

**Agricultural Council of California
American Farmland Trust
California Association of Resource Conservation Districts
California Association of Winegrape Growers
California Cattlemen's Association
California Farm Bureau Federation
California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation
Community Alliance with Family Farmers
Defenders of Wildlife
Environmental Defense
Farmworker Institute for Education & Leadership Development
Corny Gallagher
Marrone Organic Innovations, Inc.
Natural Resources Defense Council
Richard Rominger
San Joaquin Resource Conservation District
Sustainable Conservation
The Nature Conservancy
Western Growers Association
Western United Dairymen**

November 21, 2006

A.G. Kawamura, Secretary
California Department of Food and Agriculture
1220 N Street
Sacramento, California 95814-5607

RE: Farm bill priorities identified by the California Roundtable on Agriculture and the Environment

Dear Secretary Kawamura:

We greatly appreciate the leadership your Department has shown in initiating a statewide discussion of farm bill priorities for California. As members of the California Roundtable on Agriculture and the Environment (CRAE), we are writing you now to share our own recommendations for improving federal farm policy so that it provides adequate support for California agriculture and its resource base as strategic national assets.

As you know, CRAE represents diverse constituencies, including agricultural, environmental and labor organizations. CRAE provides a forum for these constituencies to identify common interests and opportunities for collective advocacy. The reauthorization of the farm bill is of great importance to all CRAE members and we have identified many common objectives as we begin to envision our next farm policy. We are pleased to share nine preliminary recommendations below. Please note, however, that this list is by no means a comprehensive collection of the issues and concerns carried by individual CRAE member organizations, including many that might be widely supported by CRAE participants. Instead, we are

submitting a short list of priority recommendations (not necessarily in order of priority) that intersect the interests of our diverse constituencies and are supported by the signatories below.

PROTECT LANDS AND HABITAT: Maximize the retention of private farm, range and forest lands as working landscapes and habitat, and minimize the conversion of those lands to residential or commercial development. Increase programs that foster this goal such as the Grasslands Reserve Program and the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program.

REWARD STEWARDSHIP ON WORKING LANDS: Increase funding for farm bill conservation programs that promote improvements to, and reward good stewardship for, environmental quality on working farm, range and forest lands, including the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) and the Conservation Security Program (CSP). Recognize state programs that demonstrate cost-efficiency and environmentally effective performance.

INCREASE AGRICULTURE RESEARCH AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE: Provide more resources for research and extension to colleges and universities to stimulate innovation and accelerate the adoption of agricultural stewardship practices. Revitalize technical assistance capacity at NRCS and cooperating agencies to more effectively implement conservation programs.

IMPROVE PROGRAM PERFORMANCE: Demonstrate on-the-ground environmental performance (such as protection of species habitat, soil conservation, and water and air quality) of farm bill conservation programs through outreach and demonstration projects (e.g. through EQIP's previous education program), targeting specific problems or regions, improved monitoring, and increasing incentives for higher levels of performance, among other strategies.

PROMOTE RENEWABLE ENERGY: Promote the development of technologies for converting agricultural waste and byproducts to useful products or energy.

DEVELOP A LEGAL AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE: Invest in collaborative programs that improve the skill and stabilize the seasonality of the agricultural workforce.

IMPROVE RURAL COMMUNITY QUALITY OF LIFE: Increase resources for Rural Development for housing, water, sewer, broadband and other much needed infrastructure to provide the essential base for community sustainability. Ensure that California's demographically unique rural communities are competitively eligible for such funds.

MANAGE INVASIVE SPECIES: Increase resources for states to detect, monitor and mitigate invasive species using least-toxic methods to the extent practicable. Increase NRCS' capacity to promote Integrated Pest Management, particularly for specialty and minor crops.

PROVIDE MARKETING ASSISTANCE: Increase investment in programs and research to enhance market and trade development.

A. G. Kawamura
November 21, 2006
Page 3

Your consideration of these recommendations is greatly appreciated. We look forward to working with you to develop a farm bill policy that better meets the needs of California's agriculture, environment and communities.

Sincerely,

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A. G. Kawamura
November 21, 2006
Page 4

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