ASSEMBLYMEMBER ROBERT RIVAS

Agriculture Tour 2020

Keeping California Our Nation's Agriculture Leader

Report of Statewide Tour by Assemblymember Robert Rivas, Newly Appointed Chair of the California State Assembly Committee on Agriculture

Fall 2020

In September 2020, Speaker Anthony Rendon appointed me to serve as Chair of the Assembly's Committee on Agriculture. Following this appointment, I embarked on a **two-month statewide tour** of meetings and site visits. My goal was to meet with stakeholders across the state and gather perspectives on the needs of California's diverse and productive agriculture industry, which has been seriously impacted by the effects of COVID-19 and recent wildfires. Findings gathered from the tour will help to inform public policy reforms in upcoming legislative sessions to aid recovery, combat the ongoing effects of climate change, and maintain California's agricultural leadership.

During October and November, I met with **approximately seventy stakeholders,** including farmers, agricultural workers, industry and union leaders, environmentalists, scientists, elected officials and others. I visited **over fifty sites** from Salinas and Oxnard on the Central Coast, to Bakersfield, Fresno, and Sacramento in the Central Valley, to San Jose and Sonoma in the Bay Area, to Los Angeles and the Inland Empire, to San Diego and more. Additional portions of the tour, including visits to San Francisco, Orange County, and the Coachella Valley, were postponed due to COVID-19-related travel restrictions.

California's $50 billion-a-year agriculture industry produces over four hundred commodities. I met with stakeholders from a wide variety of sectors, including water, dairy, nuts, university research and innovation, academia, veterinary science, organic foods, beekeeping, and many others.

This report summarizes some of the key themes highlighted by stakeholders throughout the tour. In particular, these stakeholders argued that for California to remain our nation's agricultural leader, policymakers must incentivize, invest in, and otherwise encourage the following hallmarks of this industry:

COMPETITIVENESS: mitigating regulatory burdens, business costs, and trade pressures
RESILIENCY: recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic and 2020's unprecedented wildfires
DIVERSITY: harnessing the state's unrivaled spectrum of talent, topography, and crops
WORKER PROTECTIONS: keeping laborers healthy, safely housed, and fairly compensated
FOOD SECURITY: investing in a robust food and farming system to ensure food for all
SUSTAINABILITY AND INNOVATION: promoting climate-smart and high-tech farming

I look forward to making progress in these areas during the 2021-22 Legislative Session and future sessions, working with my colleagues to establish needed policy, funding, and reforms.

I wish to thank the many industry representatives and site hosts who were so gracious with their time and assistance during the tour. I would also like to thank my many colleagues for supporting agriculture in their districts and participating in the tour, including Asm. Cecilia Aguiar-Curry, Asm. Joaquin Arambula, Asm. Richard Bloom, Asm. Tasha Boerner-Horvath, Sen. Anna Caballero, Asm. Wendy Carrillo, Asm. Sabrina Cervantes, Sen. Susan Eggman, Asm. Heath Flora, Asm. Vince Fong, Asm. Cristina Garcia, Asm. Mike Gipson, Asm. Adam Gray, Asm. Jacqui Irwin, Asm. Reginald Jones-Sawyer, Asm. Ash Kalra, Asm. Sydney Kamlager-Dove, Asm. Alex Lee, Asm. Marc Levine, Asm. Devon Mathis, Asm. Kevin McCarty, Asm. Jose Medina, Asm. Al Muratsuchi, Asm. Eloise Gómez Reyes, Asm. Luz Rivas, Asm. Rudy Salas, Asm. Miguel Santiago, and Asm. Jim Wood.

I believe the future of California agriculture is bright, and I very much look forward to serving as Chair of the Assembly's Agriculture Committee.

Sincerely,

Robert Rivas
Assemblymember, 30th District

I. Competitiveness

Mitigating regulatory burdens, business costs, and trade pressures

In recent years, labor shortages, increases to the minimum wage, and changes to unemployment laws have increased the cost of doing business for farmers in California. In addition, other long-term pressures of doing business in the state – including the rising cost of land use and unique environmental mandates – will continue to combine to make California a more expensive place to conduct agricultural activities than many other states. As a result, policymakers must give special attention to keeping California a competitive place to do business for agriculture.

Even before the impact of COVID-19, small and mid-sized farms have been growing increasingly concerned about the economic viability of their farming operations. Stakeholders on the tour offered a variety of suggestions for how California agriculture can remain profitable while also adapting to new laws and regulations. Farmers relayed that they strive to provide the safest workplaces for their workers and to comply with California's many regulations and mandates, but that this often comes at a greater relative cost to farmers in other states. Some of these costs include:

LABOR: With overtime wages scaling into effect, some farmers shared that they are worried of increased costs and/or that they may need to reduce the hours worked by their employees.

REGULATORY CHALLENGES: Larger growers can afford to pay and devote staff to adhere to the various bureaucratic requirements of growing food in California, while smaller farmers often have difficulty understanding and managing compliance with a wide range of local and state agencies, including the Air Resources Board, Water Board, and CDFA.

LAND USE PRESSURES: Already constrained by the relatively small amounts of fertile land in between areas that are less well-suited for farming, California's land use pressures have only increased in recent years as housing policies fuel urban sprawl that continues to gobble up farmland.

ENVIRONMENTAL MANDATES: There is a great deal of concern about the Governor's Executive Order related to electric engines and also the Governor's Executive Order related to biodiversity and natural and working lands. Agricultural stakeholders want to make sure they have input into the Governor's implementation of these directives, and that their unique industry circumstances are considered.

OPEN, GLOBAL MARKETS: Numerous farmers said that they are concerned about losing their competitive edge as global markets open and cheaper produce from Mexico and elsewhere increasingly floods the domestic market.

Policy Ideas for Promoting Competitiveness for California Agriculture:

(1) **California state agencies and institutions could buy more California agriculture product:** AB 822 (Caballero) of 2017 gave a buying preference to California agriculture products for state institutions; AB 1248 (E. Garcia) of 2020 would have required state institutions to only buy California agriculture products, with few exceptions. Chair Rivas's AB 1025, introduced this year, will prohibit all California state institutions from purchasing agricultural products grown, packed or processed non-domestically, unless the price of the foreign product is more than twenty-five percent lower than domestic produce or the quality of the domestic product is inferior to that of the foreign product.

