

November 10, 2023

Julie Henderson, Director
Department of Pesticide Regulation
1001 I Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Submitted via Required CDPR Portal: <https://cdpr.commentinput.com/?id=693bMd8pu>.

RE: Comments on DPR Draft Strategic Plan 2024-28

Dear Director Henderson,

On behalf of the strawberry growers, shippers, and processors of California, the California Strawberry Commission would like to express its thoughts on the Department of Pesticide Regulation's (DPR) Draft Strategic Plan for 2024-2028. We would like to thank DPR for giving their stakeholders and the public an opportunity to comment on this draft and for hosting a series of webinars and town hall-style meetings to allow for a better understanding of DPR's goals and thoughts via a public forum. Based on the presentation at the webinar, DPR seems to be emphasizing a strong focus on protecting disadvantaged communities without touting the already robust scientific reviews currently done by DPR's talented scientists in order to ensure the safe yet effective use of pesticides. Another general point is that the strategic plan states ambitious timelines to accomplish certain goals and during the first webinar, DPR's chief deputy director stated that the draft was developed for "immediate action starting in 2024". In order to achieve the monumental goals outlined in the Sustainable Pest Management (SPM) Roadmap, DPR will have to develop realistic timelines based on DPR's resources and the ability of the urban and agricultural industries to adapt. With respect to this draft's percentage reduction goals for Priority Pesticides, we cannot stress enough the criticality of ensuring viable alternatives are approved and proven effective prior to cancelling them.

Our detailed comments are categorized according to the draft strategic plan goals as stated on the draft and on comments during the presentation at the webinars and public meetings.

- 1. Goal 1.3: By 202 , establish a pesticide prioritization process, informed by a diverse, cross-sector SPM advisory group and consultation, external engagement, and public input, to take expeditious action on risk determinations and to identify and evaluate the availability of alternatives.*

Public Workshop: DPR's Chief Deputy Director mentioned that DPR is grappling with changing pest pressures due to climate change, "changing efficacy of current pest

management approaches”, and therefore, “DPR needs to support the accelerated availability and adoption of effective pest management tools.”

- This is a very interesting statement to make, especially when it was made in connection with the SPM Roadmap. What is the definition of “changing efficacy” according to DPR? How is DPR quantifying efficacy changes? We ask DPR to share the studies or knowledge base for the conclusion on changing efficacy. Does the accelerated availability and adoption of effective pest management tools also include registration of new non-biological or non-organic pesticides? Many modern pesticides are developed using site-specific chemistries that biological pathways unique to the target organism and, thus, are largely considered safe to human, animal and pollinator populations when used according to label.
- Accelerated registration is an admirable goal, however, accelerated registration and finding viable replacements and effective tools is even better. Accelerated registration should not be the only metric of success. Success should look like an agricultural industry that can progress forward without being overregulated out of business. There are many complex considerations that need to be accounted for when performing the economic impact analyses to direct and inform DPR’s decisions. For example, food security is a real issue both domestically and globally.^{1,2} California’s agricultural industry provides millions of people in the state as well as all over the world with healthy food. How is DPR incorporating food waste and its associated greenhouse gas emissions into the pesticide prioritization process?

We appreciate the efforts DPR is making to connect with farmers to gain an understanding of the literal impacts of regulatory decisions to Californians’ jobs and health. It is not unusual that for the suite of pesticides labelled for any given pest that only a few (2 or 3) are truly effective. What might seem like a small change such as the cancellation of one pesticide out of many, could lead to the inability for farmers to contain pest outbreaks. These outbreaks sometimes lead to significant crop loss in strawberries and other commodities. Agricultural businesses depend on consistent yields to keep them operational and maintain jobs for the workers. Farming requires substantial planning and forecasting performed, some of which is done years in advance. Simply put, farmers cannot ramp up production with the same rapidity that pests can destroy crops.

In California, farming is predominantly located in regions where the local economies are historically, and currently predominantly comprised of socioeconomically disadvantaged minorities. It is a well-known fact that there is a positive correlation between income and health³, therefore supporting the economy provides opportunities for positive health outcomes for individuals and communities. Different federal agencies apply different metrics for defining

¹ Springer. [Impact of Insects and Pests in loss of Crop Production: A Review | SpringerLink](#)

² Nature. [The global burden of pathogens and pests on major food crops | Nature Ecology & Evolution](#)

³ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. [Income and health outcomes : Monthly Labor Review: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics \(bls.gov\)](#)

“persistent poverty”. California certainly has higher levels of poverty in rural agricultural areas, but the counties with these rural areas, particularly those along the Central Coast, do not qualify as having persistent poverty because these counties tend to be larger counties with higher income urban populations concealing the rural areas.⁴ According to the Public Policy Institute of California, Latinos have the highest poverty rate in the state at 16.9%.⁵ Also noting that Latinos comprised about 50.7% of poor Californians, which is a disproportionate share across the state as they only total 39.4% of the state’s population.⁵ More than 75% of the California strawberry farming workforce are Latino.⁶

