



April 1, 2019

The Honorable Susan Talamantes Eggman, Chair
Assembly Committee on Agriculture
1020 N Street, Room 362
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 838 (Eggman) Farmer Equity & Innovation Center – SUPPORT

Dear Assemblymember Eggman,

On behalf of the Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF), I am writing as a co-sponsor in support of AB 838 (Eggman): Farmer Equity & Innovation Center, to support greater investment in the state's historically underserved farmers.

For over 40 years, CAFF has worked on behalf of family farmers in California to build sustainable food and farming systems, through on-the-ground services, as well as statewide advocacy. We support the viability and success of farmers that put food on California's tables.

The challenges facing California farmers are significant and getting worse, from climate change, and related weather extremes, to market and input consolidation, as well as increased costs of labor. The good news is that California farms have and can continue to be sources of innovation, when provided with the right support.

The legislature recognized some of these challenges and funded the creation of the University of California Small Farm Program in 1979, signaling the need to provide assistance to limited resource farmers. Over the next few decades, the program, and its Small Farm Center housed in Davis, served as a critical support service for on-farm research, connecting smaller farmers, sometimes with limited English proficiency to academic research, as well marketing support.

In a 1996 report to the Legislature's Latino Caucus, the University of California Office of the President shared the importance of the Small Farm Program: "getting information out to small-scale growers often requires a more 'hands-on' approach than with larger growers who may already have ready access to other sources of data. Add cultural differences and problems in understanding English to the mix, and the challenge to extend information effectively becomes even greater."

P.O. Box 363, Davis, CA 95617-0363

Phone: 530.756.8518 ☎ Fax: 530.756.7857 ☎ E-mail: info@caff.org ☎ Website: www.caff.org

When the University of California Small Farm Center closed following the mid-2000s Great Recession, University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources staff worked to maintain some presence of individual small farm advisors. Despite fewer resources, between the last two US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Ag Censuses (2007 to 2012), populations of farmers of color grew, while white farmer populations shrank.

The reality is that the challenges facing farmers, particularly historically underserved farmers, are greater than ever. According to research from the University of California – Merced, increased temperatures, erratic precipitation patterns and new pest pressures threaten California’s \$50 billion-plus agricultural industry. In addition, regulatory compliance with the state’s environmental goals, such as the potential fallowing of 500,000-plus acres of farmland under the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, also threaten the viability for smaller farmers.

This bill offers underserved farmers some much-needed support and would create a new center housed within the University of California system to target that support and take advantage of technological innovation. The center offers an opportunity to centralize and coordinate best practices from across the state, address inefficiencies and coordinate engagement with state agencies and other researchers. The Small Farm Center, for example, supported the rapid expansion of blueberry production in California, through smallholder farmers.

The bill would also support the hiring of additional farm advisors. Only four advisors currently work in the state, covering large geographies individually (Yolo, Solano & Sacramento; Fresno & Tulare; Santa Cruz, Santa Clara and San Benito; and San Diego Counties) unable to support large portions of the state’s farmers.

In addition, the bill would provide much-needed resources to farmer training programs and to farmers participating in those programs. According to the most recent USDA Ag Census, the average age of a California farmer is 60 and growing, with fewer younger farmers replacing them.

Farmer training and apprenticeship programs, drawing on diverse populations, are some of the few pathways into farming. However, these programs are costly to operate, and costly for participants or employers to participate. Colorado passed a similar law last year to provide direct support to farm apprentices.

Given the need and opportunity to support smaller, historically underserved farmers, and the opportunities for these farms as learning laboratories, we thank you for your leadership on this bill and urge the entire Assembly Committee on Agriculture to support this bill.

Sincerely,



Paul Towers
Executive Director