

Change the production ag dialogue

By **DAN DOOLEY**
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GUEST EDITORIAL

THERE are too many hungry Americans, and projections for world hunger are staggering.

"We need to produce as much food in 2050 as we have collectively for the last 8,000 years," Jason Clay of the

World Wildlife Fund told members of the California State Board of Food and Agriculture, or SBFA, in August.

A sustainable food system means doubling agricultural production by 2050 to feed the demand we know is coming (see sidebar), while using fewer of the Earth's natural resources.

Negative debate

Yet when you listen to current sustainable food system discussion, ag tends

2050 challenge

HUNGER in America is a reality. Some 37 million Americans receive emergency food annually, according to one study released earlier this year from Feeding America, the largest domestic relief group. That's one in eight — an increase of 46% since the last study (2006). Another study suggests there are about 5 million hungry people in California alone.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, or FAO, estimates at least 70% greater food production will be needed by year 2050, and some estimate even 100% greater food production will be needed.



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to be maligned if farmers aren't local or small. You're either with Michael Pollan or with Monsanto. It's a simpliminded dichotomy that offers little guidance to meet human/ecosystem needs. The Farm Foundation's Neil Conklin called the public debate "a shouting match on ideology, not a dialogue" at the same SBFA meeting. The reality is, there's demand for both large and small farms operating efficiently, sustainably and concurrently.

There's an urgent need for constructive stakeholder dialogue: getting the questions right, seeking solutions and applying them across the continuum of agricultural production. Jeff Dlott of SureHarvest told the board there are initiatives — Stewardship Index for Specialty Crops, Field-to-Market Initiative, Sustainability Consortium — nearing stakeholder agreement on a suite of outcome-based metrics addressing land, air, water and biodiversity.

Daunting challenge

The August SBFA panel of experts concluded: There's no time for business as usual here. Doubling food production will require significant advances in science and technology and putting those advances into practice. "Knowledge matters," said Howard-Yana Shapiro, Mars Inc. corporate officer of plant sciences and external affairs, at the meeting.

"Bold thinking, game-changing solutions in areas such as genetics, nutrient and water efficiencies, are the order of the day," said World Wildlife Foundation's Clay. Adds Mars' Shapiro, "Action needs to be taken on a bigger scale to bundle future capacity and assets, and align the key players around themes for the future."

New investments in bigger science will be required to enhance productivity and minimize ecological impact. We need a "man-on-the-moon" vision of food production.

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