



December 15, 2014

Director Ken Alex, Chair
 Secretary Anna M. Caballero, Member
 Secretary Diana S. Dooley, Member
 Mr. Bob Fisher, Co-Chair
 Ms. Gail Goldberg, Member
 Strategic Growth Council
 1400 Tenth Street
 Sacramento, CA 95812

Secretary Brian P. Kelly, Member
 Secretary John Laird, Member
 Secretary Matt Rodriguez, Member
 Secretary Karen Ross, Member

Re: Dedicate 10 percent of Sustainable Communities Implementation Program funding for California Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program

Dear Chairman Alex, Co-Chairman Fisher, and Councilmembers Caballero, Dooley, Goldberg, Kelly, Laird, Rodriguez, and Ross,

As agricultural and conservation leaders in our communities, we write to urge you to allocate at least 10% of Sustainable Communities Implementation Program (SCIP) funding to the Sustainable

Agricultural Lands Conservation Program (SALCP) in the FY 2015-16 budget. The initial investment of \$5 million in SALCP was a critical, but a modest start to achieving greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reductions through strategic investments in agricultural land conservation in our communities. More robust, consistent funding for SALCP is necessary to achieve GHG emissions reductions goals related to urban conversion of farmland and urban in-fill/smart growth development.

By increasing funding for SALCP the program can better meet its ambitious goals and leverage federal farm bill funding for agricultural land conservation that requires matching funds. The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, administered by the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, provides millions in potential funding for California.¹ The program can provide up to 50 percent of the dollars needed for the purchase of agricultural conservation easements. State funding under SALCP is crucial for providing the needed funding in areas where we are losing agricultural land and help leverage these federal dollars.

Improved funding for SALCP can achieve the GHG emissions reduction triple bottom line associated with agricultural land conservation: reduced vehicle miles traveled, increased carbon sequestration, and avoided emissions associated with land conversion and urban development.

California cannot meet its AB 32 and related 2050 goals without support for rural climate strategies that complement urban efforts to reduce GHG emissions and move toward a clean energy economy. Farms and ranches provide unique carbon sinks and have much lower GHG emissions than urban areas.

UC Davis researchers found the one acre of urban land emitted 70 times more GHG emissions compared to an acre of irrigated cropland – that number rises to 100 times more emissions when comparing urban land to rangeland.² Sustainable farm management practices like cover cropping, compost application, reduced tillage, farmscaping, and riparian restoration can further remove carbon from the atmosphere, thus enhancing the benefits of agricultural land conservation. These unique attributes make protection of working lands critical to the state's plans to reduce GHG emissions and avoid the worst impacts of climate change.

Despite these benefits, California continues to lose farmland at alarming rates. Between 1984 and 2010 the state lost an average of over 50,000 acres of agricultural land annually.³

The potential of SALCP to reduce GHG emissions is significant. Using the calculations from the UC Davis researchers for emissions from agricultural versus urban land uses, if SALCP efforts reduce agricultural land conversion by 40% or 20,000 acres per year, it would avoid GHG emissions by 1.2 million metric tons, equivalent to taking 240,000 cars off the road and reducing VMT by 2.9 billion miles annually. These benefits, to say nothing of the food production capacity, would be compounded every year.

We applaud the Strategic Growth Council and its sister agency, the Natural Resources Agency, for administering the sustainable agriculture portion of SCIP through an innovative new program that allows for cutting-edge land protection, complementary land use planning and land management strategies for carbon sequestration and GHG emission reductions. Such investments in our communities can create jobs, spur innovation, and improve our environmental health.

Furthermore, sustainable farming projects contribute to regional economic development in California's poorest communities and improved health outcomes; thus increased funding for SALCP

¹ See: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail//?cid=stelprdb1242695>

² See: <http://www.energy.ca.gov/2012publications/CEC-500-2012-032/CEC-500-2012-032.pdf>

³ See: <http://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/fmmp/trends/Pages/FastFacts.aspx>

supports the goals of Senate Bill 535 and its mandate for investments in disadvantaged communities.

We greatly appreciate your efforts to create a strong and effective SALCP this year. We urge you to continue down this successful path by dedicating at least 10% of SCIP funding to SALCP in the FY 2015-16 budget.

Sincerely,

Ed Thompson
California Director
American Farmland Trust

Haley Stewart
California Program Associate
Defenders of Wildlife

Michael Lynes
Director of Public Policy
Audubon California

Judith Redmond
Co-Owner
Full Belly Farm

Jennifer Fox
Executive Director
Bay Area Open Space Council

Terry Cowin
Executive Director
Land Trust of Santa Cruz County

Tom Bloomfield
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Director of Conservation
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Executive Director
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cc: Mike McCoy, Allison Joe, Strategic Growth Council
Julie Alvis, John Lowrie, Natural Resource Agency/ Department of Conservation
Cliff Rechtschaffen, Office of Governor Brown
Martha Guzman-Aceves, Office of Governor Brown
Karen Finn, Department of Finance