February 1, 2021

The Honorable Bob Wieckowski
Chair, Senate Budget Subcommittee #2
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Richard Bloom
Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee #3
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Agricultural Support for Transition to Safer, Sustainable Pest Management
(3930-024-BCP-2021-GB 8570-040-BCP-2021-GB)

Dear Senator Wieckowski and Assemblymember Bloom,

Thank you for your continued support and leadership during the pandemic, particularly your efforts to support the healthy and sustainable food & farming systems. We are excited to see the Governor’s recently proposed investments in sustainable pest management and support for California farmers.

As the leading sustainable and organic agriculture organizations in California, we write to offer our strong support and highlight the importance of the Governor's proposal to support farmers in transitioning towards safe and sustainable pest management practices.

Pesticide mill fees have not increased since 2004, and the proposed tiering based on human health toxicity -- when coupled with the proposed investments -- are a rational and fair way to generate the funding needed to effectuate this transition.
The current mill fee system treats all pesticides -- from “soft,” reduced risk pesticides to fossil fuel-based, toxic pesticides -- as if they have equal risks and costs to society. This is unfair to farmers who have made the transition to safer, less toxic pesticides. The current system has also resulted in inadequate funding to support more producers in adopting sustainable pest management.

In the absence of adequate public interest pest management support, large scale farmers often turn to private Pest Control Advisors (PCAs) whose advice may be skewed by having a conflict of interest, as 90 percent of PCAs are employed by agricultural chemical distributors and many PCAs earn commissions from the sale of pesticides.¹

Small and medium scale farmers rely on the knowledge and resources provided by technical assistance providers, such as University of California Cooperative Extension/Agriculture and Natural Resources (UCCE/UCANR), and their peers for success.² Over the last two decades, UCANR's budget has been cut by the legislature by 57 percent. In 1990, UCCE had 202 specialists, but by 2018 there were only 109; similarly, UCCE had 326 farm advisors in 1990, but only 170 in 2018. This decline in agricultural technical assistance and related research impedes farmers' ability to transition to safer, sustainable pest management.

The Governor proposes to allocate $20 million to expand Integrated Pest Management (IPM) research, education and extension programs to support sustainable pest management. With this increase in funding, the state can once again provide the necessary technical assistance to reach the state’s diverse farms and ranches and support an expansion of safe and sustainable pest management. This is critical as sustainable and organic farm practices are more knowledge-intensive³, and often lack reliable localized technical support and resources catered to their practices and systems.⁴ In California, more than 80 percent of farms operate on less than 180 acres and nearly three-fourths operate on less than $100,000 in annual sales. These growers often cannot afford a sustainable pest management advisor or private consultant to provide reliable information and advice on pest management, they rely on peer-to-peer networks and UC extension for knowledge.

The Governor’s proposed funding would provide support to the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA)’s Biologically Integrated Farming Systems Program (BIFS). BIFS is an impactful program that fosters on-farm education and outreach on innovative biologically

¹ Harrison, J.L, Pesticide Drift and the Pursuit of Environmental Justice (MIT Press, 2011)
integrated farming systems. Biologically integrated systems use biological and cultural farming practices to reduce chemical inputs and thus reduce the degradation of natural resources caused by these inputs. Providing technical assistance, fostering farmer-to-farmer information exchange, and establishing on-farm demonstration projects are some of the most effective and necessary strategies for farmers to transition to more biologically integrated pest management.

The Governor's proposed investment will also support efforts to bolster the University of California and California State IPM programs to support grower implementation of safer alternatives to high-risk pesticides. These UC and California State IPM programs offer the best and only free source of science-based information and resources on pests for farmers.

These localized education and outreach programs on sustainable pest management are valuable strategies to support growers in transitioning away from harmful pesticide use, reducing on-farm costs, and towards growing healthy food, improving ecosystems, and developing more resilient agricultural systems.

We hope that you will support these critical programs highlighted above that help to make farmers grow more sustainably and more resilient in the future. Thank you for your consideration and leadership during this difficult time.

Sincerely,

Paul Towers
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Community Alliance with Family Farmers

Kara Heckert
California Regional Director
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