



May 27, 2021

The Honorable Governor Gavin Newsom  
1303 10th Street, Suite 1173  
State Capitol, Room 412

**Re: Support for Sustainable Pest Management, Regenerative Organic Farming and Farmworker Protections, and Request for Additional Resources**

Dear Governor Newsom:

On behalf of the undersigned farmworker, labor, environmental justice, public health and sustainable agriculture organizations, we write to express our strong support and appreciation for the Governor's and Assembly's prioritization of sustainable pest management and sustainable agriculture in the 2021-2022 budget. We also write to ask for additional resources: 1) for further

support of sustainable pest management and regenerative organic farming, and 2) to support farmworkers who, for too long, have been underappreciated and undervalued, often living and working in substandard conditions even while our collective food supply is dependent upon their labor.

## **SUPPORT FOR SUSTAINABLE PEST MANAGEMENT AND REGENERATIVE ORGANIC FARMING**

We support many of the sustainable pest management and sustainable agriculture items in the May Revise and Assembly budget proposals. We also would like to recommend additional initiatives we believe are critical for reaching the State's goal of transitioning "away from harmful pesticides and expand[ing] sustainable agricultural practices, while continuing to provide nutritious food through a strong agricultural economy."<sup>1</sup>

The moment is ripe for the state to prioritize sustainable pest management. More than 200 million pounds of agricultural pesticides are used each year on California fields. Only about 0.1% of applied pesticides reach the targeted organisms while the remaining amount contaminates the surrounding environment, and is linked to both acute and chronic disease in workers, rural community members, and others.<sup>2</sup> Many pesticides can cause cancer, asthma and other respiratory ailments, learning disabilities, birth defects, reproductive and other disorders. Respiratory ailments triggered by pesticides are of particular concern, as we've seen how they can make individuals more susceptible to other illnesses such as COVID, as well as worsened symptoms. Agricultural pesticides also contribute to air and water pollution; increase emissions of the particularly potent greenhouse gas nitrous oxide, which is 300 times more potent than carbon dioxide; and inhibit the soil's ability to sequester carbon.

Without dedicated state resources to help California farmers transition away from overreliance on synthetic pesticides, pesticide use will increase as pest pressures rise due to climate change. To date, public funding has insufficiently supported farmers adopting safer, sustainable pest management, and it's time to better align our state's budget with public health and environmental goals.

Fortunately, through California's small but robust organic farming community, we know that regenerative organic systems, which prohibit nearly all use of synthetic pesticides and fertilizers, are more resilient in the face of extreme weather, drought, climate change and economic pressures. Regenerative organic farming systems provide a number of critical ecosystem services. Among these are: improved air and water for nearby communities; pollinator and wildlife habitat; improved soil quality, productivity and water retention; reduced greenhouse gas emissions; and increased soil carbon sequestration. Organic farming also has economic benefits,

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<sup>1</sup> Transition to Safer, Sustainable Pest Management Budget Change Proposal, 3930-024-BCP-2021-GB, 8570-040-BCP-202-GB, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Hussain S, Siddique T, Saleem M, Arshad M, Khalid A. 2009. Chapter 5 Impact of Pesticides on Soil Microbial Diversity, Enzymes, and Biochemical Reactions. In: *Advances in Agronomy*. Vol. 102 of. Elsevier. 159–200; doi: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2113\(09\)01005-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2113(09)01005-0).

with census data showing that, on average, organic farms in the U.S. have higher operating profits than conventional farms, creating real opportunity for rural economic livelihoods and expanded employment opportunities. Research shows that “organic hotspot” regions boost household incomes and reduce poverty levels at greater rates than general agriculture activity, and even more than major anti-poverty programs.<sup>3</sup> We have also seen the market for organics grow and surpass the market for conventionally-grown produce during the pandemic<sup>4</sup>, indicating that these investments are aligned with growing consumer demand.