(2) **Consolidate and streamline the paperwork and regulatory process associated with compliance with California's various rules and regulations,** perhaps by creating a single "one stop shop" online for farmers and ranchers.

(3) **Technical assistance (TA) for farmers to access state grant programs:** TA providers help farmers understand and apply the latest science and best practices, facilitate farmer-to-farmer learning, lead on-farm research and demonstration projects, and assist growers with applications for grants and cost share programs. While recent legislation related to CDFA's environmental farming programs have added language and funding for TA, other agencies that regulate agriculture should review grant programs for the inclusion of TA.

(4) **Reform state housing policies to combat urban sprawl:** For California farms to remain competitive, dramatic change is needed to state housing policies generally – to allow for denser development in the urban core, near job centers and public transit. No matter what other policies are put in place, California's agriculture sector will never maintain its leadership position if it continues to lose arable land year over year. Addressing the housing crisis will also help with many of the other challenges facing agriculture, including labor costs (which are increasingly fueled by sky-high housing prices) and achievement of state climate goals (which would become significantly easier for agriculture to comply with should land conversion be slowed).

(5) **Limit economic impacts of utility tree-trimming on agricultural land:** Electric utilities frequently conduct tree-trimming on agricultural lands to prevent wildfire, despite the relatively low risk in some agricultural regions such as the Central Valley. This practice can negatively impact orchards in particular. Reform is needed to make sure that electric utilities are not only prioritizing vegetation management in the regions of highest risk, but also having the minimum feasible impact on orchards. Chair Rivas has introduced AB 280 to help address this issue.

(6) **Tax credit for overtime:** Many farmers expressed concern over California's recently enacted overtime mandate, worried that they will be forced to keep workers' hours to forty per week. This could result in some crops not being harvested and also workers, as a group, receiving less wages.

II. Resilience

Recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic and 2020's unprecedented wildfires

California agricultural markets faced unique and unprecedented additional challenges in 2020. In particular, Chair Rivas heard from stakeholders that California's agricultural industry continues to be hit hard from the impacts of COVID-19 and wildfires. Legislators will need to continue to confront these challenges.

A. IMPACTS OF COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted our food and farm systems, disrupting both demand and supply in unprecedented ways. In order to feed their families, Californians rely on family farmers, ranchers, and farmworkers who raise livestock, poultry, and agricultural commodities. It is critical that all food commodities are able to move through the supply chain even when the nation is faced with human illness, travel restrictions, and other outbreak-related impacts. Our food and farm systems, therefore, must be improved.

Additionally, the spread of COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact on the health, safety, and housing of our farm and other agricultural workers. Reports of COVID-19 outbreaks linked to farms, packing sheds, and meatpacking plants across California continue. It is clear more must be done to protect California's agriculture workers.

Policy Ideas for Promoting Resilience for California Agriculture in the Wake of COVID-19:

(1) **Economic stimulus:** Ensure that agricultural businesses and workers, including undocumented workers, are included in any state economic stimulus, to compensate for losses and disruption resulting from the pandemic. This might include direct subsidies, overtime or other tax credits, or temporary waivers from some existing regulations.

(2) **Vaccine access:** Though agricultural workers have been prioritized for receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, the state must act swiftly and intentionally to reach this vulnerable population and ensure they receive the vaccine dosages they are due. The state's vaccination efforts must also include undocumented immigrants who are often afraid to seek government aid if it may jeopardize their residency in the country. Asm. Eduardo Garcia and Chair Rivas have introduced AB 93 to prioritize workers in the food supply industry, including, field workers and grocery workers, for rapid testing and vaccination programs in response to future pandemics.

(3) **Expanded access to testing:** Until widespread vaccination is achieved, testing efforts must be accelerated and expanded in rural areas. Wait times for appointments and turnaround time for test results must be reduced, including by increased utilization of the rapid antigen test (with results available in less than an hour) instead of or in addition to the more common swab molecular test (with results sometimes taking a week or more).

(4) **Reporting:** In order for outbreaks to be quickly detected and mitigated, all state agencies and counties that administer testing must be required to collect and report the occupations of persons testing positive for COVID-19. Currently, only a handful of counties regularly collect and post occupational data related to COVID-19 testing, including with regard to agricultural workers. AB 685 (Reyes, 2020) created clear, simple guidelines for what an employer should do when informed that someone at the worksite has tested positive or been diagnosed with Covid-19. The bill allows one business day to notify workers who were on the premises with the person who has Covid-19. That notice should inform workers what type of sick leave they may be eligible for and the disinfection plan for the worksite.

(5) **Cal/OSHA enforcement:** Cal/OSHA's enforcement efforts must be expanded beyond the targeted "strategic enforcement" that has been previously announced. Agricultural workers are historically less inclined to make a complaint due to fears surrounding their immigration status or concerns about retaining their job. Chair Rivas's AB 2043 of 2020 provided for a targeted outreach and education campaign for agricultural workers administered by Cal/OSHA. It also provided for the tracking and reporting of complaints at agricultural worksites.

(6) **Expansion of the "Housing for the Harvest" program:** As in nursing homes and homeless facilities, once an outbreak occurs in an agricultural community, it is very difficult to contain. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that many agricultural workers live in overcrowded spaces. While the Governor's "Housing for the Harvest" program is critical for providing temporary housing for sick or at-risk agricultural workers across the state, it needs to be dramatically expanded. In addition, more permanent solutions for safe housing are needed.

B. IMPACTS OF 2020'S UNPRECEDENTED WILDFIRE SEASON

Due in part to climate change and decades of inadequate vegetation management, wildfires in California are continuing to increase in frequency and intensity, resulting in loss of life and damage to property, infrastructure, and ecosystems. In 2020 alone, wildfires burned more

than 4.2 million acres. Six of the ten largest recorded fires in California's history occurred in 2020 (August Complex, Mendocino Complex, SCU Lightning Complex, Creek, LNU Lightning Complex, and North Complex). There were also more wildfires in closer proximity to agricultural lands. Altogether, the impact of recent wildfires on California's agriculture has been catastrophic and unprecedented.

