

Farm tour offers lawmakers reality check

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Last Monday, Oct. 10, California

lawmakers were treated to a whirlwind tour of farms and farmworker communities along the state's central coast. The Sustainable Food & Farming Tour brought legislators to see firsthand the critical issues facing agricultural families in the state.

The tour, co-organized by PAN, Californians for Pesticide Reform and Pesticide Watch, set out from San Francisco to visit farms, schools and homes. The packed day on the road put a real-world face to many of the urgent problems raised by pesticide use, and highlighted ground-proven solutions of sustainable agriculture.

The tour left from Mission Pie restaurant and headed to Jacobs Farm, one of the country's largest organic herb growers. There Brise Tencer, a sustainable agriculture policy consultant, encouraged legislators to support state and federal policies that assist organic farmers:

[Organic agriculture]...is thriving, it's a growing sector of our economy, even in a time of recession. It's exciting to see the economic growth, the job opportunities, and I think what's most remarkable about this trend is that organic farmers have been at a pretty significant disadvantage historically in terms of public policy.

The federal government in particular spends a really significant amount of resources, tax dollars in particular, helping U.S. agriculture...and organic agriculture has been noticeably absent from that work.

Then at [Swanton Berry Farm](#), co-founder Jim Cochran spoke about the challenges and opportunities facing the agricultural sector. He urged the policymakers to help pick the right path forward: "We have a choice to follow the path of flailing Detroit automakers or the Silicon Valley innovators."

Water too contaminated to drink

Later in the day, Brown Beret youth leader Salvatore Lua spoke at Renaissance High School in Watsonville about the harms of [industrial agriculture](#). He and many other students, as well as their largely [farmworker](#) families, are unable to drink the water at school or at home because it is so heavily contaminated.

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Dr. Ann Lopez, director of the Center for Farmworker Families, called out this unequal burden that farmworkers and their families face, noting that “300,000 farmworkers are poisoned every single year in the U.S.”

Finally, legislators stopped at the [Agriculture & Land-Based Training Association](#) (like Mission Pie, [profiled](#) by our partners at Physicians for Social Responsibility – Los Angeles) to learn about this innovative program that teaches farmworkers how to become successful, profitable organic farmers. The organization has already trained dozens of organic farmers in the Monterey Bay Area.

As legislators head back to their offices, PAN and our partners hope they take with them the stories of sustainable farming, the barriers to achieving that success, and a deeper understanding of how our broken industrial agricultural system is harming real people in communities throughout the state.

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