## **I. We Support the Following Budget Proposals:**

We support the following investments as proposed by the Governor in the May Revise, and urge the Administration to ensure that these programs explicitly align with the Administration’s commitment to “transition away from using toxic chemicals and protect the health of community residents” and that they prioritize funding for socially disadvantaged communities and underserved farmers and ranchers:

### **A. \$10 million for a Pesticide Notification Network**

We strongly support the Governor’s proposed \$10 million to “implement a statewide infrastructure network to provide equitable access to important information about local pesticide use.” The pesticide notification network should ensure information about upcoming pesticides applications is publicly available in appropriate languages, so community members can take their own precautions, such as shutting windows or keeping asthmatic children indoors; doctors can more quickly assess potential pesticide-related illnesses; and public health researchers can gather vital information about potential exposures. With agricultural pesticide use having increased over the last few years to more than 200 million pounds of pesticide active ingredients each year, it’s urgent that this information be provided to the public as soon as possible. We believe a notification regulation should build upon, but expand beyond, public web posting of Notices of Intent.<sup>5</sup> We also urge the Administration to

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<sup>3</sup> “Organic hotspots” are counties with a high number of organic agricultural operations whose neighboring counties also have high levels of organic activities. According to *Harvesting Opportunity: The Power of Regional Food System Investments to Transform Communities*, published as a partnership between the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System and the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s agencies of Rural Development and the Agricultural Marketing Service, an Organic Hotspot increases median household income by over \$2,000 and lowers a county’s poverty rate by as much as 1.35 percentage points. See [https://www.stlouisfed.org/~media/Files/PDFs/Community-Development/Harvesting-Opportunity/Harvesting\\_Opportunity.pdf?la=en](https://www.stlouisfed.org/~media/Files/PDFs/Community-Development/Harvesting-Opportunity/Harvesting_Opportunity.pdf?la=en).

Jaenicke, E.C., Penn State University and Organic Trade Association. U.S. Organic Hotspots and their Benefit to Local Economies, 2016. [http://ota.com/sites/default/files/indexed\\_files/OTA-HotSpotsWhitePaper-OnlineVersion.pdf](http://ota.com/sites/default/files/indexed_files/OTA-HotSpotsWhitePaper-OnlineVersion.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> In 2020 organic produce outpaced conventional nationally in terms of both year-over-year sales and volume growth. While conventional produce posted a sales gain of 10.7% and a volume gain of 9%, organic produce saw a 14.2% increase in sales and a 16% increase in volume. The difference was even more stark in the West where organic sales saw an increase of 16.8% and a volume increase of 17.4%. Organic Produce Network. 2020. State of Organic Produce, p. 10. <https://www.organicproducenetwork.com/article/1272/opn-releases-inaugural-state-of-organic-produce-2020>

<sup>5</sup> Notices of Intent (NOIs) are requests farmers currently submit to County Agricultural Commissioners when they seek approval to use the most hazardous agricultural pesticides, known as Restricted Materials pesticides. Although County Agricultural Commissioners have access to this public information, they do not currently share it with the

reconsider the proposed timeline for a statewide regulation and set a goal for implementation by the beginning of 2023 rather than 2024.

**B. \$30 million for the Fresno-Merced Future of Food Innovation Initiative so long as the initiative prioritizes support for local and regional regenerative organic and agroecological farming** that: meets the food needs of Californians, builds the local rural economy, and provides additional resources to socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers to ensure they are able to benefit from technological innovations that are affordable, appropriately-scaled, sustainable and accessible. To aid in the development of equitable and sustainable agricultural solutions to economic and environmental challenges within the Central Valley, a first step should be conducting a community needs assessment centered on frontline environmental justice communities impacted by industrial agriculture, farmers of color and farmworkers.

## **II. We Support the Following Budget Proposals with Proposed Changes:**

### **A. Proposed Sustainable Pest Management Funding, but with Clear Parameters on Funding**

To accelerate the transition away from using toxic chemicals and protect the health of community residents, we support the Senate's and Assembly's proposed \$90 million over two years for sustainable pest management. We ask that any increased funding for sustainable pest management in the 2021-22 budget include clear parameters in trailer bill language ensuring the following specific funding:

