

October 24th, 2011, National Food Day

Dear Governor Brown, members of the California Congressional delegation, and California Food, Health and Agriculture officials:

California needs a federal Farm Bill that promotes healthy food, environmental sustainability and good jobs.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) recommends that fruits and vegetables make up half of our plates at mealtimes, yet just 4 percent of adults get the recommended number of servings of fruits and vegetables. Lack of access, availability, and affordability of healthful food and beverages – particularly in low-income rural and urban communities and communities of color – has contributed to diets low in fruits, vegetables, and other health-promoting foods. Diet-related disease – including diabetes, cancer and heart disease – are costing the nation billions in added health care expenses: poor diets and inactivity cost California more than \$20 billion a year and the nation at least \$150 billion annually in medical care.

As the nation's largest agricultural producer, California grows nearly half of the nation's fruit, nuts and vegetables, making its food and agriculture sector a powerful engine for local and national economic growth. Fruit, nut and vegetable farms produce nutritious food and are the most labor-intensive in agriculture. Our state is also home to a growing number of sustainable livestock operations, from organic dairies and poultry operations to grass-fed beef from ranches seeking to preserve California's biodiversity.

Nevertheless, only a tiny fraction of the federal funding in the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008 (the Farm Bill) encourages consumption and production of these healthy foods. And of that fraction, too few resources go toward building dynamic local food economies and provide local jobs, fair wages for agricultural workers, and economic opportunities for beginning, small, and mid-size farmers and ranchers.

Although California is the national leader in organic and sustainable food production, much more needs to be done to improve water and air quality in agricultural regions, and to transform agriculture into a more wildlife-friendly activity. Recent Farm Bills have included more environmental incentives for farmers but these have now seen significant funding cuts. Furthermore, climate change will require significant adaptation by farmers as they attempt to cope with rising temperatures and the increasing unpredictability of weather.

We can do a much better job of supporting small and mid-sized farms, protecting the environment, promoting food safety, ensuring healthy rural economies, and improving the nation's and our state's health by investing in programs that support more diversified farming and livestock systems, healthy food access, conservation and research.

As Congress makes critical budget decisions affecting the nation's food and farming systems, we urge you to support legislation and protect programs that:

- prevent hunger and support healthy diets;
- increase access to healthy food and beverages in schools and communities;
- promote conservation practices on farms and reduce the need to use synthetic chemical pesticides and fertilizer;
- foster the next generation of farmers and ranchers, and
- build thriving local and sustainable food systems.

Smart spending policies today will reduce health care costs, protect local farmland and the environment, create new jobs, and generate economic opportunities for farmers and ranchers.

Specifically, we ask you to advocate for:

- ***Full Funding for Programs that Strengthen Economic Opportunities for Small and Mid-sized Farmers and Ranchers and Improve Consumer Access to Local, Healthy and Sustainable/Organic Food.*** These include rural economic development programs, Farmers Market Promotion Program, the Value-Added Producer Grant program, Organic Certification Cost-Share Program, equitable crop insurance for organic producers, and Beginning Farmer Development and Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers loan programs. We urge you to reform the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program so that more funding goes to support healthy food access and local and sustainable food production and distribution. We also encourage innovations to better link urban and rural areas to maximize benefits for everyone.
- ***Protecting and strengthening USDA food assistance programs that fight hunger and improve nutrition.*** We must ensure that the federal deficit is not reduced at the expense of low-income Americans by reducing funding for SNAP/CalFresh, WIC and other major food programs.
- ***Increasing Access to and Affordability of Healthy Food and Beverages in Underserved Communities.*** We urge you to support the Healthy Food Financing Initiative program, the Community Food Projects Grants Program, and incentives for healthy food and beverage purchases by clients of federal food programs (including facilitating the use of SNAP, WIC and SSI benefits at farmers' markets, community supported agriculture and other direct marketing/delivery programs)
- ***Healthier Diets for Children.*** It is vital to increase the percentage of fresh fruit and vegetable purchases in school food procurement programs and expand the Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program. The government should incorporate more local fresh fruit and vegetable purchases into the USDA Commodity Foods program and the Department of Defense's (DoD) Fresh program for school meals. Shifting to better food and beverages would not necessarily raise costs and would improve health.
- ***Full Funding for Agriculture Conservation & Research and Extension Programs.*** Conservation, research and extension are crucial to helping farmers and ranchers protect soil resources, improve air quality and conserve water and wildlife habitat. Critical programs include the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Conservation Stewardship Program. We also urge you especially to support research focusing on whole-farm management systems, on-farm solutions, and infrastructure that strengthen ecologically sensitive, local and regional food production. Existing programs include ATTRA/The National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service, Sustainable Agriculture Research Education, and the Organic Research and Extension Initiative.
- ***Full Funding for Programs to Promote healthier Diets for All Americans*** Healthy diets are essential for happy lives and save billions of dollars in health-care costs. Dietary improvement programs run by USDA's Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion, which oversees the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and MyPlate, should be protected and expanded over time.