Policy Ideas for Promoting Resilience for California Agriculture in the Wake of the 2020 Wildfire Season:

(1) **N-95 masks, personal protective equipment (PPE), and on-farm wildfire safety:** The combination of the COVID-19 pandemic, new wildfire smoke regulations for outdoor workers, and the unprecedented number of wildfires together put enormous strain on the availability of PPE for farmworkers this past fire season. Chair Rivas's AB 73, the Farmworker Wildfire Smoke Protections Act, introduced in December 2020, would establish a dedicated stockpile of N-95 respirators for agricultural use, provide for Cal OSHA enforcement strike teams during wildfire season, and mandate wildfire smoke training for agricultural workers.

(2) **Fire insurance for agriculture:** Many farmers and ranchers raised the issue of increasing fire insurance rates, of being denied fire insurance from standard insurance avenues, and the lack of insurance from the California FAIR Plan for farms. Without insurance, many lenders will not extend credit to farmers. SB 11, introduced by Senator Rubio, seeks to address this problem.

(3) **Expand animal grazing to mitigate wildfire fuels:** Livestock grazing is an effective wildfire prevention and mitigation tool, given that it reduces the size, spread, and severity of fires. While limited livestock grazing occurs on some California Department of Fish and Wildlife lands and within the State Parks system, grazing could be more broadly utilized on these public lands. Chair Rivas has introduced AB 434, the Managed Grazing to Mitigate Wildfires Act, to address this issue.

(4) **Expand prescribed burns:** Burn bosses report that liability concerns, and attendant insurability concerns, are the single greatest disincentive to conducting controlled burns. California could adopt a gross negligence standard akin to that adopted by the State of Nevada. The state might also reduce the frequency of 'no-burn' decisions by air pollution control districts and air quality management districts as they relate to prescribed burns. Finally, the state might exempt certain prescribed fire activities from CEQA requirements or streamline CEQA requirements for those projects.

III. Diversity

Harnessing the state's unrivaled spectrum of talent, topography, and crops

California's farmers, ranchers, and workers are diverse. California has the largest population of Asian-American farmers, and ranks third in the nation for Hispanic farmers. While farmer diversity continues to increase annually, data shows that farmers of color tend to farm smaller farms, earn less money on average, and receive 36% less in government funding than their white counterparts. In discussions with stakeholders, the unique issues faced by farmers of color were mentioned frequently. In particular, Chair Rivas heard of the need to improve the pipeline of new farmers and to help new and diverse farmers gain access to land and be successful.

California's crops are also incredibly diverse, with over four hundred commodities currently grown in the state. California also features a wide range of topography and sites for agriculture, from rural areas to urban cities, and from on the land to in the sea. The tour made stops at farms in several urban areas, including West Sacramento, San Jose, and Los Angeles. It was clear that urban farming can positively influence communities in many ways, including by improving access to healthy food, promoting community development, and creating jobs. Chair Rivas also visited mariculture sites in the Port of San Diego. Policy is needed to protect and expand this diversity of operations and production, in both rural and urban areas.

Policy Ideas for Further Promoting Diversity in California Agriculture:

(1) **Supporting socially disadvantaged farmers (SDFs):** Exploring ways the state can support SDFs entering into the farming space, while leveraging the important work UC Agriculture and Natural Resources and the Cooperative Extension does, is vital to expand and sustain SDFs' entry to farming in California. In 2017, AB 1348 (Aguiar-Curry) – the Farmer Equity Act – codified the definition of Socially Disadvantaged Group and SDFs, and established CDFA as the coordinating agency for SDF Programs. Chair Rivas hosted an informational hearing related to SDFs and the Farmer Equity Act on March 17. He has also introduced AB 352, a bill focused on expanding farmland conservation for SDFs.

(2) **Better access to technical assistance for state grant programs:** Updates to the CDFA's grant programs have begun to address the unique need of SDFs in the grant process. CDFA should continue to design grant programs with considerations or priority funding for SDFs, and should continue to build stakeholder feedback into the process. This will ensure more socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers have the opportunity to apply for and obtain grant funding for their operations.

(3) **Access to ag land:** Many SDFs face barriers to accessing land when attempting to enter the farming space. Recent legislation by Chair Rivas (AB 986, 2019) aimed to help ease the burden on socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers by providing improved access to grants and other sources of funding that traditionally favor established farmers.

(4) **Pathway to long term lease/purchase of ag land:** Previous legislation includes the Chair's AB 2955 from 2020, which would have made changes to the California Farmland Conservancy Program Act to remove barriers to SDFs participating in the agricultural economy and stewarding working lands under conservation. The bill would have expanded the use of funds for the program to include technical and acquisition assistance grants to eligible entities for the sole purpose of reducing barriers to land access for SDFs. Chair Rivas plans to reintroduce a similar version of this legislation in the upcoming legislative cycle.

(5) **Ensure that state agency outreach is multi-lingual and accessible:** CDFA has begun to design regulatory programs with an educational component that includes information in a variety of languages. It is critical that education and outreach is provided to SDFs alongside the implementation of new regulations from all state agencies.

(6) **Expand UC small farm advisor program:** AB 838 (Eggman) of 2019 would have created the Farmer Equity and Innovation Center within the University of California's Small Farm Program, charged with ensuring the continued economic viability of SDFs.

(7) **Promote and expand urban farming:** A number of cities in California, including San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego, have updated municipal policies to facilitate urban agriculture due to strong community interest. There is need, however, for a cohesive state policy and strategy for expanding urban farming throughout California. Urban farmers routinely face unique issues, for example, related to zoning, soil, water access, and profitability.

(8) **Promote and expand mariculture:** New legislation by Chair Rivas (AB 303, 2021) will apply the principles of AB 1348 to the marine and estuarine aquaculture industries. In addition to being a sustainable form of food production, aquaculture does not suffer from the issues of high land costs that plague so many farmers attempting to get started. Many immigrants also bring aquaculture traditions that can help invigorate California's nascent industry. The forthcoming legislation will also tackle ongoing permitting and leasing issues that have prevented aquaculture from taking root on a larger scale in California, while ensuring environmental protections.

IV. Worker Protections

Keeping laborers healthy, safely housed, and fairly compensated

The success of California agriculture very much depends on the success, safety, and health of its laborers, so worker protections was also a frequent topic discussed on the statewide tour. Workers in California enjoy some of the most robust protections in the world, including a relatively high minimum wage and overtime requirement, workplace safety standards, and a variety of state-mandated employment benefits. But new policies should be considered to ensure California remains a leader for workers, as well as for farmers and ranchers.

