

UC Davis Agricultural Sustainability Institute
Research Initiative: Assessment of California Agroecosystems

An ecosystem assessment for California agriculture, modeled on the [Millennium Ecosystem Assessment](#) (MA) and focusing on agricultural sustainability issues, could be a useful starting point for the new [Agricultural Sustainability Institute](#) (ASI) at UC Davis.

ASI is intended to lead research on big emerging issues in California's food system and to shape an agenda for research, education and action on those issues starting now. That agenda will be driven by the concerns and aspirations of stakeholders representing the diversity of California.

ASI will be consulting with a wide range of stakeholders as part of our strategic planning process. Responsiveness to these users' needs can ensure the relevance and the legitimacy of the assessment and provide the necessary focus on 'real world' issues and opportunities.

Analysis of driving forces—for example, population and migration, urban/suburban expansion, climate change, price trends in energy and other commodities, technological change, changing consumer preferences--and scenarios analysis can help us identify prominent emerging issues.

Assessment of conditions and trends in products and environmental services from California agriculture could be an effective way of engaging interested UC faculty and students with broader stakeholder groups in framing both an agenda for policy action as well as an agenda for research.

Is California agriculture sustainable? What does that question mean? Of course, it is highly unlikely the answer would be a categorical "yes" or "no." Instead, an assessment could shed light on more nuanced questions:

- Where has there been progress?
- Where there are problems? Which strategies and responses can be most effective?
- Are there tradeoffs across objectives?
- Where are the knowledge gaps that matter most?
- What indicators can we use to benchmark trends in sustainability? How can these be measured in ways that are not only scientifically credible but also useful and meaningful to policymakers and the public?

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