

Questions for Candidates and Elected Officials

Devin Mathis, Republican candidate for State Assembly, 26th District

1. Nearly a quarter of Kern's population (24.4%) is at or below the federal poverty level, according to the California Poverty Measure, but ranks 23 in the state in terms of eligible residents' utilization of CalFresh—an estimated loss of \$73.6 Million in federal nutrition benefits. What policies would you support to boost participation among the currently eligible population for a program that has a \$1.79 economic multiplier for every \$1 spent?

I would support social marketing and community outreach based methods to boost participation; these two methods have shown to be best practices over the years. People need to know that they are eligible; access to these programs ought to be clear. I plan to work with those who have had success in the past to insure that our area is being taken care of.

2. California's current three-year drought is the worst in at least 100 years. Consequently 428,000 acres have been fallowed, and over 17,000 jobs lost. What policies would you propose to build on-farm resilience in the face of climate change and a more sustainable use of Kern's water?

More with Less: For years we have been shown the way and told by experts what needs to be done, yet here we are. I for one will listen to the experts and seek them out. We have been told for years which policy changes we need to make. I will advocate that we make them and that we look to the future and take the nexus approach of bringing energy, water and food production into the same equation. We must develop strong public-private sector partnerships and move forward. The reality is that we are all in this together.

Water conservation and efficiency improvements can reduce water use and improve water quality while maintaining or increasing crop yield. Yet these improvements often entail significant investment which can be a barrier to implementation. Smart policies can reduce this barrier.

- Provide sales tax exemptions or rebates on efficient irrigation equipment to help offset capital investments for these systems.
- Provide property tax exemptions for farmers who upgrade to more water-efficient irrigation systems. Exemptions should apply to the value added to a property by the irrigation system and be valid for 5 to 10 years.
- Develop new legal mechanisms by which municipal water or state or local wildlife agencies could invest in farmers' irrigation systems in exchange for some portion of the water conserved.
- The state, federal government, and/or energy providers should offer rebates or incentives to farmers who implement on-farm conservation measures that may increase on-farm energy use but result in a net energy savings.
- The state and/or federal government should investigate and establish other mechanisms that encourage water-use efficiency if they achieve broader social or environmental benefits.

3. We estimate that 17.2% of the California's workforce is in the food system, including production, processing, distribution, retail, and service industries. According to the KEDC, nearly a quarter (24%) of Kern's private sector jobs are food system-related, yet many of the workers are undervalued and are more likely to experience substandard working conditions. What labor issues in the food chain are you most concerned with, and how would you address them?

All workers should be valued; everyone plays a part in business getting done regardless of what kind of work it is. If standards are not being met, then those responsible ought to be held accountable. I will use the power of my office to insure that accountability is happening and that people are being treated with respect. It is vital that our society's food systems are in good working order, that they are secure and that standards are being met, this helps to ensure healthy communities.

4. The Kern Food Policy Council is pursuing the creation of a comprehensive, county-wide food system assessment that will help us create new relationships between policy and action, as well as explore the potential for community-based pilot projects directly addressing the physical and economic health and well-being of Kern County residents. In what ways, if any, would you support this effort?

Yes, this effort does need support. I will use my office to not only partner with The Kern Food Policy Council, but to help advocate for safe secure food systems in our communities, to help end hunger. We live in America, not a third world country; it saddens me to see our people hungry and thirsty while those in power sit idly by. My job is to put people over politics, which means taking care of people first.