Part of keeping workers protected means keeping them safely housed. Too often, given the housing shortage being experienced throughout California, farmworkers live in crowded facilities. A recent study in Chair Rivas's District, which includes both the agricultural Salinas and Pajaro Valleys, found significant overcrowding in farmworker households, with an average household of 7 PPD (persons per dwelling) as compared to an overall 3.23 PPD in Monterey County and 2.60 in Santa Cruz County. Chair Rivas toured a farmworker housing development in Sonoma and heard from various stakeholders about the need for streamlining and incentives to ensure significant increase in farmworker housing supply can be built quickly in the state.

Policy Ideas for Further Promoting Worker Protections in California Agriculture:

(1) **Workplace notices:** SB 1102 (Monning, 2020) would have required employers to include in their written workplace rights notice to all employees, specified information in the event of a federal or state emergency or disaster declaration that may affect their health and safety. Additionally, it would have required employers of H-2A employees to provide specific written notice on labor rights and obligations under federal and state law, including notice of emergency or disaster declarations. The bill was passed by the Legislature, but it was later vetoed by Governor Newsom. Asm. Kalra has introduced AB 857 in the new legislative session, to again tackle this issue.

(2) **Workers' Right to Organize:** Asm. Stone has introduced AB 616 this year to update the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act (CALR Act) as it relates to elections. Since the CALR Act, California overall election process has changed in ways to facilitate the exercise of the right to vote. Registering to vote is easier. The time everyone has to vote has increased. Voters can authorize someone else to turn in their ballot. Furthermore, the California Voting Choice Act created options for how people can cast their ballot. Asm. Stone's "The Agricultural Labor Relations Voting Choice Act" would afford farmworkers similar flexibility in union representation elections.

(3) **Farmworker Resource Centers:** Asm. Bennett, along with Sen. Limon and Chair Rivas, has introduced AB 941 this year to fund a grant program for counties to establish a Farmworker Resource Center which would provide information and access to services to farmworkers and their families. Services provided would include, but not be limited to, assistance with public agencies, providing resources and answering questions on programs dealing with education, housing, utilities, payroll and wage rights, and health and human services.

(4) **Increase funding and streamlining for farmworker housing:** For California farms to remain competitive and their workers to remain safe and healthy, more funding and streamlining is needed for the production of farmworker housing. Chair Rivas's AB 1783 of 2019 provided streamlining for certain housing projects on agricultural land, and Chair Rivas has also championed the expansion of the California Farmworker Housing Tax Credit. The current designation of $500,000 for these credits is far too little to support the large number of projects needed to deliver new, permanent, and safe housing for our farm and other agricultural workers. This year's proposed State Budget will allocate a total of $500 million to the broader State Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program, some of which must be prioritized for farmworker housing tax credits. An expansion of the California Farmworker Housing Assistance Tax Credit program, by at least $25 million, will speed up projects already in the pipeline and incentivize new projects needed in light of the COVID-19 health crisis.

V. Food Security

Investing in a robust food and farming system to ensure food for all

Food insecurity has increased this year due to COVID-19. Hardest hit by food insecurity are low wage workers and people of color, who are more likely to have been laid off due to the pandemic. The statewide tour had stops at large food bank operations in the L.A. region and the Inland Empire as well as at farms that work with food access organizations, including an operation in Ventura that offers heavily discounted CSA food boxes to farmworkers in the region. These stakeholders highlighted the persistent strain on California's food access system to feed our population.

COVID-19 also made clear the importance of a resilient, robust, end-to-end food supply chain. Indeed, our food and farming systems were nearly pushed to a breaking point by COVID-19 – the dramatic swings and disruptions in supply and demand resulted in various crops going to waste, while at the same time many people were going hungry. We toured the sites of unique community-based groups like La Mesa Verde in East San Jose, which leads local initiatives to promote food self-sufficiency and urban farming. Local initiatives are vital in building a more sustainable local food network. Substantial additional state funding is needed to improve and expand California's food processing and distribution infrastructure – as well as for nutrition, farm to food bank, and other food security programs.

Policy Ideas for Combatting Food Insecurity and Ensuring Robust Food and Farming Systems in California:

(1) **The Food, Farm, and Economic Recovery Bond:** Chair Rivas, in December 2020, introduced AB 125, an ambitious, multi-billion-dollar bond effort to fully fund and expand regional and local food processing, distribution, and market infrastructure, especially for underserved farmers, while expanding support for anti-hunger and improved food access efforts throughout the state.

(2) **Expand CDFA's Farm to Fork programs:** CDFA's Office of Farm to Fork is committed to helping all Californians access healthy and nutritious California-grown food. It connects school districts and community members directly with California's farmers and ranchers, and it provides information and other resources. Farm to School Programs are a vital way to improve the health and well-being of California schoolchildren through integrated nutrition education and healthy food access, and therefore should be expanded.

(3) **Expand the California Nutrition Incentive Program (CNIP) and Market Match:** Programs such as Market Match and CNIP help welfare recipients and low-income consumers purchase more goods at Certified Farmers Markets. While these programs have been a boon for both farmers and consumers, they are underutilized. The state should work to expand the use of Market Match and CNIP for low-income consumers.

(4) **Incentivize and expand local "food hub" infrastructure:** A food hub, as defined by the USDA, is "a centrally located facility with a business management structure facilitating the aggregation, storage, processing, distribution, and/or marketing of locally/regionally produced food products." Food hubs are a part of the agricultural value chain model and often share common values relating to conservation, sustainability, healthy food access, and supporting local farmers. AB 534 (Mayes, 2019) addressed many food insecurity issues and aimed to lessen food insecurity. Part of the legislation looked at food hubs and aimed: (1) to identify infrastructure needs to develop food hubs and work to create, an inventory of state-owned property that would be suitable for food hub locations, and (2) to explore methods to use new and existing resources to develop food hub infrastructure and to utilize county fairgrounds as food hub locations. While the bill did not become law, it raised new ways to look at food hub infrastructure.

