

California Roundtable on Agriculture and the Environment (CRAE)

Charter Adopted June 2008

Who We Are

The California Roundtable on Agriculture and the Environment (CRAE) is an alliance of agricultural, environmental, regulatory and social justice leaders seeking to promote an agriculture and food sector that is economically viable, environmentally sound and socially responsible. By “economically viable,” we mean agriculture that is long-lasting and widely profitable. By “environmentally sound,” we mean the production, transport and consumption of food and fiber in such a way that protects human and ecosystem health. By “socially responsible,” we mean contributing to the needs of the community, including farm families and employees, protecting consumer and worker health and safety, and supporting state, regional and local agriculture in the marketplace. We believe that agricultural producers, consumers, policy makers, and public interest organizations must all play a critical role in achieving these objectives.

Regulatory agency partners and technical experts participate as advisors to Roundtable deliberations and activities but do not participate in the final determination of consensus decisions. All members channel information back to their agencies or organizations, creating better understanding among environmental and agricultural interests to strengthen our commitment to cooperation and collaboration. Roundtable participants strive to educate each other about agricultural and environmental issues, identify shared interests and advocate in support of the group’s common goals and principles.

Activities

Since Fall 2004, the California Roundtable on Agriculture and the Environment has been building consensus between agriculture and environmental interests on key issues impacting the food system. CRAE works primarily at the policy level, providing information and perspective to state and federal legislators and regulators. CRAE also convenes for information sharing and discussion to ensure that decisions made by the group are based on sound science and policy.

To date, CRAE has addressed a wide range of topics related to California agriculture. Some of these subjects include:

- promoting Farm Bill reform,
- working with the University of California to address the research needs of agriculture and the environment,
- exploring ways to use third-party certification of farms as a way to improve environmental performance and create regulatory incentives on farms,
- developing a proactive response to food safety issues that protects human health and the environment,
- preserving agricultural land in California,
- support for AgJobs, and
- protecting agricultural production and environmental resources from invasive pests.

Meetings

The CRAE membership meets 8 times a year at 6-8 week intervals. CRAE project committees work between meetings to effect change connected to the Roundtable's priorities.

CRAE operates on a consensus basis. We use open, honest and robust dialogue to achieve consensus in making decisions. Consensus is defined as a mutually accepted group position or an agreement good enough for all members to move ahead. "Good enough" means that there is no strong objection by any group member, and those who are not in full accord give their consent to the position of CRAE established by the balance of the group.

In order to develop mutual trust, we respect the right of each individual to have viewpoints, beliefs and values. This means we speak in ways that respect others' opinions. We actively listen to one another with the intention of building mutually acceptable solutions from identified points of agreement. Through mutual learning we seek common understanding of complex problems. We seek to build reality-based solutions. Therefore, we precisely identify points of disagreement and common ground.

Meeting ground rules

As members of CRAE, we commit to the following principles:

We speak the truth about our viewpoints, beliefs and values. It is not acceptable to say one agrees when one does not. With honest statements of our respective positions, we can forge reality-based concepts. It is essential to clearly articulate disagreement.

We respect the right of each individual to have their own viewpoints, beliefs and values. This means, people will not be allowed to criticize others for their statements or to speak in ways that do not reflect respect for others opinions.

We listen to one another with the intent of finding what we have in common. This type of "open" listening will allow us to build from identified points of agreement. This also confirms that we will encourage ideas that are outside the box, new, and creative. In short, we will consider ideas that at first may seem foreign, but with work could be forged into workable concepts.

We keep our statements as brief and clear as possible. No one person will be permitted to dominate the exchange. This will provide the opportunity for everyone to contribute.

We do not attack others using anger or other extreme emotions to intimidate or change peoples positions. It is natural and acceptable to feel frustration and other emotions in the meetings, but these emotions must be modulated and expressed in ways that do not destroy the process.

CRAE Topics and Agendas

Agenda items for CRAE general meetings are selected based on CRAE's yearly-established priorities and the capacity to forward CRAE's work. In addition to project areas, this may include information-sharing or discussion items which aim to share perspectives and raise awareness among CRAE members. Issues of special concern that may arise during the year may also be brought forward.

CRAE endeavors to address the most pressing issues facing agriculture and its intersection with the environment. Annually, the group establishes the list of issues it plans to explore in priority order. There is no fixed maximum number of issues CRAE will consider concurrently, but members understand that there are limits to both what can be covered during CRAE meetings and can be discussed and worked on outside of CRAE meetings.

Meeting agendas are drafted by the meeting facilitator based on input from CRAE committees and the membership, and are then reviewed and approved by the steering committee and distributed to CRAE members one week in advance of meetings. CRAE committees and individual members may propose agenda items at least 2 weeks before CRAE meetings. Agenda items will include: reports and dialogue on issue areas, information sharing or discussion items which aim to share perspectives and raise awareness among CRAE members, and issues of special concern that may arise during the year.

CRAE Policy for Group Action

The purpose of CRAE is to identify and act on areas of common ground between industry and environmental advocates for agriculture in California. Members often work together to draft joint proposals that reflect clear common ground. When that common ground is identified, the group may take a number of actions:

- Draft letters to agencies, boards, legislators, or others identifying key issues and policy recommendations
- Speak in support of, or as a participant in or member of, CRAE at various public forums
- Publish opinion/editorial pieces
- Convene meetings to encourage dialogue about key issues
- Take other actions deemed by the members to be in support of the shared positions identified by the group.