- a new proposed investment of \$20 million/year for a **Community Support Fund** that would fund community protections identified as a priority by residents at greatest risk of pesticide exposure (e.g., buffer zones, PPE, green spaces that include habitat for pollinators and other beneficial insects);
- a one-time investment of \$44 million for ecological restoration, including \$12 million for a **DNA Barcode Reference Library** as described in the Senate's Budget proposal and a \$30 million investment for a **Pollinator Habitat Program** as proposed in the Governor's May revise;
- \$6 million/year for **Enhanced Air Monitoring and Enforcement** that directs the Department of Pesticide Regulation to link detection events with immediate protective actions, such as increased pesticide restrictions, additional mitigations, and community notification; and ongoing monitoring to serve in re-evaluation of health risks and development of more permanent protective health measures; and
- \$20 million/year for **Enhanced Implementation of Integrated Pest Management (IPM)**. Of this \$20 million, we would like to see:
  - \$10 million for the **Biologically Integrated Pest Management Program**.<sup>6</sup>

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public in advance of pesticide applications, preventing community members from taking their own safety precautions.

<sup>6</sup> The Biologically Integrated Pest Management Program operated for many years as the Biologically Integrated Farming Systems (BIFS) and Biologically Integrated Orchard Systems (BIOS) programs. These early programs are credited with many cropping systems moving away from calendar sprays of toxic pesticides toward better pest

- \$8 million to support the **Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program, the UC Statewide Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Program, and the Organic Agriculture Institute.**
- B. \$280 million to support **universal school meals, school kitchen upgrades, staff training, and CDFA’s Farm to School Initiative** from Prop 98 General Funds and a one-time General Fund increase to CDFA, **but with inclusion of incentives for school procurement that supports organic farming.** There are many health, community, and environmental benefits associated with serving more organic food at schools and other public institutions. Serving organic food at schools means fewer children will be exposed to pesticides through food residues. Increasing organic production also reduces rural communities' exposure by eliminating the air and water pollution associated with the use of synthetic pesticides and fertilizers. In addition, organic farming eliminates the routine use of antibiotics in livestock, a practice that threatens antibiotics’ effectiveness in treating human disease. Organic farming produces more nutritious food<sup>7</sup> and protects biodiversity and the climate. Organic farming systems are more profitable for farmers<sup>8</sup>, can create more jobs than conventional farming systems, and can help address rural poverty.<sup>9</sup> While it is widely assumed that organic food is too expensive for school food service, an analysis conducted in California in 2020 shows that organic purchasing is not only possible, but that the price can be on par with or lower than conventional school meals.<sup>10</sup> Institutional procurement offers one of the most effective mechanisms for scaling up organic agriculture free of synthetic pesticides and fertilizers, and we lose an incredibly important opportunity to protect the health of children, communities and the environment every time we fail to include organic incentives in procurement programs.

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monitoring and reduction of some of the most hazardous chemicals. California needs to reinvigorate these efforts to support farmer outreach and education on reduced and no toxic pesticide use.

See <https://www.cdca.ca.gov/oefi/opca/bifs.html> and <https://sarep.ucdavis.edu/are/ecosystem/bifs>.

<sup>7</sup> A recent meta-analysis of 343 peer-reviewed studies found “statistically significant and meaningful differences in nutrient composition between organic and non-organic crops,” including higher levels of antioxidants, phenolic acids and flavanones. Barański, Marcin et al. “Higher Antioxidant and Lower Cadmium Concentrations and Lower Incidence of Pesticide Residues in Organically Grown Crops: A Systematic Literature Review and Meta-Analyses.” *The British Journal of Nutrition* 112, no. 5 (September 14, 2014): 794–811, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007114514001366>.

<sup>8</sup> Finley, Lynn et al. “Does Organic Farming Present Greater Opportunities for Employment and Community Development than Conventional Farming? A Survey-Based Investigation in California and Washington.” *Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems* 42, no. 5 (May 28, 2018): 552–572. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21683565.2017.1394416>.

<sup>9</sup> Marasteanu, I. Julia and Edward C. Jaenicke. “The Role of US Organic Certifiers in Organic Hotspot Formation.” *Renewable Agriculture and Food Systems* 31, no. 3 (June 2016): 230–245. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742170515000149>.

