



Press Release

Agriculture and Public Health Advocates Call on Becerra to Protect Funding State-wide Groups Call for Sustainable Agriculture and Food Access Resources

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(San Francisco, CA) – Agriculture, public health and nutrition groups from throughout California called on the Congressional Joint Budget Reduction Taskforce to protect key sustainable agricultural systems and healthy food access programs.

Farm Bill programs are normally debated as part of 12 to 18 month process that defines federal food and agriculture system policies and funding for a five-year period. This year farm bill negotiations have been greatly accelerated as part of the budget reduction ‘Super Committee’ process.

More than 20 groups presented their message in a letter to Rep. Xavier Becerra, the only Californian on the Budget Reduction Taskforce. The groups called for maintaining or building programs that advance a more healthy and sustainable food system.

“During the last five years we’ve worked with dozens of groups in the Los Angeles area calling for a more sustainable food system”, said Michael Dimock President of Roots of Change. “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,” said Dimock.

Among other highlights, the letter calls on the Budget Reduction 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 increased support for farmers through technical assistance and training, including ATTRA/National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service.“
- Scale back the proposed cuts to conservation by eliminating the funding reductions being proposed for the Conservation Stewardship Program and Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

- Protect food assistance for low-income people.
- Include the important policy reforms from the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Opportunity Act and the Local Farms, Food, and Jobs Act that support the next, diverse generation of American farmers and to foster job-creating local farm and food efforts. The bills were introduced with strong support from the California Congressional delegation.

There is broad consensus within California agriculture in support of programs that advance local food systems and support beginning farmers. Evidence of this is the recent position paper released by the California Department of Food and Agriculture on the farm bill.

“The public is increasingly concerned about healthy food and where it comes from,” said Pompea Smith, CEO of Sustainable Economic Enterprises of Los Angeles (SEE-LA) a group that manages farmers markets. “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.”

“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,” said Brise Tencer of California Certified Organic Farmers. “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.”

The California Caucus of the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition is made up of California’s most effective and established sustainable agriculture advocacy and education organizations. Caucus groups represent over 50,000 California farmer and consumer stakeholders.

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