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Central Coast Agriculture is Focused on the Future

We can all agree that these are challenging times, but such has been much of agriculture's experience throughout history. Although these challenges are difficult while we're in the midst of them, we always gain something from the experience.

Our industry has seen tremendous innovation over the past few decades, including bagged salads, value added produce (i.e. baby carrots with ranch dip), field pack (where crews harvest lettuce straight into their grocery-ready bags in the field), harvesting machines that help workers harvest more efficiently, seed technology for improved planting and germination, and most recently food safety. In that same spirit we've always led the way and been trend setters in our field. We're constantly looking ahead, planning for the future, and thinking outside the box. Here are some things that the industry is currently doing to create opportunities from challenges:

As I'm sure you've read in the paper or seen in the news, the Grower-Shipper Association has partnered with the City of Salinas, County of Monterey and Transportation Agency of Monterey County to conduct a \$45,000 rail feasibility study. This research may show us that the transportation system we discarded more than 30 years ago may be the answer to our fuel cost challenges today.

The Grower-Shipper Association is also beginning conversations with technology leaders in the Silicon Valley to see how we may partner their expertise with our own and work collaboratively to build high-tech research facilities, laboratories and communications systems. If we get investment capital and establish these centers we can create jobs – good, high-wage jobs - that will create opportunities for the next generation and keep us on the cutting edge.

On the food safety front the Grower-Shipper Association was integral in forming the Leafy Green Handlers Marketing Agreement (LGMA), a program that is now being used as the template for national standards that are currently being vetted nationwide among industry leaders and government. We also helped to create the Center for Produce Safety at Davis, an industry, academic, and regulatory collaborative effort designed to directly address the most pressing issues of safety in the produce industry. The nation is looking to California and what we've done here to lead the way for food safety efforts in the future. When it comes to food safety, we're doing it. And we'll continue to do more.

Sustainability is a term that means something different to everyone but there are three key components which most will agree define sustainability: economic viability, environmental conscientiousness, and social responsibility. I agree that corporate and social responsibility is vitally important and it is this third component that I wish to focus upon here. We will be convening a summit of industry and community leaders, as well as health and nutrition experts to

see what we can do about keeping local agriculture viable, maintaining employment levels and creating better paying jobs. Our work with the Grower-Shipper Foundation is also focused on improving education and employment opportunities and executive leadership programs like AgKnowledge. We need to remain focused on how our industry can give back to the community and create a brighter future for our workers. With this in mind, we should be providing national leadership on the concept of sustainable agriculture. Our customers look at how we treat our workers when deciding whether to buy from our docks. We're focused on how can we improve upon our priorities of people, profits, and planet and expand upon them. Sustainability is here to stay. Our industry needs to define that term and we've got a good story to tell and the opportunity to do even more. It's good for business and it's the right thing to do.

How will these projects and research play out over the next decade? We can't know exactly, but we do know that innovation in times of struggle has brought us this far. What we need, we make happen. We need to continue to lead; it's both our history and our future. Stay tuned.