<sup>10</sup> The three schools that participated in the study were all able to purchase 100 percent organic food at prices on par with or lower than conventional food. The study concluded that scratch cooked plant-forward and plant-based meals are often less expensive than meat-based dishes, creating budget flexibility to purchase organic ingredients, and organic ingredients are more affordable when purchased locally and seasonally. Hammerschlag K., Arndt S., and Klein K. 2020. Organic, Plant-Forward, Scratch Cooked School Meals: A California Case Study. [https://1bps6437gg8c169i0y1drtgz-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/CAM\\_Feeding\\_Schools\\_Report-final-just-report\\_alt.pdf](https://1bps6437gg8c169i0y1drtgz-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/CAM_Feeding_Schools_Report-final-just-report_alt.pdf).

- C. \$100 million in the Governor's budget to increase funding for CDFA's **Healthy Soils Program, but with greater support for adoption of multiple farming practices and holistic farming systems, such as organic**, that reap the greatest climate and other ecosystem benefits, **and addition of incentives that encourage reduction of synthetic pesticide use.**<sup>11</sup> The Healthy Soils Program does not currently offer any incentives dedicated to protecting soil health by reducing synthetic chemical use. We ask that a portion of the proposed HSP funding be *explicitly dedicated* to supporting reduction of synthetic pesticide use as well as farmers' transition to organic farming systems.
- D. \$20 million for **Technical Assistance and Conservation Management Plans** as outlined in the May Revise, **along with an additional request for \$7 million for an Organic Transition Program** to fund grants to farmers, especially farmers of color and tribal producers. The Conservation Planning Program will fund the creation of Organic Systems Plans, a key part of the organic certification process. However, transitioning farmers need financial and technical assistance to help them operationalize Organic Systems Plans and transition their farm operations to certified organic operations.<sup>12</sup>
- E. **\$10 million for a New and Beginning Farmer Training and Farm Manager Apprenticeships in the May Revise**, with a request to prioritize support for socially-disadvantaged farmers in management of regenerative organic farming, and an additional funding request of **\$15 million to support Regional Farmer Training Centers that would support this goal.**<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The Healthy Soils Program provides critical support for farmers to adopt practices beneficial to building healthy soils. We note, however, that the program is not as effective as it could be because of its narrow support for adoption of individual management practices rather than farming systems that stack multiple practices, which can provide the biggest environmental and climate benefits. For instance, while the individual practice of reduced tillage can have benefits for soil health, it can also result in increased pesticide use to control weeds, which can harm human health, surrounding air and water quality and soil micro- and macro-biota necessary for stable carbon sequestration.

<sup>12</sup> Because of organic's rigorous certification requirements, conventional farmers interested in transitioning to organic face special requirements - they must undergo a three-year organic farming transition period, during which they develop and implement their Organic Systems Plan. To be designated organic, land has to be managed without prohibited inputs - synthetic pesticides and fertilizers - for at least 36 months before that land can be used for certified organic production. During that period of time farmers are prohibited from selling their produce as organic, which means while they take on the extra expenses and challenges of transitioning to more sustainable pest management, they are unable to access the market premiums that accompany the organic label. Having support during the transition period would help many farmers overcome a key barrier to transitioning.

<sup>13</sup> Non-profit organizations such as the Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA) have a record of success in training farmworkers to become the next generation of organic farmers and agricultural professionals, cultivating dozens of successful farming enterprises. Serving 90% Latino farmworker/farmers of an average age of 30 years, ALBA works to reverse racial inequities in our current farming system. Grant funding would go a long way to ensure the success of such programs. Other promising efforts include a new initiative, three years in the making, to develop a Central Valley Agroecology Center in Tulare County, the first of its kind, which would be modeled largely after the successful ALBA program. Additional regional farmer training centers that would benefit from infrastructure investments that scale up their work include: Sierra Harvest's Farm Institute for beginning farmers, based in Nevada County; Center for Land-Based Learning based out of Yolo and Sacramento Counties, and Huerta del Valle in Riverside County, which has started a new 6-month farmer training program, primarily with low-income Latino residents.



