



May 29, 2015

The Honorable Kevin de León
Senate President pro Tem
State Capitol, Room 205
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Toni Atkins
Assembly Speaker
State Capitol, Room 219
Sacramento, CA 94249

The Honorable Mark Leno
Senate Budget Committee Chair
State Capitol, Room 5100
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Shirley Weber
Assembly Budget Committee Chair
State Capitol, Room 6026
Sacramento, CA 94249

Re: Dedicate 10 percent of the AHSC (cap-and-trade) funds for the Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program

Dear pro Tem de León, Speaker Atkins and Chairs Leno and Weber,

As agricultural and conservation leaders in our communities, we write to urge you to allocate at least 10

percent of the Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities cap-and-trade allocation to the Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program (SALCP) in the FY 2015-16 budget.

SALCP is a component of the Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities Program of the Strategic Growth Council. The program reduces GHG emissions associated with the conversion of agricultural land to urban development through a combination of local government planning grants, agricultural conservation easements for permanent protection and incentives for climate-friendly farm management strategies.

Demand for SALCP in FY 2014-15 far exceeded the current funding level of \$5 million with over \$45 million in funding requests for statewide projects.

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 or 2030 and 2050 GHG reduction goals without support for rural climate strategies that complement urban efforts to reduce 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. Sustainable farm management practices can further remove carbon from the atmosphere, thus enhancing the benefits of agricultural land conservation.

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.

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.

Moreover, by increasing funding for SALCP the program leverages federal farm bill funding for agricultural land conservation that requires matching funds. The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, administered by the USDA, provides millions in potential funding for California. The federal program can provide up to 50 percent of the dollars needed for the purchase of agricultural conservation easements, but state matching funds are needed.

As the state moves forward to tackle the most pressing challenges of climate change we must embrace efforts, like SALCP, that provide multiple benefits to our communities. Sustainable farming projects contribute to regional economic development in California's poorest communities and improved health outcomes through improved management; thus, SALCP helps to support the goals of Senate Bill 535 and its mandate for investments in disadvantaged communities.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Ed Thompson
California State Director
American Farmland Trust

Kelly Damewood
Policy Director
California Certified Organic Farmers

Kathryn Lyddan
Executive Director
Brentwood Agricultural Land Trust

Jeanne Merrill
Policy Director
California Climate & Agriculture Network

Darla Guenzler
Executive Director
California Council of Land Trusts

Nita Vail
Chief Executive Officer
California Rangeland Trust

Rebecca Spector
West Coast Director
Center for Food Safety

Bill Martin
Executive Director
Central Valley Farmland Trust

David Runsten
Policy Director
Community Alliance with Family Farmers

Haley Stewart
California Program Associate
Defenders of Wildlife

Ken Dickerson
Executive Director
Ecological Farming Association

Judith Redmond
Co-Owner
Full Belly Farm

Jeremy Marsden
Executive Director
Greenbelt Alliance

Terry Corwin
Executive Director
Land Trust of Santa Cruz County

Jamison Watts
Executive Director
Marin Agricultural Land Trust

Anne Cole
Executive Director
Mendocino Land Trust

Stephen E. Abbors
General Manager
Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District

Dave Henson
Executive Director
Occidental Arts and Ecology Center

Paul Mason
Vice President of Policy and Incentives
Pacific Forest Trust

Daniel Olstein
Executive Director
Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST)

Chris Coburn
Executive Director
Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz
County

Andrea MacKenzie
General Manager
Santa Clara County Open Space Authority

Sibella Kraus
President
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Steven R. Frisch
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Yolo Land Trust

Jo Ann Baumgartner
Director
Wild Farm Alliance