Remarks by CDFA Secretary Bill Lyons

Press Conference for the California Institute for the Study of Specialty Crops

Cal Poly - October 1, 2003

Thank you very much for joining us today.

I want to begin by thanking Dean Wehner and the faculty at the College of Agriculture, especially Dr. Jay Noel, for the leadership they bring to this endeavor. The institute could not have gotten off the ground without their vision. Cal Poly already has a stellar reputation for excellence in agricultural research, and I have complete faith in the talent and expertise they will bring to the institute.

It is widely accepted that agriculture in our great state is feeling the strain of external pressures that make it increasingly difficult for it to compete in the global marketplace. Global trade agreements—or should I say disagreements—along with regulatory burdens, rising production costs and competition from abroad make for a harsh climate for our farmers and ranchers.

California's hardworking agricultural community reaps valuable dividends for all of us by way of safe, affordable food and fiber and ever-important jobs and revenue for the state. In 2002, the production value of California's agriculture industry was $27.5 billion dollars. What may not be evident, though, is that the farmer's share of this figure continues to shrink, making it more and more difficult for businesses to stay afloat.

The California Institute for the Study of Specialty Crops was created to research the economic, policy and regulatory components of our state's specialty crop industry. The idea is that policy makers, elected officials, agricultural organizations, the media and others will use the institute as a resource for up-to-date research on the issues that matter most to agriculture.

Funds for the institute come from Governor Gray Davis's Buy California Initiative and grants from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The institute is just one element of a multi-approach to boost the competitiveness of specialty crops, which make up the bulk of California agriculture. For more details on the Buy California Initiative, please read the report recently released by CDFA.

Objective, reliable research from the institute and its counterparts in the UC and CSU system is essential to carrying on informed policy debates on issues that affect agriculture. I am very excited about this endeavor because it represents a long-term investment in agriculture at a time that we desperately need to forge solutions to long-term problems.