(5) **Encourage more direct food supply from farms to local buyers:** CDFA regulates three types of direct marketing for farmers and ranchers: (1) farm stands, (2) certified farmers markets, and, (3) community supported agriculture. These all allow for selling farm goods directly to consumers. Many small farms in California use one or all of these programs. The state should look for ways to expand and further incentivize these examples of direct distribution of locally grown food.

(6) **Extend tax credit for farm donation to foodbanks:** AB 614 (Eggman, 2019) expanded the pre-existing 15% tax credit, which is currently limited to fresh fruits and vegetables donated to food banks, to donations of specified food items, processed foods, and raw agricultural products. This credit sunsets on December 1, 2022, so it should be extended to encourage farmers to continue donations to food banks.

(7) **Extend CalFresh for undocumented immigrants:** This year's AB 221 (Santiago, Chiu, R. Rivas) would expand food assistance to many non-citizen immigrants who aren't currently receiving it. Currently, many Californians who could benefit from food assistance do not receive it due to immigration status. The effects ripple far beyond food issues to fuel poverty, health issues, and lack of access to other services. Especially during the ongoing recession, this expansion is urgently needed.

VI. Sustainability & Innovation

Promoting climate-smart and high-tech farming

California agriculture is known world-wide for its innovation and advanced technology, especially with regard to sustainability. Agricultural innovation includes efficient water use, energy self-reliance, transitioning farm waste into energy, using agricultural lands to sequester carbon, and incentivizing farming practices that reduce greenhouse gasses (GHG). Meanwhile, climate change is already having very real impacts on California's agricultural productivity and the livelihoods of our farmers and ranchers. A growing body of research is pointing to significantly tougher challenges ahead for farmers, our rural communities, and our food security, unless policymakers do more to mitigate the effects of climate change and improve resilience to its impacts.

Chair Rivas heard widespread support from farmers up and down the state for the programs and grants that the state offers to support and incentivize sustainability and innovation. CDFA's Office of Environmental Farming and Innovation offers grants to farmers and ranchers for the Healthy Soils Program (HSP), State Water Efficiency and Enhancement Program (SWEEP), Alternative Manure Management Program (AMMP), and Dairy Digester Research and Development Program (DDRDP). These programs provide grants to projects that improve soil health, increase water and energy efficiency, reduce GHGs, and provide many other environmental and economic benefits. But they are consistently oversubscribed and often difficult to obtain.

The Williamson Act was another frequently cited favorite State program for farmers. The Williamson Act enables local governments to enter into contracts with private landowners for the purpose of restricting specific parcels of land to agricultural or related open space use. Private land within locally-designated agricultural preserve areas is eligible for enrollment under contract. The minimum term for contracts is ten years. However, since the contract term automatically renews on each anniversary date of the contract, the actual term is essentially indefinite. Landowners receive substantially reduced property tax assessments in return for enrollment under a Williamson Act contract.

Chair Rivas heard significant concern expressed related to the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) and groundwater sustainability. There is a legitimate threat that farmers will have to fallow significant acres of land or reduce crop sizes due to the required reductions in water usage. With groundwater sustainability agencies implementing local plans this year, it is vital that the state partner with farmers to provide resources and assistance that encourages more sustainable practices. On the tour, Chair Rivas saw innovative irrigation technologies that improved efficiency. California needs to leverage programs like SWEEP to help farmers reduce water usage and maintain their operations.

Finally, Chair Rivas heard concerns related to farm and rangeland conservation. California is losing, on average, 40,000 acres of farm and rangeland a year. Open space authorities and other conservation groups on the tour offered great examples of how state and local officials can work with private industry to conserve land.

Policy Ideas for Promoting Sustainability and Innovation in California Agriculture:

(1) **Expand CDFA's environmental farming programs (DDRDP, Healthy Soils, SWEEP, AMMP):** CDFA's environmental farming programs are funded primarily though the Green House Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF). GGRF has diminished in recent years and thus so has the funding for several of these programs. If the progress of these programs is to continue, the state will need to find a new funding source.

(2) **Restore state funding for the Williamson Act:** Until the Great Recession, the state covered the cost of tax revenue loss to local governments for Williamson Act contracts. The current lack of state funding has caused many counties to begin winding down Williamson Act contracts, so action is needed to reverse this trend.

(3) **The Food, Farm, and Economic Recovery Bond:** This year's AB 125, introduced by Chair Rivas, will provide funding for a variety of sustainable and climate-smart farming programs. Several other proposed bonds also contain important new funding streams: for example, SB 45 (Portantino), a climate resiliency bond, allocates $90 million for CDFA to fund grants for environmental farming type programs. At the most recent funding levels, the SB 45 proposal could fund the various programs for 1.5 years. AB 1500, another bond effort led by Asm. Eduardo Garcia and Asm. Mullin, similarly earmarks significant funding for sustainable agriculture programs.

(4) **Carbon sequestration leveraging our natural and working lands:** Improved planning and certainty are needed for California to optimize the carbon sequestration capabilities of agricultural and other lands while still maintaining farms' profitability. AB 284 by Chair Rivas, a rerun of his AB 2954 from 2020 (held by the Senate Appropriations Committee), will direct the California Air Resources Board to incorporate natural and working lands carbon sequestration potential into its scoping plan exercise, during which various pathways to attain upcoming climate goals are mapped out.

(5) **Plan for alternative ag land use due to SGMA fallowing:** By the most conservative estimate, 500,000 acres of agriculture land are expected to go fallow in the San Joaquin Valley as SGMA is implemented over the next twenty years. Farmers and conservationists would like to ensure that the land stay in farming or open space in some capacity. This year's AB 252 by Chair Rivas will create a pilot program to provide incentive payments to local governments, which will in turn pay landowners for voluntarily and strategically transitioning land in critically over-drafted basins.

(6) **Promote and expand mariculture:** This year's AB 303 by Chair Rivas will apply the principles of AB 1348 (Asm. Aguiar-Curry, 2017) to the marine and estuarine aquaculture industries. In addition to being one of the most sustainable forms of food production on the planet, aquaculture does not suffer from the issues of high land costs that plague so many farmers attempting to get started. Many immigrants also bring aquaculture traditions that can help invigorate California's nascent industry. The forthcoming legislation will also tackle ongoing permitting and leasing issues that have prevented aquaculture from taking root on a larger scale in California.