- F. \$8.7 million for **Technical Assistance (TA) Programs for Underserved Farmers** as outlined in the Governor’s budget, **but with a request for an additional \$26 million in critical TA funding** to support adoption of regenerative organic agriculture, and to provide additional support to farmers of color, small-scale farmers and Tribal farmers. The need for additional technical assistance to support greater adoption of more sustainable farming systems and smaller-scale growers and growers of color is urgent.<sup>14</sup> Specifically we request:
1. \$11 million for additional TA to scale up Climate Smart Ag projects;
  2. \$10 million for hiring of UC Cooperative Extension advisors, educators and specialists with expertise in organic and small farm advising; and
  3. \$5 million for funding to hire Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs) and Tribal Resource Conservation Districts staff with expertise in organic and sustainable agriculture, conservation planning, and culturally competent provision of services to socially-disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.

## **SUPPORT FOR FARMWORKER PROTECTIONS**

### **I. We Support the Following Budget Proposals:**

- A. \$25 million for the **Low-Income Home Weatherization for Farmworker Housing**, as laid out in the Senate budget proposal, **but with inclusion of improved indoor air quality measures** in addition to energy efficiency and renewable energy measures.
- B. \$1.3 billion for **Safe Drinking Water expenditures** as laid out in the Governor’s May Revise. It is critical that farmworker safe drinking water projects are eligible and prioritized.

### **II. We Request the Following Additional Investments, which are highlighted in greater detail in the AB 125 coalition’s sign-on budget letter:**

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<sup>14</sup> Only 5% of the 269 UC Cooperative Extension advisors and specialists work on organic farm systems despite California being the leading organic agriculture state in the country. Muramoto, J. 2021. California organic systems researcher map (Feb 2021). <https://sarep.ucdavis.edu/organic-research>. At the same time, organic farming has seen rapid growth in recent years, and organic farmland now makes up 10.6% of farm acreage in California. California Agriculture Statistics Review 2019-2020. CDFA. [https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Statistics/PDFs/2020\\_Ag\\_Stats\\_Review.pdf](https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Statistics/PDFs/2020_Ag_Stats_Review.pdf). Declines in other UC specialists, including small farm advisors, have hurt technical assistance outreach in the state, especially to socially-disadvantaged farmers and in regions of the state such as the San Joaquin Valley where low-income communities of color are on the frontlines of chemical-intensive agriculture. Thirty-seven states provide more public funding for agricultural research and Cooperative Extension per unit of agriculture production than California. Perry G. Agricultural and Resource Economics, Colorado State University. Briefing provided to Western Association of Agricultural Experiment Station Directors, March 31, 2021. Data from USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture baked on 2018 allocations and farm gate receipts. And Research Conservation Districts (RCDs) on the whole are vastly underfunded, with virtually no RCDs to support the San Joaquin Valley, the hub of agricultural activity in the state. Tribal RCDs are established in coordination with USDA, but no funds are attached to that establishment, so there are Tribal RCDs on the books that have never been able to get off the ground due to limited funding.

- A. \$100 million to the Strategic Growth Council's Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities program for **grants to construct multi-unit, family housing for farmworker families and households.**
- B. \$5 million for the **creation of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) stockpiles for farmworkers.**

We appreciate your consideration and would be happy to work with you and your staff in answering any questions or supporting the development of trailer bill language in these final moments of this year's budget process. Our organizations work with frontline communities and essential workers in the food system, and these budget recommendations would be equitable investments for both people and the planet.

Sincerely,

Agricultural Institute of Marin (AIM)  
Alianza Nacional de Campesinas  
Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments (ANHE)  
Californians for Pesticide Reform (CPR)  
Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment (CRPE)  
Central California Environmental Justice Network (CCEJN)  
Central California Asthma Collaborative (CCAC)  
Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy (CAUSE)  
Central Valley Air Quality Coalition (CVAQ)  
Centro Binacional para el Desarrollo Indígena Oaxaqueño (CBDIO)  
Families Advocating for Chemical and Toxics Safety (FACTS)  
Líderes Campesinas en California  
Monterey Bay Central Labor Council (MBCLC)  
Pesticide Action Network (PAN)  
Physicians for Social Responsibility-Los Angeles (PSR-LA)  
Slow Food California

cc: Angie Wei, Office of the Governor, Legislative Affairs Secretary  
Angela Pontes, Office of the Governor, Deputy Legislative Secretary