

For Immediate Release

December 18, 2015

Contact: Jeanne Merrill, California Climate and Agriculture Network (CalCAN)
916-600-0083 or jmerrill@calclimateag.org

Climate Change and Farmland Conservation Program Gets Big Boost

Council Votes to Expand Funding, New Program Guidelines

SACRAMENTO — Yesterday, the state of California greatly expanded funding for the country's first climate change and farmland conservation program. The [Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program](#) (SALCP) funds conservation easements on agricultural lands to permanently protect them and reduce sprawl development. The program also funds efforts by local governments to improve their land use planning and policy development to support long-term conservation of agricultural lands in their region.

The [Strategic Growth Council](#), made up of members of Governor Jerry Brown's cabinet and appointed public members, voted to increase SALCP funding to \$40 million, up from \$5 million last year. The SALCP funding of \$40 million represents nearly half of what the state has invested in farmland conservation in the past 18 years through its California Farmland Conservancy Program. The Council also approved new program guidelines for the second round of funding which will commence in 2016.

This significant new funding for farmland conservation in the state should help address the ongoing significant loss of agricultural land in California, which averages 50,000 acres annually.

“Dozens of land trust, environmental and farmer organizations worked hard to make the case for this funding,” said Jeanne Merrill, Policy Director of the California Climate and Agriculture Network (CalCAN). “We are very pleased about yesterday's decision, and believe it will make a difference in protecting both farmland and the climate.”

SALCP brings together farmland conservation with climate change by focusing on reducing greenhouse gas emissions associated with the conversion of agricultural lands to urban, suburban and rural ranchette development. The program was created following [research](#) at UC Davis that found that an acre of urban land in Yolo County emitted 70 times more greenhouse gas emissions compared to an acre of irrigated cropland. The [climate benefits of farmland](#), including its ability to capture and store atmospheric carbon, are lost when land is converted to urban or other non-agricultural uses.

Demand for SALCP has been high. In 2015, the first year of the program, over \$45 million in requests for SALCP funding were made, but only \$5 million was available. Despite this, SALCP funded conservation easements on 14,000 acres and funded five counties to develop agricultural land conservation strategies.

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The California Climate and Agriculture Network (calclimateag.org) is a coalition of sustainable agriculture & farmer member groups working on the nexus of climate change & agriculture policy.