

A Bright Future Ahead for Salinas Valley AgTech

Salinas Californian Opp-Ed

March 1, 2019

By: Steve McShane

Word Count: 531 without bio

Everyone knows our agricultural roots run deep here in the Salinas Valley. For decades, we have been the lettuce capital of America. But this month, I'm celebrating the ways we are looking ahead to agricultural technology solutions for the future.

I have a background is in soil science and agribusiness. Those two things have taught me to invest in the soil you work with and to anticipate business challenges before they hit your farming operation and bank account.

In Salinas, agricultural technology is combining both of those principles to help both growers and shippers to navigate a rapidly-changing industry and business environment. Fortunately, Salinas is quickly becoming a hub for agricultural innovation.

This month marks the 6th Annual Salinas Valley Agricultural Technology Summit at Hartnell College. This unique event provides a forum for every stakeholder in the agriculture industry to gather to talk about AgTech solutions they can use, today. Since the beginning, the event has fostered a boots-on-the-ground event with a hands-on approach. At the same time attendees are exposed to speakers on topics like blockchain technology and how it can help farmers trace their products.

On June 26-27, Salinas will also host the fifth annual Forbes AgTech Salinas Summit, looking at challenges and solutions for the agricultural industry from a 50,000-foot perspective. Start-ups will meet with investors and big agricultural companies. Sixty-percent of attendees are company executives, and Steve Forbes himself will attend.

But we have other ongoing AgTech projects too. Take the THRIVE Accelerator, which has been awarding the best of AgTech startups with capital and technical assistance for almost 10 years. And the Western Growers Center for Innovation and Technology, founded here in Salinas in 2016 to house AgTech startups in the Salinas Valley.

Across the board, our AgTech offerings are in high demand. When I helped found the Salinas Valley AgTech Summit in 2013, I could not imagine the annual event it is today, drawing more than 1,000 attendees. The Forbes AgTech Summit continues to set new records for attendees and participating start-ups as well. And down at the Western Growers Center, there are 53 start-up companies registered, responsible for 140 jobs in Salinas alone.

These are some of the incredible results of our region taking a serious look at the future. The truth is, the future of agriculture in the Salinas Valley depends on it. One of my good friends and

a Salinas Valley AgTech Summit volunteer, Eric Schwartz, confirms the urgency when it comes to the top issues facing agriculture.

Schwartz says the summits serve as places of collaboration where growers and innovators can share knowledge. He reminds folks that the Salinas Valley Ag Tech Summit is a low-cost event and free to students. I'm planning to attend and registration can be found at www.svagtechsummit.com.

I am proud of our community and am quickly realizing that Salinas is leading the world in agricultural innovation. Consider this your invitation to join in.

Steve McShane is a third-term Salinas City Councilmember with a B.S in Soil Sciences from Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, and an MBA with a focus in Agribusiness Administration from Santa Clara University. You can reach him at (831) 970-4141 or Steve@McShanesLandscape.com.