Educational and advocacy letters are one of the primary means of action for the group. CRAE letters that represent all member organizations and achieve consensus are written on CRAE letterhead¹ and do not require individual organizational sign-ons. Sign-on letters that reflect CRAE positions and obtain CRAE approval (through consensus of the CRAE membership) - but to which not all member organizations can individually sign on - may go on CRAE letterhead and must indicate that the letter is coming specifically from the list of member organizations signed on. Sign-on letters brought forward by members that do not represent the consensus views of the group may not mention CRAE in the body of the letter and CRAE letterhead may not be used.

The members of the Roundtable recognize that significant effort has been made to establish the credibility of the Roundtable. CRAE members may identify themselves as members of the organization in their communications, however they may not use that membership to advance positions not taken by consensus by the Roundtable.

Guests

CRAE meetings are open to members and their invited guests only. We agree to be mindful with our guest list, recognizing that observers may inhibit the ability of members to speak

¹ CRAE letterhead will not list member organizations.

freely. Guests must be hosted by a CRAE member. Guests may offer additional perspective but do not participate in CRAE decisions. Requests for guest invitations must be made to the facilitator and approved by the steering committee at least one week in advance of the meeting.

Membership

CRAE members are representatives of statewide and national organizations representing agriculture, the environment, and the public sector. Its agricultural members represent production and commodity agriculture of all scales, specialty agriculture, family farming, and agricultural labor. Environmental representatives include those interested in the protection of natural resources and human health. Public agency partners represent state and federal institutions that are interested in both the protection of the environment and the viability of the agricultural community. Public partners participate in CRAE discussions but are not signatories to CRAE decisions. CRAE consists of a maximum membership of 30 organizations (including public partners and advisors) representing a broad cross-section of California's agricultural interests. CRAE seeks a balance between each of the stakeholder groups such that its membership reflects the best opportunity to successfully influence policy in the areas in which CRAE works.

CRAE membership is by organization. Organizations are asked to designate a representative to sit on the Roundtable with the understanding that in some cases an alternate or second member may be designated, subject to the approval of the steering committee. However, the continuity of individual participation is encouraged. CRAE functions well when trust is fostered among members who participate on an ongoing basis over time and when overall group size is small enough to encourage real dialogue. Members and organizations holding CRAE seats prior to January 2008 are not subject to the multiple member limits specified here.

While individual members participate on behalf of their organizations, during meetings participants speak for themselves and their words do not bind their organizations to specific positions. Members of the group are encouraged to explore new ideas and possibilities, to think outside the box—this is part of the group's purpose.

Steering committee: CRAE maintains a steering committee of 4-5 CRAE members representing the diversity of CRAE's membership. Steering committee members are asked to serve for a period of 2 years with staggered terms; ideally, 2 new members are replaced each year. Volunteers are called on once a year. The steering committee is the primary point of contact for the facilitation team and assists in establishing agendas and group priorities. They are also responsible for the maintenance and periodic revision of the group's charter, reviewing meeting results, and for assuring the diversity of CRAE's membership.

New members: The CRAE facilitator maintains a list of individuals who have requested to join CRAE. CRAE members may also nominate new members. When openings for additional members present themselves, CRAE's steering committee approves new members so as to maintain the overall balance of perspectives in the Roundtable. New members are selected to maximize CRAE's ability to enact change. Individuals should have experience in, and support, multi-stakeholder collaborative initiatives. New members must agree to commit to the expectations of membership outlined below.

CRAE Membership Guidelines

Members are expected to commit to a cycle of 8 meetings a year and adhere to the spirit of collaboration and consensus building established by the Roundtable. The effective functioning of the Roundtable is dependent on the commitment and regular participation of its members. As such, CRAE shall have an attendance policy as follows:

1. An organization whose representatives miss 3 consecutive regularly scheduled meetings shall be considered to have resigned.
2. An organization whose representatives miss 4 meetings in a calendar year shall be considered to have resigned.
3. A member or organization who is deemed by the group to have violated the purpose and principles of the CRAE Charter may have his or her membership terminated by group consensus (less the affected member).

In the event of 1 or 2, a resigned member may be reinstated by group consensus at the following meeting. Meeting attendance shall be reviewed regularly by the facilitator. The facilitator shall notify an affected member of his or her effective resignation or termination.

CRAE members are also expected to carry forward the work of the Roundtable by participating on project subcommittees. It is desirable that members participate on at least one project committee each year.

CRAE Costs and Funding

CRAE is supported by professional facilitation that is both knowledgeable about the issues and has expertise in multi-stakeholder collaboration. The facilitation team is responsible for scheduling and organizing CRAE meetings, providing administrative and project support to CRAE and its subcommittees, preparing and revising agendas, facilitating CRAE meetings, and preparing meeting results.

The costs of these services are borne by CRAE member organizations and are partially offset by grants secured by the facilitators or CRAE members. Each year, members are informed of the annual fee for participating, which is due by February 15 of each calendar year. New members joining CRAE mid-year pay a pro-rated member fee. Payment of the membership fee is required for participation on CRAE.