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Strawberry Farmers Receive Support in Fight Against Soil-Borne Diseases

New grant will fund research at California Strawberry Center at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo

Watsonville and San Luis Obispo, CA—A \$1 million dollar grant has been awarded to the Cal Poly San Luis Obispo (Cal Poly) Strawberry Center to research methods to combat soil-borne diseases that harm strawberry plants. The California Strawberry Commission made the initial request to Assemblyman Robert Rivas (D-Salinas), who worked through the legislature to secure the new funding.

“I’d like to thank the California Strawberry Commission, the California Strawberry Center, and Cal Poly for their partnership and continued research on emerging diseases impacting California’s strawberry farmers. This research funding will help create sustainable solutions to new strawberry diseases here in Monterey and Santa Cruz counties, and ensure California remains the leader in strawberry production amidst the ongoing climate crisis,” said Assemblyman Rivas.

The grant will expand the Strawberry Center’s ongoing diagnostics services and research on diseases affecting strawberry plants.

This funding will help further the work of the Strawberry Center in developing solutions to ensure the sustainability of the California strawberry industry,” said Gerald Holmes, Strawberry Center Director. “It also enables Cal Poly to fulfill our mission of engaging students in hands-on learning, preparing them to enter the workforce ready to make a difference. Cal Poly is very appreciative of Assemblyman Rivas’ support of this important work.”

The California strawberry industry is challenged by numerous diseases, especially those caused by soil-borne pathogens. Monterey and Santa Cruz Counties have been greatly impacted by these diseases in addition to other production districts throughout California. This grant funding will assist growers in managing problem soil areas in strawberry production districts and will provide benefits to the entire California strawberry industry. These diseases are impossible to diagnose visually, even for the most experienced strawberry growers, pest control advisors and plant pathologists. A portion of the funding will be used to expand the Strawberry Center’s capacity for diagnostics and additional laboratory space. The expanded lab space will help the Strawberry Center staff diagnose and even prevent plant diseases.

“The more than 300 strawberry growers in California are in a daily fight to ensure healthy plants produce quality strawberries that are in high demand by consumers and generate over \$1 billion dollars in farm wages,” said Rick Tomlinson, Strawberry Commission President. “This grant will further strengthen the Commission’s partnership with the Strawberry Center to provide farmers with much needed tools to fight soil-borne diseases. On behalf of the entire California strawberry industry, I would like to thank Assemblyman Rivas for his work in securing this funding,” Tomlinson said.

The Strawberry Center is a partnership between the Commission and Cal Poly that began in 2013. The initial team began conducting research on soil-borne pathogens and fumigation alternatives, two critical pressing issues facing the industry. Over the last nine years, the Strawberry Center has expanded its research to three main programs: plant pathology, entomology, and automation.

Strawberries occupy a tiny footprint in California's agricultural landscape, with the Watsonville/Salinas area being the predominant production regions, producing more than 97 million crates so far in the 2022 season. The California strawberry industry, which also includes acreage in the Oxnard and Santa Maria regions, collectively generates over \$2 billion dollars annually in production value with a total economic contribution of over \$3.2 billion dollars to California. More than 90% of these dollars stay in local communities on the Central Coast, supporting the local labor force and fueling the economic engine of these communities.

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About California Strawberry Commission

[The California Strawberry Commission](#) is more than 300 strawberry farmers, shippers, and processors, all working together to advance strawberry farming for the future of our land and people. Commission programs create opportunities for success through groundbreaking programs focused on workforce training, strawberry production research, and nutrition research. Through science-based information and education, it delivers the good news about sustainable farming practices that benefit the health of people, farms, and communities.