

December 17, 2019

Subject: FY 2018-19 Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program

Reporting Period: September – December 2019

Staff Lead: Virginia Jameson, Department of Conservation

Recommended Action

Approve the staff recommendation to award \$56,896,857 in FY 18-19 funds to support the identified 31 agricultural easements and six planning grants in this report through Round 5 of the Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program.

Summary

The Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program (SALC) provides grants to fund agricultural conservation easements and local government plans to protect agricultural lands from conversion to more greenhouse-gas-intensive uses. This is the fifth round of the program, which has made awards on an annual basis.

Staff received 38 applications for easement funding and six applications for planning grants from local governments. Of the \$60,329,840 available (\$59,877,494 million from the Fiscal Year 2018-19 Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund auction proceeds and \$452,346 carried over from prior rounds) staff recommend funding 31 easement projects and all six planning grants for a total of \$56,896,857. The easement projects are located in 19 counties as far north as Plumas County and as far south as Santa Barbara County. When completed, this suite of easements would avoid an estimated 5.19 million metric tons of CO₂ equivalent. The planning grant applicants include three from the Central and San Joaquin Valleys, two from the North Coast, and one from Southern California.

Staff recommends carrying the remaining \$3,432,983 forward to the sixth round as part of the program's continuing appropriation. Staff intends to release draft guidelines for Round 6 for public comment in early January 2020 and bring the draft guidelines to the Council for consideration in February 2020. Topics for consideration in the updated draft guidelines include tribal engagement, applicant eligibility, and the program Risk Options.

Background

Senate Bill 862, Chapter 36, Statutes of 2014, establishes the Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities program (AHSC) to be administered by the California Strategic Growth Council (SGC), “to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through projects that implement land use, housing, transportation, and agricultural land preservation practices to support infill and compact development....” (Pub. Resource Code § 75210).

In July 2014, the Council approved the Department of Housing and Community Development to help implement the housing, transportation, and infrastructure components of AHSC, and the Department of Conservation and the California Natural Resources Agency to help implement the agricultural lands protection component of AHSC, named the Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program, or SALC.

The SALC Program facilitates the reduction of GHG emissions by protecting croplands and rangelands at risk of conversion to urban and rural residential development. The program accomplishes this by investing in two project types: agricultural conservation easements and local government planning grants. Easement projects extinguish development rights, thereby avoiding increases in GHG emissions by reducing opportunities for expansive, vehicle-dependent forms of development; planning grants support the implementation of Sustainable Communities Strategies or other local plans that reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The quantification methodology estimates avoided GHG emissions per project based on vehicle miles traveled avoided when properties are protected from development, as well as emissions avoided from forgone construction and building energy from heating. In 2019, the California Air Resources Board updated its quantification methodology; staff will apply the new methodology retroactively to the past projects to provide a new estimate of total emissions avoided as a result of the program.

Planning Grants

SALC’s planning grant program component has been undersubscribed in recent years. For FY 2017-18 funding, SALC received no planning grant applications, which spurred staff to adjust the guidelines to allow more flexibility in Round 5. At that time, SGC allocated \$200,000 for a technical assistance contract to attract and support prospective SALC planning grant applicants. DOC staff and the technical assistance provider, Cultivate LLC, conducted extensive outreach,

which helped result in six planning grant applications in the current round. In addition, Cultivate LLC is working with the counties of Ventura, San Diego, and San Bernardino to prepare Round 6 SALC planning grant applications. This renewed interest in the planning grant program component represents an important success since long-term planning is vital to meeting the State's goals for long-term protection and management of agricultural lands. SGC will provide \$200,000 to continue the technical assistance to support this aspect of SALC.

Staff recommend funding all six planning grant applications received in this round, for projects totaling about \$1.4 million. Each project is consistent with the SALC guidelines and the AHSC legislative mandate by supporting the implementation of a Sustainable Community Strategy or other transportation plan aimed at reducing emissions from vehicles. Each supports the protection of agricultural resources, infill development, and the sustainable use of natural resources. For example, the goal of the Madera planning grant is to reduce negative impacts of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act implementation locally, both by creating an easement purchasing program that will protect prime farmland for agricultural production, as well as land with lesser soils in a way that would restrict that land to less water intensive uses such as grazing.

Planning Grants Recommended for Funding

Applicant	Project Title	County	Recommended Award Amount
City of Yucaipa	Viticulture Operation and Associated Development Standards Plan	San Bernardino	\$250,000
County of Madera	SGMA Agricultural Land Solution	Madera	\$200,000
City of McFarland	McFarland Comprehensive General Plan Update: Land Use and Agricultural Conservation	Kern	\$250,000
County of Mendocino	Mendocino County Sustainable Agricultural Land Conservation Program	Mendocino	\$208,600
City of Arcata	Arcata Gateway Planning Grant	Humboldt	\$250,000
County of Mariposa	Mariposa County Ag/Working Landscape Conservation Plan	Mariposa	\$245,639

Total \$ Recommended for Award	\$ 1,404,239
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Conservation Easements

This round, SALC received 38 applications for conservation easement projects. Of the 31 projects recommended for funding, 34 percent are on irrigated farmland, 53 percent rangeland, and 13 percent mixed-use agriculture. They are in 19 counties ranging from Plumas in the north to Santa Barbara in the south.