Please support efforts to define a new Food and Farm Bill in line with today's needs. In the last century, the farm bill successfully ensured an abundant supply of cheap but often lower-quality calories. In this century, it must support healthier diets, diverse and resilient farming systems, and economic revitalization to help eliminate hunger.

Sincerely,

Sam Monannam, Bi-Rite Market
Sue Sigler, California Association of Food Banks
Harold Goldstein, California Center for Public Health Advocacy
Lisa Hershey, California Convergence
Armando Nieto, California Food and Justice Coalition
Mathew Sharp, California Food Policy Advocates
Tracey Brieger, Californians for Pesticide Reform
Bob McFarland, California State Grange
Wendy Alfsen, California WALKS
Laurie True, California WIC Association
Rebecca Spector, Center for Food Safety
Michael Jacobson, Center for Science in the Public Interest
Julie Cummins, Center for Urban Education about Sustainable Agriculture
Caroline Farrell, Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment
Genoveva Islas-Hooker, Central California Regional Obesity Prevention Program
John La Puma, Chef Clinic
Jennifer Clary, Clean Water Action
Dave Runsten, Community Alliance with Family Farmers
Gwendolyn Flynn, Community Health Councils
Ken Dickerson, Ecological Farming Association
Martin Bourque, Ecology Center
Kari Hamerschlag, Environmental Working Group
Rev. Sally Bingham, Episcopal Diocese of California
Jenny Huston, Farm to Table Food Services
Claire Cummings, Food and Farming Forum
Adam Scow, Food and Water Watch
Dulanie Ellis, Food Council, Ojai Valley Green Coalition
Rick Nahmias, Food Forward
Allen J. Moy, Fresh Approach
Paul Muller, Judith Redmond, Andrew Brait and Dru Rivers, Full Belly Farm
Olivia Marshall, Gastronom, LLC
Gladwyn d'Souza, Green Youth Alliance
Frank Tamborello, Hunger Action LA
Kathleen Harmon, Interfaith Council of Amador
Anim Steel, Live Real
Andrea Denike Martinez, Mia Lehrer + Associates
Mas, Marcy, Nikiko and Korio Masumoto, Masumoto Family Farm
Barbara Sobel, Moms Advocating Sustainability
Oakland Food Policy Council
Dave Henson, Occidental Arts and Ecology Center
Gillian Poe, Orange County Food Access Coalition
Ronnie Cummings, Organic Consumers Association
John Silveira, Pacific Coast Farmers' Market Association
Margaret Reeves, Pesticide Action Network
Jared Lawson, Pie Ranch
Rebecca Flurnoy, PolicyLink
Juliet Sims, Prevention Institute
Barry Kendall, Progressive Ideas Network
Matthew Marsom, Public Health Institute

Marice Ashe, Public Health Law and Policy
Michael Dimock, Roots of Change
Sibella Kraus, SAGE (Sustainable Agriculture Education)
Sadie Sponsler, San Diego Hunger Coalition
Robert Gould, San Francisco Bay Area Physicians for Social Responsibility
Ashleigh Evans and Carole Dorshkind, San Mateo County Democracy for America
Megan Carney, Santa Barbara County Food Policy Council
Ernie Shelton, Shelton's Natural Food Market
Anna Smith Clark, Slow Food Bay Area
Lisa Lucas Talbot, Slow Food LA
Conner Everts, Southern California Watershed Alliance
Adrienne Etherton, Sustainable San Mateo County
Tom Willey, TD Willey Farms
Robert García, The City Project
Peggy da Silva, Veritable Vegetable
Victory V Lee, Victory Garden Foundation
Caleen Sisk-Franco, Winnemem Wintu Tribe

cc. The Honorable Debbie Stabenow, Chairwoman U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
The Honorable Frank D. Lucas, Chairman House Committee on Agriculture
The Honorable Pat Roberts, Ranking Member, U.S. Senate Committee on
Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
The Honorable Collin Peterson, Ranking Member, House Committee on Agriculture
The Honorable Tom Vilsack, Secretary, United States Department of Agriculture
The Honorable Kathleen Merrigan, Deputy Secretary, United States Department of Agriculture