

April 2, 2025

The Honorable Monique Limón, Chair  
The Honorable Kelly Seyarto, Vice Chair  
Senate Natural Resources & Water Committee  
1021 O Street, Room 3220  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: SB 462 (Cortese) - Support if Amended**

Dear Chair Limón and Vice Chair Seyarto,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on SB 462. On behalf of American Farmland Trust and the California Climate and Agriculture Network, we respectfully write to support *if amended* SB 462 (Cortese) which would establish a continuous appropriation for the California Farmland Conservancy Program.

American Farmland Trust (AFT) is the only national conservation organization dedicated to protecting farmland, promoting sound farming practices, and keeping farmers on the land. AFT has a long history of working on farmland protection and agricultural viability policy efforts in California including our involvement in supporting the establishment of the California Farmland Conservancy Program (CFCP) in 1995. California Climate and Agriculture Network (CalCAN) is a statewide network of farmers and ranchers, agricultural professionals, scientists, and allied organizations that advocates for policies that advance sustainable and organic agricultural climate solutions. Since our inception in 2009, we have supported CFCP as an important tool for farmland conservation.

CFCP provides funding for agricultural conservation easements that permanently protect agricultural land from development, and for land improvement projects on protected land to support long-term sustainable stewardship. CFCP also encourages local governments to integrate farmland conservation into their planning decisions, aligning with the state's agricultural preservation policies.<sup>1</sup>

Well-managed farms and rangelands support wildlife and biodiversity, clean our water, increase resilience to natural disasters like floods and fires, and help combat climate change. All of these functions are consistent with the Governor's Executive Order N-82-20 on biodiversity and land conservation and are in alignment with the state's climate smart land strategy and climate goals.

As leaders who work with partners on the ground to accelerate and protect California's natural and working lands, we see the pressing need for funding to ensure that agricultural lands can continue to thrive. We appreciate Senator Cortese's leadership to uplift farmland conservation by creating an on-going funding source for CFCP.

**We support the bill if amended to remove the exclusion of grazing lands from CFCP.** Excluding grazing land from program funds would undermine the program's goal of preserving agricultural land and the state's goals for conserving grasslands. CFCP is an important tool to help the state protect grazed land and meet the state's nature based solutions climate target to conserve 33,000 additional acres/year of grasslands by 2030, and sustain that rate through 2045, as required by [AB 1757](#). Grazing provides critical

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/grant-programs/cfcpl>

benefits to California's grasslands. Livestock remove non-native plants and prevent tree and shrub encroachment, maintaining important habitat and reducing fuel loads. Grazed grassland also has reduced fire risk compared to non-grazed grassland, acts as critical wildfire buffer zones for communities, helps maintain habitat for grassland animals, including endangered species, and provides food sources for pollinators.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, the future of our agricultural lands is ever evolving. While a ranch might be using its land for grazing now, we cannot predict what a future farmer might want to cultivate on the land. For example, the Department of Conservation reports that approximately 109,000 acres of range and other lands were converted to new irrigated land between 2016 and 2018.<sup>3</sup> Adding a restriction to grazing land in statute could exclude projects that otherwise meet program goals.

Finally, the state cannot continue to lose any more agricultural land, including grazing land, to development. AFT's 2020 [Farms Under Threat](#) reports that between 2001 and 2016, 465,900 acres of California's agricultural land were converted to urban and highly developed land uses and low-density residential land use. If this trend continues, according to AFT's [Farms Under Threat: Choosing an Abundant Future](#), the state will pave over, fragment, or compromise 797,400 acres of agricultural land by 2040. Since 1984, 26% of total agricultural acres lost to nonagricultural uses are grazing lands.<sup>4</sup> With the average price of an acre of agricultural land continuing to rise annually, we need to protect every acre to ensure California's ability to produce the most healthy and abundant food for future generations.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this letter to support *if amended* for SB 462. We appreciate the elevation of this critical issue and request the committee amend the bill to maintain program flexibility to ensure the program can effectively prioritize agricultural land conservation projects and help meet state climate targets in years to come.

We look forward to working with you and your staff on these important issues. If you have any questions regarding these comments, please reach out to Chelsea Gazillo, AFT's Senior California Policy Manager at [cgazillo@farmland.org](mailto:cgazillo@farmland.org) or (707) 495-8223 or Anna Larson, CalCAN's Associate Policy Director, at [anna@calclimateag.org](mailto:anna@calclimateag.org) or (650) 260-4254.

Sincerely,

Chelsea Gazillo  
Senior California Policy Manager  
American Farmland Trust

Anna Larson  
Associate Policy Director  
California Climate and Agriculture Network

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<sup>2</sup> <https://anrcatalog.ucanr.edu/pdf/8517.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/fmmp/Pages/2016-2018\\_Farmland\\_Conversion\\_Report.aspx](https://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/fmmp/Pages/2016-2018_Farmland_Conversion_Report.aspx)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.