



Joint MTC Planning Committee/ABAG Administrative Committee
101 8th Street
Oakland, CA 94607
February 6, 2013

Re: OneBayArea Conservation Grant Program

Dear Chairs Spering and Luce and Members of the Committees:

We are writing to secure your support for the OneBayArea Conservation Grant program, a new and innovative source of funds for the people of the Bay Area and the agricultural, recreational and natural lands upon which we all rely. This program demonstrates the Bay Area's leadership at the intersection of transportation and land use, and will help secure the value of these lands for generations to come. It is particularly important that the funding be invested in projects and programs that yield tangible and measurable conservation outcomes.

The Conservation Grant Program will be important to the protection of the region's agricultural lands, which provide direct benefits to our local economy, as well as natural benefits including water filtration and flow moderation through rangelands, carbon sequestration in soils and trees, and wildlife habitat along the edges of farms. The Bay Area has vibrant agricultural markets at many scales but is still under threat from global competition and a shrinking agricultural land base. Farmers on the urban-edge face unique challenges and opportunities. There are several ways in which the Conservation Grant Program can fund efforts to create a sustainable future for the Bay Area's farms and ranches. For example, the Conservation Grant Program could fund:

- Permanent protection of the Bay Area’s high value agricultural land through conservation easements and other mechanisms.
- Establishment of a countywide “farmbudsman” program. The farmbudsman would serve as a liaison and ombudsman to growers, producers, food processors and the agricultural communities. The farmbudsman would create strategic marketing plans and serve as an intermediary between county officials and local agricultural businesses. In addition, the program would assist farmers and ranchers with the permitting and regulatory process, including assistance with agricultural permitting and standards. The position would facilitate the agricultural community’s projects, expanding the viability of the overall agriculture industry.
- Development of an agricultural lands conservation and economic development strategy that balances the growth needs of the PDAs with conservation of agricultural lands in the bordering PCAs, engaging multiple stakeholders including landowners, growers, and funders in the process.
- Design and implementation of agricultural carbon sequestration programs, which would allow farmers and ranchers to tap into state and federal funding incentives for programs and projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- Development of a model agriculture mitigation policy that municipalities, counties and regions can adopt.
- The start-up of the proposed “Coyote Valley Agricultural Enterprise and Conservation program” in Santa Clara County and similar “agricultural enterprise zone” projects in other Bay Area counties.

Projects such as these will produce measurable results for Bay Area farmers and ranchers, as well as the residents who enjoy their products and services. In order to support projects such as these, the Conservation Grant Program guidelines and administration must be clearly aligned with other local, state and federal public and private agricultural conservation grant programs. This will leverage OBAG’s \$10 million any times over and facilitate the fund-matching requirement that exists for the \$5 million allocated to East and South Bay counties.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. We look forward to working with you to ensure that the Conservation Grant Program is successful locally, in the region and is a model for other regions in California and nationally.

Sincerely,

Ralph Benson, Executive Director
Sonoma Land Trust

Jeff Stump, Easement Program Director
Marin Agricultural Land Trust

Andrea Mackenzie, General Manager
Santa Clara County Open Space Authority

Tom Bloomfield, Chairman
Brentwood Agricultural Land Trust

Walter Moore, President
Peninsula Open Space Trust

Ed Thompson, California Director
American Farmland Trust

Sibella Kraus, President and Founder
Sustainable Agriculture Education (SAGE)

Nancy Schaefer, Bay Area Program Manager
California Rangeland Trust

Craige Edgerton, Executive Director
Silicon Valley Land Conservancy

cc: MTC Executive Director Steve Heminger
MTC Deputy Executive Director Ann Fleming
MTC Director of Planning Ken Kirkey
MTC Director of Programming and Allocations Alix Brockelman
MTC Transportation Analyst Craig Goldblatt
ABAG Acting Director of Planning Miriam Chion