(7) **Reducing freight emissions:** Over the coming decades, the agriculture industry will face compliance with the Governor's recent executive order mandating transition of vehicle fleets to carbon-free fuels. Chair Rivas has introduced AB 584 to create an innovative pilot program allowing trucks transporting dairy products to take on more weight provided they can meet stringent safety standards and use carbon-free fuels. This legislation will help foster adoption of sustainable practices in the industry, while offsetting any economic impacts by allowing for more freight to be transported in a single truck journey.

(8) **Tech training and workforce development:** As agriculture tech solutions are increasingly being deployed on farms (for example, in ground water sensors, use of drones to gather crop data, and GPS-enhanced farm equipment), there is a need for workforce development to train our labor force to use the new technology.

Appendix 1

Agriculture-Related Legislation by Chair Rivas in 2021

AB 73 (Farmworker Wildfire Smoke Protections): Establish a dedicated stockpile of N-95 respirators for agricultural use, provide for Cal/OSHA enforcement strike teams during wildfire season, and mandate wildfire smoke training for agricultural workers.

AB 125 (Food, Farm and Economic Recovery Bond): Multi-billion-dollar bond to fully fund and expand agricultural sustainability, resiliency, and food access programs. With Californians Against Waste, California Certified Organic Farmers, California Climate & Agriculture Network, Californians for Pesticide Reform, Carbon Cycle Institute, Center for Food Safety, Community Alliance with Family Farmers, Environmental Working Group, Natural Resources Defense Council, and Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority.

AB 252 (SGMA Land Fallowing Relief): Minimize economic impacts and maximize overall benefits of agricultural land conversion due to SGMA. With the Environmental Defense Fund.

AB 280 (Utility Tree-Trimming and Agriculture): Minimize the impacts of utility vegetation management in low-risk, high-value areas underneath power lines, such as orchards. With the California Farm Bureau Federation.

AB 284 (Natural and Working Lands Climate Goal): Ensure that the California Air Resources Board is incorporating the carbon sequestration potential of natural and working lands into climate planning. With The Nature Conservancy and The California Climate & Agriculture Network.

AB 303 (Mariculture): Eliminate and streamline outdated permitting and leasing requirements, while ensuring that the marine aquaculture industry in California leads on issues of diversity and environmental sustainability.

AB 352 (Farmland Conservation for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers): Ensure that a fair portion of funding from the California Farmland Conservancy is dedicated to helping socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. With the California Alliance of Family Farmers.

AB 434 (Managed Grazing to Mitigate Wildfires): Improve access for cattle grazing on public lands to mitigate wildfire risks and promote healthy ecosystems. With the California Cattlemen's Association.

AB 584 (Truck Weight Limits): Pilot program to allow heavier trucks to transport agricultural goods should they meet robust safety and environmental standards. With California Dairies, Inc.

AB 1025 (Buy American, Buy Californian Agriculture): Clarifies how the state will comply with the federal "Buy American" policy by prohibiting all California state institutions from purchasing agricultural products grown, packed or processed non-domestically, unless the price of the foreign product is more than twenty-five percent lower than domestic produce or the quality of the domestic product is inferior to that of the foreign product. With the Agricultural Council of California.

Appendix 2

Stakeholder Meetings

Agricultural Council of California	Tricia Geringer, VP of Government Affairs
American Farmland Trust	Katie Patterson, California Policy Director Kara Heckert, California Regional Director Rebecca Marcus, Lobbyist
CA Agriculture Labor Relations Board (ALRB)	Victoria Hassid, Chair of ALRB Santiago Avila-Gomez, Executive Secretary
CA Avocado Commission	Ken Melban Jason Mraz, avocado rancher
California Advocates	Dennis Alibiani, Vice President Anthony Molina, Advocate
California Agricultural Commissioners & Sealers Association	Matt Silverling, Lobbyist Rick Gorrola, Shasta County Agriculture Commissioner Josh Huntsinger, Placer County Agriculture Commissioner Karen Overstreet, San Benito County Agriculture Commissioner Chris Flores, Sacramento County Agriculture Commissioner Sandy Elles, Staff for California Agricultural Commissioners & Sealers Association
California Association of Winegrape Growers	Michael Miller, Director of Gov. Relations Bill Berryhill, Grower Jeff Bitter, Grower Kim Stemler, Grower Bob Lauchland, Grower Kendall Hoxsey, Grower Mike Testa, Grower
California Cattlemen's Association	Jason Bryant, Lobbyist Billy Gatlin, Executive Vice President

California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF)	Kelly Damewood, CEO Rebekah Weber, Policy Director
California Climate & Agriculture Network (CalCAN)	Jeanne Merrill, Policy Director Rebecca Marcus, Lobbyist
California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA)	Karen Ross, Secretary of CDFA Jenny Lester Moffit, Undersecretary Rachael O'Brien, Deputy Secretary Arturo Barajas, Deputy Secretary
California Department of Labor	Julie Su, Secretary Sebastian Sanchez, Assistant Secretary of Farm Worker and Immigration Services Mary Hernandez, Deputy Secretary for Legislation
California Environmental Protection Agency	Jared Blumenfeld, Secretary of CalEPA Val Dolcini, Director Department of Pesticide Regulation Julie Henderson, Deputy Secretary for Health and Public Policy
California Farmworker Foundation	Hernan Hernández, Executive Director
California Food and Farming Network	Beth Spitler, Field Director Margaret Reeves, Senior Scientist Stephanie Stevens, Program Manager Tida Infahsaeng, Senior Policy Associate
California Fresh Fruit Association	Ian LeMay, Chairman
California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA)	Wade Crowfoot, Secretary of CNRA Miranda Flores, Deputy Secretary of Legislation

California Poultry Association	Bill Mattos, President of CA Poultry Federation/ Northwest Chicken Council Tom Bower, Senior VP of Supply Chain Foster Farms Michael Boccadoro, West Coast Advisors
California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation, Inc.	Cynthia Rice, Litigation Coordinator Anne Katten, Director, Pesticide & Worker Safety Project Noe Paramo, Director of Sustainable Rural Communities Project, Legislative Advocate Mark Schacht, Deputy Director, Legislative Director
California Strawberry Commission	Rick Tomlinson, President Mark Martinez, Vice President of Public Policy Hector Gutierrez -NB Farms, Inc and Chairman of the Board Eric Lauritzen- Director of Regulatory Affairs, California Strawberry Commission
California Wine Institute	Noelle Cremers, Director of Environmental & Regulatory Affairs Tim Schmelzer, Vice President, California State Relations
Chair of California Agricultural Board	Don Cameron
Community Alliance with Family Farmers	Paul Towers, Executive Director Dave Runsten, Policy Director
Del Mar Fairgrounds	Richard Valdez, Board President Carlene Moore, Interim Chief Executive Officer Pierre Sleiman, Chair of Del Mar's Ag Committee