Strawberries are unique in that the workers are paid California minimum wage as well as a piece rate at certain times in the season, with some farmworkers earning upwards of \$30.00/hour. According to the 2022 California Employment Development Department Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics farmworkers make more per hour than forest and conservation workers, plumbers, and veterinarian technicians to name a just a few occupations.⁷ Strawberry farming operations bring significant economic value to their local economies with 97 cents of each strawberry farm dollar remaining locally. The strawberry farming industry employs over 55,000 people and is predominantly minority owned.³ While our efforts are focused on supporting the strawberry industry (10% of the state’s agricultural labor workforce⁴), all of California’s agricultural workers are sensitive to the regulations that impact their line of work, impacting on average 473,000 workers annually.⁸

2. *Goal 1.4: “Success in support for SPM transition is measured by ongoing 5% annual reductions in Priority Pesticide use.*
 - What does a 5% annual reduction in Priority Pesticide use look like? Since the criteria for identifying the Priority Pesticides are still under development and there is no published list of the priority pesticides at this time, further explanation of the statement is necessary. Additionally, if effective and commercially viable softer chemistries or alternatives to Priority Pesticides are registered, the decrease in use of the priority pesticides should naturally occur. In reality, strawberry growers will not choose more toxic chemistries especially if the less toxic alternatives are equally efficacious and commercially viable. However, the complete loss of effective “Priority Pesticides” as tools will impact farming due to lower yields which will cause the cost of food to increase. It may be much more difficult for DPR to gain public support to go back to allowing a Priority Pesticide

⁴ RCAC. <https://www.rcac.org/rural-stories/californias-rural-counties-face-hurdles-in-fight-against-poverty/>

⁵ PPIC. <https://www.ppic.org/blog/a-look-at-demographic-differences-in-poverty-across-regions-in-california/>

⁶ California Strawberry Commission. <https://www.californiastrawberries.com/>

⁷ California Employment Development Department. [OES Employment and Wages \(ca.gov\)](https://oes.eid.edd.ca.gov/)

⁸ US Department of Labor. <https://labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov/data/ca-agriculture.html>

to be used for Section 18 and 24(c) type situations. Therefore, we suggest ongoing and established discussion with regulated entities to develop a thorough and stable pathway to pursuing SPM. Robust discussions with various grower groups are necessary before critical decisions on regulatory actions on the identified Priority Pesticides.

3. *Goal 1.4: “By 202_, increase the number of integrated pest management and SPM technical assistance resources that DPR provides by 20%.”*
 - This is a very exciting plan, although historically state programs have been known to run into bureaucratic and administrative issues when creating “resources” and sadly are not timely or are underutilized due to access issues. This plan has the best of intentions and will create assistance to agriculture if the process is carefully thought out and agricultural organizations and academic institutions are engaged in the conversation. These conversations will have to find ways to move with less bureaucracy and reduce inter-departmental redundancies. Without administrative efficiencies, the proposed programs end up losing their relevancy.
4. *Goal 2: Track, Evaluate and Enforce Safe Pesticide Use. “It is critical for DPR to have access to information to best inform policies.”*
 - We agree that making informed policy decisions means the DPR must have access to available information through tracking and evaluating data such as accurate pesticide use information, pesticide illness reports and other data. This information also requires partnership with the County Agricultural Commissioners since they are the “boots on the ground” when it comes to pesticide use enforcement. The emphasis on collecting pesticide use data and enforcement in disproportionately impacted agricultural and urban areas needs to be defined, explained, and discussed with all stakeholders and not just the environmental justice communities.
5. *Goal 3: Foster engagement, collaboration, and transparency.*
 - We agree with this goal and propose regular scheduled meetings and check-ins with various industry and grower groups so we can engage in all the issues where DPR makes decisions that impact agriculture and the California economy.
 - In DPR’s efforts to increase transparency, we are curious if DPR will use a particular forum or method for discussing lessons learned from public meetings with the impacted stakeholders. DPR states that they have met with “all partners and impacted stakeholders” and we would encourage DPR to substantiate this claim by sharing a list of the commodities and or entities that have engaged with it.
 - We highly recommend that DPR engages with the Cal Poly Strawberry Research Center and UC Davis Strawberry Breeding & Research Program as they have some of the world’s leading experts in strawberry farming integrated pest management (IPM). Both institutions are well connected to California’s agricultural industry, and support farming with different research approaches. Aside from just basic research, they perform translational research that provides

real time solutions to plant pathology and entomology issues that the industry must contend with.

6. *Goal 3.3: Launch a statewide restricted material pesticide application notification system.*
 - We urge DPR to include educational information on the safety of the chemistries included in these digital notifications to avoid creating panic, misinformation, and confusion for the public. The notifications should outline the rigorous review process that all these pesticides undergo to be approved at the federal and state level. DPR should take pride in their rigorous review processes and efforts to foster a growth mindset for its employees, which both contribute to providing safe and healthy food to Californians and throughout the world.

We ask DPR to consider what other metrics of success could be included that would support both DPR's funding requests to maintain and grow its programs, and contribute to meaningful protection to Californians aside from just the reduction of pesticide use. We appreciate that metrics play a key role in supporting the betterment of a group or concept but find DPR's current SPM metrics to be lacking in their consideration of the impacts to the state's economic viability, and soundness of scientific justifications. No one entity has all the answers or information, and therefore we are glad to see DPR making efforts such as this strategic plan to create a network including industry experts. We look forward to finding ways of engaging with DPR to continue safe and healthy farming.

We appreciate your consideration of our comments and recommendations. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us.

Respectfully submitted,



Mark Martinez

California Strawberry Commission

mmartinez@calstrawberry.org