



March 9, 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 – SPONSOR

Dear Chair Rivas,

On behalf of the California Climate & Agriculture Network (CalCAN) and Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) the sponsors of AB 552, 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.¹

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.² 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.

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

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.³

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.

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,



Jamie Fanous
Policy Director
Community Alliance with Family Farmers



Anna Larson
Policy Associate
California Climate & Agriculture Network

³ See <https://www.nhacd.net/equipment-rentals> and <https://smadc.com/farmer-resources/farm-equipment/>