

LAWMAKER PROFILE

Cecilia Aguiar-Curry

Cecilia Aguiar-Curry isn't a hunter, but she doesn't have to be to see that California's mallards and pheasants need help. Aguiar-Curry, who represents California's 4th District in the state Assembly, grew up in a farming family in Winters, in western Yolo County. In the 1960s and '70s, she recalls skies bursting with ducks and geese in the winter, and pheasants were all over the place.

Still a farmer in Winters, she got to wondering recently: What happened to all the pheasants?

Pheasants and California's mallards are both suffering from the same problem: Loss of habitat. For pheasants, it's the habitat where they live; for mallards, the habitat they need to build nests close to water and safe from predators.

That's why she was more than happy to carry a bill this year sponsored by California Waterfowl. AB 2106 would have added a \$5 fee to the state's upland and waterfowl validations to fund the Nesting Bird Habitat Incentive Program, which was created in 2018 by AB 2697 (James Gallagher, R-Yuba City) but not funded.

The incentive program would have paid farmers and other landowners, including private duck clubs, to fallow, grow cover crops or enhance existing nesting habitat. In a survey last year, 74% of CWA members and supporters said they would back the additional fee to boost breeding habitat.

That was a pretty powerful statement to Aguiar-Curry, as was the fact that the program provides plenty of flexibility to farmers who want to do more to help wildlife.

Back when Aguiar-Curry was first running for the Assembly, she made a point of getting to know the hunting community, and she was blown away by hunters' generosity when it comes to conservation.

"When I realized how much you've taxed yourselves for the benefit of habitat and doing the right thing, I thought, 'People need to know about this,'" she said. "People need to realize what you do with the money."

She's made a point to educate fellow lawmakers, not just about hunting, but about agriculture as well – two topics that aren't part of the life experiences of many members of California's urban-dominated Legislature.

Aguiar-Curry helped set up a tour of Montna Ranch for members of the Women's Caucus this year to learn about rice farming and how rice benefits wildlife. "To hear my urban colleagues ooh and ah, and say, 'My gosh, this is just beautiful. Why haven't we done this tour before?' – that's when we really realized we need to educate colleagues who are not familiar with our rural areas," she said.



Cecilia Aguiar-Curry, a lawmaker and farmer, checks out the results of various fertilizers on a corn field.

That education almost paid off for AB 2106. The bill had just about made it to the finish line in August when it hit a snag and got held up in a committee. "I was shocked. We weren't asking for money – this actually added revenue," she said.

But Aguiar-Curry isn't giving up. "Once again, I think it's educating the gentleman who killed the bill," she said.

"We're not going away. We're trying this again." *✍️*

ASSEMBLYMEMBER CECILIA AGUIAR-CURRY

Elected: 2016

District: 4th (includes all or parts of Napa, Lake, Yolo, Sonoma, Colusa and Solano counties)

Party: Democrat

Residence: Winters

Education: Bachelor's degree in business administration, San Jose State University

Occupation: Walnut farmer

Family: Longtime partner Larry Harris, a stepson and two adult daughters

Prior political experience: Mayor of Winters