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### Farm Bill Draft Ready for Super Committee

Speculation about the so-called "secret" farm bill was rampant again this week as leaders on the House and Senate Agriculture Committees continued meeting behind closed doors to strike a deal that would net \$23 billion in farm and food program cuts over ten years. The leaders from the agriculture committees are racing to get recommendations to the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction (a.k.a. the Super Committee) in time to be included in their November 23 recommendations to Congress on \$1.2 trillion in budget reductions.



Today, lawmakers were saying they were very close to agreement, and a [draft plan began circulating](#). Sustainable agriculture policy analysts following the process in the nation's Capitol said it appeared efforts to reform commodity programs had spun out of control. Based on early plan drafts, the analysts said a three-option program would be offered to commodity producers, a plan critics said was at least \$7 billion over budget.

Overall, indications are that commodity programs will see \$15 billion in cuts, conservation will likely be trimmed by about \$6 billion with nutrition assistance seeing a \$4 billion cut.

Along with allies across the country that are members of the [National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition](#), we are concerned about proposed cuts to conservation and organic programs,

and we continue to monitor developments and try to exert influence in a largely inaccessible process.

### California Sustainable Ag Groups Weigh In

In California, more than 20 agriculture, public health, and nutrition groups banded together through the California Caucus of the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition to write a letter to California Congressman Xavier Becerra urging



the Super Committee to protect key sustainable agriculture and healthy food access programs. CalCAN is a member of the California Caucus and played a key role in convening the group to reach out to Rep. Becerra, the only California representative on the Super Committee.

In a [press release](#) the groups called for "maintaining or building farm bill programs that advance healthier and sustainable food system."

San Francisco-based Roots of Change (ROC) was among the California groups signing the letter. ROC President Michael Dimock said, "We hope Congressman Becerra will take the opportunity to champion important conservation and healthy, community-based food systems in the budget process. These policies create economic opportunity and job creation in the food and agricultural sector in urban and rural areas of California."

Sustainable Economic Enterprises of Los Angeles (SEE-LA), a group that manages farmers markets, joined in the appeal. SEE-LA Chief Executive Pompea Smith said, "Demand at the Los Angeles area farmers markets continues to grow, and cuts to programs that support healthy, local food are a step in the wrong direction for public health."

California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF) also signed the Becerra letter. CCOF Program and Policy Director Brise Tencer said, "Consumers want access to food with verified labels, but demand outpaces supply. By funding programs that support organic farmers such as research and certification assistance,

we are helping consumers. The organic sector continues to grow as people vote with their dollars at markets across the country, but federal funding for organic has been disproportionately low."

### **Highlights of California Appeal**

The groups reaching out to Rep. Becerra called on the Super Committee to:

- Maintain or increase funding for specific programs that have been key to supporting a more diverse, sustainable California agriculture. The 2008 Farm Bill funded or created programs to ease access to land for beginning farmers and ranchers, fund organic farming research and certification assistance, and support on-farm conservation practices that bring important environmental and health benefits. It also increased support for farmers through technical assistance and training, including ATTRA/National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service.
- Support full funding for the Conservation Stewardship Program and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program.
- Protect food assistance for low-income people.
- Include the important policy reforms from two recently introduced bills, the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Opportunity Act and the Local Farms, Food, and Jobs Act, which support the next, diverse generation of American farmers and foster job-creating local farm and food efforts.

### **Meeting with Becerra's Los Angeles Staff**

In a follow-up to the Becerra letter, Steve Schwartz, Coordinator with the NSAC California Caucus, led a team of sustainable agriculture and healthy food advocates during a meeting with Becerra's district director in Los Angeles on Wednesday.

"I think we were very successful in framing the farm bill policies and programs as a food and farm bill that is relevant and important to Becerra and his downtown LA district in

many ways," said Schwartz.

Representatives from Physicians for Social Responsibility, Sustainable Economic Enterprises of Los Angeles, and the Los Angeles-based Community Services Unlimited, Inc., joined members of the California Caucus at the meeting.

"Our diverse group was able to talk about Community Food Program and Farmers Market Promotion Program funded projects in the district. We were also able to talk about organic and beginning farmer policies and programs of interest in the Congressional Latino caucus," said Schwartz.

Schwartz said Becerra's staff was receptive and open to discussing a broad range of sustainable agriculture issues in addition to food and nutrition concerns.

### **To the Super Committee**

While the rush to bring farm program recommendations to the Super Committee commanded the spotlight this week, the outcome of the Super Committee process itself remained uncertain at week's end. The committee is slated to offer its recommendations to Congress by November 23, but it remains unclear whether the budget cutters will be able to bring their recommendations to Congress in time for a scheduled December 23 vote. Under the rules imposed when the Super Committee was created in early August, the committee's budget recommendations are subject to an up or down vote in both chambers. That means once the recommendations are put forward, there will be no opportunity to amend the plan in either the House or Senate.

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CalCAN | PO Box 1366 | Sebastopol | CA | 95473