants without drastically reducing benefits, and encourage continued pursuit of transparency, efficiency, and accountability in program administration.
11. Existing federal assistance options that help build connections between growers with surplus products and food insecure families lack the flexibility to nimbly address needs in many western communities. Western Governors support Congressional and Administrative efforts to provide states with emergency funding to purchase goods from local producers who lack a market for their surplus crops, and provide them to food banks and nutrition assistance programs who are facing unprecedented demands.
12. Western Governors encourage USDA to coordinate with state departments of agriculture and local governments in the delivery of the Farmers to Families Food Box Program and other federal efforts focused on addressing food insecurity challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Strong partnerships across federal, state and local agencies can help ensure that food is not wasted due to logistical and capacity constraints at local food banks.
13. Western Governors support legislative measures that provide states with access to flexible funding to respond to urgent and emerging issues in the agricultural economy and food supply chain. Additionally, we support legislative efforts that address agricultural supply chain disruptions; increase food banks and nonprofits' capacity to address growing nutrition demands; provide personal protective equipment and COVID-19 testing capacity to producers and processing facility employees; and promote the ability of producer and business cooperatives, state departments of agriculture, and Cooperative Extension Services to strengthen local food networks.
14. Western Governors recognize that the Farm Bill includes titles and issues not contemplated in this resolution. We encourage Congressional committees, federal agencies and the executive branch to review Governors' existing policy resolutions addressing national forest

and rangeland management; species conservation; voluntary conservation programs; biosecurity and invasive species management; rural development; and broadband connectivity.

C. GOVERNORS' MANAGEMENT DIRECTIVE

1. The Governors direct WGA staff to work with Congressional committees of jurisdiction, the Executive Branch, and other entities, where appropriate, to achieve the objectives of this resolution.
2. Furthermore, the Governors direct WGA staff to consult with the Staff Advisory Council regarding its efforts to realize the objectives of this resolution and to keep the Governors apprised of its progress in this regard.

Western Governors enact new policy resolutions and amend existing resolutions on a bi-annual basis. Please consult www.westgov.org/resolutions for the most current copy of a resolution and a list of all current WGA policy resolutions.