



The Honorable Susan Talamantes Eggman
State Capitol, Room 2003
Sacramento, CA 94249-0013

February 24, 2014

RE: SUPPORT – AB 1961

Dear Assemblymember Talamantes Eggman,

We are pleased to co-sponsor AB 1961, the Sustainable Farmland Strategy Act. California farmland is a scarce, valuable and largely irreplaceable resource that is being permanently converted to non-agricultural uses at a rate of 30,000 acres per year. At this rate, California will lose another million acres of farmland by 2050. The Sustainable Farmland Strategy Act will create opportunities at the county level to discuss and plan for the long-term retention of farmland, while maintaining flexibility and local control of land use planning decisions.

Protecting California's agricultural land base is essential to sustaining the state's ability to produce one-eighth of the nation's food, including half of domestic fruit and vegetable production. While agricultural productivity is increasing, so is the global population and demand for food, making it imperative that California protect its productive farmland.

The protection of agricultural land also plays an important role in limiting the impacts of climate change and meeting the goals of California's Global Warming Solutions Act, AB 32. Research funded by the California Energy Commission's Public Interest Research (PIER) program found that an average acre of urban land emits 70 times more GHG emissions than an average acre of irrigated cropland.

Under AB 1961, by January 1, 2018, counties will develop a Sustainable Farmland Strategy (SFS) that inventories agriculturally zoned land, describes local goals, strategies, and related policies and ordinances to retain agriculturally-zoned lands, and mitigate for the loss of agriculturally-zoned lands – all to be posted on county websites. Counties with less than 4 percent of their land base in agriculture are exempt from the provisions of AB 1961 (based on USDA Agriculture Census data of 2007 this includes San Francisco, Del Norte, Alpine and Mono counties). Counties will have the option of complying with the SFS requirement by relying on existing inventories and maps of agricultural lands and existing goals, strategies and related policies that substantially comply with the provisions of the bill.

AB 1961 would also require that the Office of Planning and Research include best management practices for farmland conservation in the next update of the General Plan Guidelines, providing a resource for local planners as they consider their SFS policies.

AB 1961 offers counties flexibility in implementing their SFS and it builds upon existing resources, including agricultural land maps from the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program at the Department of Conservation. It is a positive step in the right direction and important complement to the Williamson Act, as we consider the future of California agriculture.

Thank you for your leadership in authoring AB 1961. We look forward to working with you to support its passage.

Sincerely,

Ed Thompson
American Farmland Trust

Jeanne Merrill
California Climate and Agriculture Network

David Runsten
Community Alliance with Family Farmers