Driscoll's	Miles Reiter, CEO Jenet DeCosta, Chief of Staff for Miles Reiter Tom O'Brien, Senior VP and General Counsel
El Concilio	Jose R. Rodriguez, President & CEO Dr. Inés Ruiz-Huston, VP of Special Programs and Operations
Kahn, Soares, & Conway	Louie Brown, Partner Lauren Noland-Hajik, Attorney at Law
Kern County Farm Bureau	Patty Poire John Moore III Rob Yraceburu Tito Martinez Dan Waterhouse
Niemela Pappas & Associates	Emily Pappas, Partner Jaime Minor, Legislative Advocate Matt Roman, Legislative Advocate
Plant California Alliance	Nursery Growers John Schoustra, Greenwood Daylily Gardensa Maria Martinez, Maria's Garden Center
Port of San Diego	David Yow, Legislative Policy Administrator Paula Sylvia, Director of Aquaculture and Blue Technology Programs
Riverside County Farm Bureau	John Gless, Gless Ranch and Riverside County Farm Bureau Director Richard Schmid, President Joyce Jong, City of Riverside, Agriculture & Food Systems Development, Jong's Poultry Farm, and Riverside County Farm Bureau Director Rachael Johnson, Executive Director Ruben Arroyo, Riverside County Agricultural Commissioner

Rural County Representatives	Stacy Corless, Vice-Chair Bob Williams Mary-Ann Warmerdam, Senior Legislative Advocate
San Joaquin County Farm Bureau	Bruce Blodgett, Executive Director Board Members and Growers
Sierra Grain Terminal	Matt Swanson, Owner Megan Herd
Sonoma Couny Farm Bureau	Steve Dutton Jen Beretta, Board Member Dominic Carinalli Pat Burns Jordan Mahrt John Bidia Trevor Tauzer Nicolas Hernandez John Bucher
Turlock Irrigation District	Michelle Reimers, General Manager Brad Koehn, Chief Operating Officer Tou Her, Assistant General Manager, Water Resource Michael Cooke, Director of Water Resources & Regulatory Affairs Randy Fiorni, Farmer & former TID Board Member
United Food and Commercial Workers	Amber Baur, Executive Director
United Farm Workers	Teresa Romero, President Gieve Kashkooli, Legislative Director
University of California, Davis	Group of Vet Students

University of California, Los Angeles - Food Policy Experts	Paula Daniels, Professor, Board Chair of the Center for Good Food Purchasing Allison Korn, Assistant Dean & Food Law and Policy Clinic Dr. D'artagnan Scorza
University of California Farm Advisor	Karmjot Randhawa, UCEE Fresno County Director Ruth Dahlquist-Willard, Small Farm Advisor
Wagner Dairy	Richard Wagner, Owner Kevin Abernathy, General Manager of Milk Producers Council Darrin Monteiro Vice President of Member & Government Relations of California Dairies Inc. Michael Boccadoro, Executive Director of Dairy Cares
Western United Dairies	Anja Raudabaugh, CEO
Western Growers Association	Matthew Allen, Vice President of State Government Affairs
Wonderful Citrus	Zak Lafitte, President of Wonderful Citrus

Appendix 3

Tour Site Visits

Central Coast

CITIES

Salinas, Watsonville

Oct. 9 – Schedule

- **10:15 AM:** Meet at R&D Facility for Driscoll's
- **12:15 PM:** Lunch with Monterey County Farm Bureau
- **1:30 PM:** Braga Fresh tour – see field production in Chualar and equipment modifications due to COVID-19, visit processing facility in Spreckels
- **3:30 PM:** Meet with representatives from Salinas Valley Memorial Hospital on efforts SVMH is making through their Agriculture Outreach Programs

San Joaquin Valley

CITIES

Caruthers, Fresno, Hughson, Merced, Turlock

Oct. 12 – Schedule

- **9:00 AM:** Meet with leadership of the Turlock Irrigation District with Asms. Gray and Flora
- **10:30 AM:** Sierra Grain Terminal with Asm. Gray and Flora
- **12:00 PM:** Lunch in Merced with Western United Dairies CEO Anja Raudabaugh and Asm. Gray
- **3:00 PM:** Visit local farm using distributed energy resources with California Solar & Storage Association and Asm. Arambula
- **4:30 PM:** Farm Tour and Dinner in Fresno with UC Small Farm Advisor Ruth Dalquist-Willard with Asm. Arambula

San Joaquin Valley

CITIES

Bakersfield, Delano, Fresno

Oct. 13 — Schedule

- **10:30 AM:** Tour local almond orchard that has implemented the California Almond Sustainability Program with Asm. Mathis
- **12:30 PM:** Lunch in Delano with Ag Commodities Group leaders with Asm. Mathis
- **2:00 PM:** Meet with California Farmworker Foundation with Asms. Mathis and Salas
- **3:00 PM:** Tour Cuties sorting/processing facility; attend briefing on citrus diseases on-site with Asms. Mathis and Salas
- **5:30 PM:** Dinner with Kern County Farm Bureau with Asms. Mathis, Salas and Fong

San Joaquin Valley

CITIES

Escalon, Sacramento, Stockton

Oct. 14 – Schedule

- **10:00 AM:** Tour dairy farm in San Joaquin
- **12:45 PM:** Lunch in Stockton area with Stockton El Concilio
- **2:00 PM:** Meet with members of the San Joaquin County Farm Bureau in Stockton area
- **4:00 PM:** Tour Blue Diamond facility in Sacramento with Asms. Cooley and McCarty
- **6:00 PM:** Have dinner in Sacramento with Rural Counties Representative Council and Asms. Cooley and McCarty

