March 13, 2023

The Honorable Robert Rivas
Chair, California State Assembly Agriculture Committee
1020 N Street, Room 362
Sacramento, California 95814

Re: AB 552 (Bennett) – Regional Farmer Equipment & Cooperative Resources Assistance Program – SUPPORT

Dear Chair Rivas,

We the undersigned farmers and food organizations we write to express our support for AB 552 to establish a program to support regional farm equipment sharing for small and/or mid-scale, limited resource, and underserved farmers and ranchers.

As climate change impacts increase and the agriculture sector must adapt to extreme weather, wildfire, temperature changes, and decreasing water availability, there is an urgent need to help farmers and ranchers adopt management approaches that increase their climate and economic resilience. Sustainable management practices also provide critical ecosystem services, including carbon sequestration, as well as supporting regional food and fiber systems.

In California, 75% of farms operate with net cash farm income gains under $25,000 or with net losses. After land, the purchase of farm equipment and infrastructure is the second largest capital investment producers face, but it is often inaccessible for small to mid-scale, underserved, and limited resource farmers and ranchers. Often, conservation practices and agricultural wildfire mitigation strategies, such as prescribed grazing, require high-value equipment that is used infrequently. Similarly, infrastructure such as cold storage facilities are often prohibitively expensive, but shared facilities can serve multiple growers across a region throughout the year, especially in regions where different crops require storage at different times.

Equipment sharing programs allow farmers to borrow or lease high-value equipment and can facilitate conservation practices, help alleviate financial barriers to equipment, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and provide necessary resources to build regional food economies.

There is evidence of successful publicly supported equipment sharing programs in states like Maryland and New Hampshire, as well as numerous non-profit-run programs.

Despite the public benefits of equipment sharing and burgeoning need and interest across the state, there is currently no state support for farmer and rancher equipment sharing programs.

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1 Also known as - Socially Disadvantaged Farmers & Ranchers as defined FAC 511
2 USDA 2017 Census of Agriculture, Table 5, available at: https://www.nass.usda.gov/Quick_Stats/CDQT/chapter/1/table/5/state/CA/year/2017
3 See https://www.nhacd.net/equipment-rentals and https://smadc.com/farmer-resources/farm-equipment/
This bill establishes a program to support equipment sharing for farmers and ranchers that face the highest barriers in accessing the equipment they need to build climate resilience and regional food and fiber systems. This program would provide funds to eligible entities, such as resource conservation districts, County agricultural commissioners, University of California Cooperative Extension offices, tribal entities, farmer cooperatives, and nonprofits to develop and maintain equipment sharing programs for their constituencies. The program would also support technical assistance for maintenance of tools, tool demonstrations, and farmer cooperatives. This bill prioritizes farmers that face the highest barriers - underserved farmers and ranchers, and limited resource farmers.

As climate impacts worsen, this bill would provide a critical bridge for farmers who are seeking access to needed equipment for conservation practices, wildfire mitigation, and expanding their economic viability, but currently face financial barriers.

Sincerely,

Anna Larson, Policy Associate, California Climate and Agriculture Network (CalCAN)

Jamie Fanous, Policy Director, Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF)

Cam Tredennick, Executive Director, California Association of Resource Conservation Districts

Torri Estrada, Executive Director, Carbon Cycle Institute

Emily Schwing, Public Affairs Director, Veggielution

Christine Farren, Executive Director, Foodwise

Baani Behniwal, Natural Sequestration Initiative Manager, The Climate Center
Michael Dimock, Director, Public Health Institute's Roots of Change

Kelsey Brewer, Working Lands Scientist, Marin Resource Conservation District

Margaret Reeves, Senior Scientist, Pesticide Action Network

Zoe Siegel, Director of Climate Resilience, Greenbelt Alliance

Laetitia Benador, Senior Policy Research Specialist, California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF)

Treighton, Farmer, Barbell Farm

Heather Podoll, Partnership and Advocacy Coordinator, Fibershed

Ariel Rivers, Farmer, Air's Wild Acres

Patricia Carrillo, Executive Director, Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA)

Stacy Rebich Hespanha, Founder, Flourish Local, Loca Vivant Kitchen
Nayamin Martinez, Executive Director, Central California Environmental Justice Network

Chris Brickett, Beginning Farmer

Dr. Sridharan (Sri) Sehturatnam, Director - CA Farm Academy, Center for Land-Based Learning

Christine Gemperle, Farmer, Gemperle Orchards

Bea Alvarez, Climate Resilience Projects Coordinator, Foodshed Coop

Melissa Sorongon, Founding Member, California Plowshares

Dave Henson, Executive Director, Occidental Arts and Ecology Center

Michael Evenson, Owner/operator, Lost Coast Ranch & Legislative Director, California State Grange

Leonard Diggs, Director of Farmer and Rancher Opportunities, Pie Ranch
Laura deTar, Executive Director, Fresh Approach

Laura deTar

Angeliel Ryah, Regenerative Farmer, Belong Farm

Angeliel Ryah

Cathryn Henning, Co-owner and farmer, BeeWorthy Farms

Cathryn Henning

Wendy Krupnick, Farmer, Chiatri de Laguna Farm

Wendy Krupnick

Tamara Hicks, Owner, Toluma Farms

Tamara Hicks

Rich Collins, Farmer, The Collins Farm

Rich Collins

Karina Mudd, Co-Founder, California Native Seed Supply Collaborative

Karina Mudd

Reggie Knox, Chief Executive Office, California FarmLink

Reggie Knox

Shakira Miracle, Executive Director, Santa Barbara County Food Action Network

Shakira Miracle