San Joaquin Valley

CITIES

Davis, Fairfield, Sacramento, Vacaville, Woodland

Oct. 15 – Schedule

- **8:00 AM:** Meet with CA Poultry Federation president Bill Mattos and Asms. Cooley and McCarty
- **10:00 AM:** Tour urban farm in Sacramento Center for Land-Based Learning with Asm. McCarty
- **11:30 AM:** Meet and greet with UC Davis veterinary students
- **1:00 PM:** Tour of UC Davis Center of Innovation & Entrepreneurship projects
- **2:30 PM:** Tour Pioneer Hi-Bred facility in Woodland

Inland Empire

CITIES

Cervantes, Medina, Reyes

Oct. 19 – Schedule

- **8:00 AM:** Breakfast with small nursery growers of San Bernardino County with Inland Empire Asms.
- **9:30 AM:** Tour Gless Ranch with Riverside County Farm Bureau members and with Inland Empire Asms.
- **11:30 AM:** Lunch with Inland Empire Asms. at Pepitos Mexican Restaurant
- **1:00 PM:** Discussion with hunger advocates in San Bernardino with Inland Empire Asms.; Sunkist growers to make donation during this stop
- **2:15 PM:** Tour Lucky Farms with Inland Empire Asms.

Bay Area

CITIES

San Jose

Oct. 21 – Schedule

- **8:30 AM:** Visit La Mesa Verde at Sacred Heart Community to discuss food security, urban farming, and community involvement
- **10:00 AM:** Tour Veggielution in San Jose and discuss community access, urban farming, and sustainability
- **12:15 PM:** Lunch with Asm. Kalra and Councilmember Carrasco
- **1:30 PM:** Meet with Santa Clara County Open Space Authority to discuss open space, conservation, sprawl, and grant programs

Bay Area

CITIES

Marshall, Penngrove, Santa Rosa

Oct. 22 – Schedule

- **8:00 AM:** Breakfast in Santa Rosa with Sonoma County Farm Bureau members with Asms. Aguiar-Curry, Levine, and Wood
- **9:30 AM:** Tour Balletto Vineyard in Asm. Levine's district and discuss sustainability, COVID impact, and economy in the industry
- **11:30 AM:** Lunch and tour CAFF farm with Sonoma County Asms., discussing wildfire and COVID impact on small farms and other small farm issues
- **2:00 PM:** Tour Beretta Organic Dairy in Santa Rosa

Ventura County

CITIES

Camarillo, Ventura

Nov. 9 – Schedule

- **9:00 AM:** Tour Houweling's Tomatoes greenhouse tomato farm with Asm. Irwin
- **10:00 AM:** Tour Gills Onions processing operation with Asm. Irwin
- **12:15 PM:** Lunch and tour in Oxnard with strawberry growers with Asm. Irwin
- **2:45 PM:** Tour and meet with McGrath Family farm, Baby Root Farm and the Abundant table with Asm. Irwin

Los Angeles

CITIES

Los Angeles

Nov. 10 – Schedule

- **9:30 AM:** Tour cannabis grow with LA Asms.
- **11:30 AM:** Meet, tour and lunch with food security advocates with LA Asms.
- **2:00 PM:** Tour LA Conservation Corp (LACC) training urban garden with LA Asms.
- **3:30 PM:** LA UC Cooperative Extension tour near Echo Park and discussion of LA programs with LA Asms.

Los Angeles

CITIES

Carson, Los Angeles, Santa Monica

Nov. 11 – Schedule

- **8:00 AM:** Breakfast in LA with The Plant California Alliance (nursery and garden centers) with LA Asms.
- **9:30 AM:** Tour of Santa Monica farmer market with LA Asms.
- **11:30 AM:** Meet with agriculture experts at UCLA with LA Asms.
- **3:30 PM:** Tour of Maria's Garden Center in Carson with LA Asms.

San Diego

CITIES

Del Mar, Oceanside, San Diego

Nov. 12 – Schedule

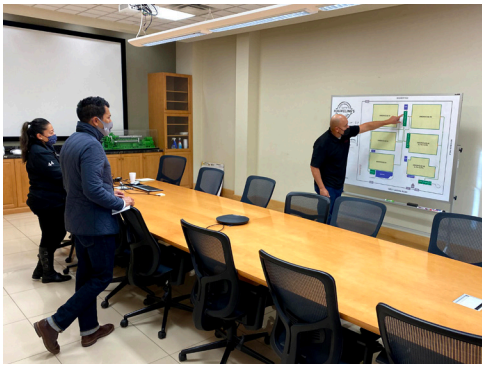
- **9:00 AM:** Tour with avocado producers
- **11:30 AM:** Lunch/tour with Del Mar Fair board or CEO
- **2:00 PM:** Meet with conservation experts at San Diego Zoo with Asm. Gonzalez
- **3:30 PM:** Tour Port of San Diego aquaculture operation with

Coachella Valley & Imperial County

Nov. 16 – Schedule

- **8:30 AM:** Breakfast and date farm tour with Growing Coachella Valley (Coachella Valley grape, vegetable and date growers) with Asm. Garcia
- **11:00 AM:** Meet with local farmworker advocates (Leadership Counsel, CRLA, UFW Coachella VAlley, Lideres Campesinas Coachella)
- **12:30 PM:** Lunch with Asm. Garcia
- **3:00 PM:** Agriculture roundtable with Imperial County Farm Bureau, Imperial County Ag Commissioner and Fresh Harvest Growers with Asm. Garcia

LA GALLINA
CHUNDONA
THE HIPPY
CHICKEN



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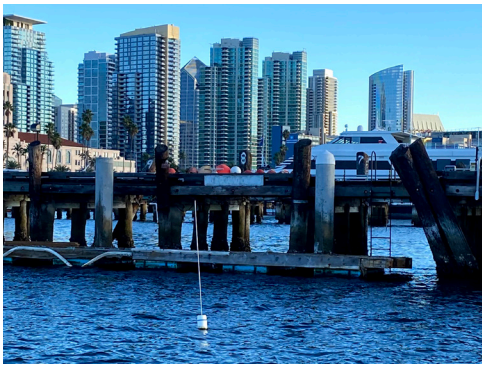

Murray Family Farms
CERTIFIED ORGANIC
Sustainable Farming Practices
Growing Food & Community With Love

LOS ANGELES REGIONAL

BLUE DIAMOND
ALMONDS
BRAND