Staff reviewed the project applications for eligibility and readiness, and then awarded points based on the series of SALC guideline selection criteria that evaluate the project's agricultural, economic, and ecological co-benefits. Based on these criteria, staff found that one of the projects was ineligible, two did not meet readiness requirements, and four did not meet SALC program goals.

The suite of easements recommended for funding will protect 20,864 acres of farm and rangeland. The estimated emissions avoided is 4,514,118 metric tons of CO₂ equivalent.

Easement Grants Recommended for Funding

Applicant	Project # ¹	Property Located Near	County	Total Acres	Recommended Award Amount
Ag Land Trust	PP1_MNT	Salinas	Monterey	825	\$10,025,000
Solano Land Trust	PP2_SOL	Dixon	Solano	79	\$507,500
Solano Land Trust	PP3_SOL	Winters	Solano	105	\$657,500
Ag Land Trust	PP5_MNT	Chualar	Monterey	113	\$775,000
Ag Land Trust	PP6_MNT	San Miguel	Monterey	609	\$1,525,000
Sierra Foothill Conservancy	PP7_MAD	Ahwahnee	Madera	1,729	\$806,500
American Farmland Trust	PP8_MER	Chowchilla	Merced	1,099	\$6,644,000

¹ Project numbers in this table correspond to those in the Project Summaries and the Complete Projects List (Attachments 1 & 3).

Northern California Regional Land Trust	PP9_TEH	Los Molinos	Tehama	3,109	\$2,261,288
Placer Land Trust	PP10_PLA	Lincoln	Placer	186	\$1,374,000
Placer Land Trust	PP11_PLA	Lincoln	Placer	329	\$999,000
Sutter Buttes Regional Land Trust	PP12_SUT	Meridian	Sutter	131	\$614,700
Sutter Buttes Regional Land Trust	PP13_SUT	Meridian	Sutter	367	\$1,650,550
San Benito Agricultural Land Trust	PP14_SBT	San Juan Bautista	San Benito	24	\$438,900
California Rangeland Trust	PP16_CAL	Copperopolis	Calaveras	3,155	\$4,550,000
Trust for Public Land	PP17_YUB	Smartsville	Yuba	1,595	\$1,400,000
Solano Land Trust	PP18_SOL	Winters	Solano	907	\$4,325,000
California Rangeland Trust	PP20_TUO	Copperopolis	Tuolumne	493	\$419,698
California Rangeland Trust	PP23_CAL	Wallace	Calaveras	505	\$504,500
California Farmland Trust	PP26_SJQ	Farmington	San Joaquin	72	\$754,632
Marin Agricultural Land Trust	PP27_MAR	Novato	Marin	299	\$1,059,125
California Rangeland Trust	PP28_CAL	Valley Springs	Calaveras	378	\$412,486
California Farmland Trust	PP30_SJQ	Linden	San Joaquin	92	\$942,223
California Rangeland Trust	PP31_CAL	Valley Springs	Calaveras	742	\$718,241
California Farmland Trust	PP32_SJQ	Linden	San Joaquin	154	\$1,552,475
Feather River Land Trust	PP33_PLU	Crescent Mills-Greenville	Plumas	591	\$500,000
California Farmland Trust	PP34_MER	Los Banos	Merced	328	\$3,325,300
Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo County	PP36_SLO	San Luis Obispo	San Luis Obispo	200	\$650,000



Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo County	PP37_SLO	Los Osos	San Luis Obispo	321	\$750,000
Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo County	PP38_SLO	Morro Bay	San Luis Obispo	331	\$800,000
Land Trust for Santa Barbara County	PP39_SBA	Lompoc	Santa Barbara	999	\$1,550,000
City of San Luis Obispo	PP43_SLO	San Luis Obispo	San Luis Obispo	1,000	\$3,000,000
Total \$ Recommended for Award					\$ 55,492,618

Program Achievements to Date

In prior rounds, SGC has awarded \$123.9 million through SALC, supporting:

- 52 easement projects covering 92,000 acres of agricultural land
- 8 planning grants
- Technical assistance for three local governments in 2019

The amount awarded includes the total appropriated in rounds 1-4 as well as any rollover funds that became available when projects withdrew or came in under budget. If the Council approves staff's recommendations for Round 5, the total acreage in the process of being protected by SALC-funded projects would surpass 110,000 acres.

Council Recommendation

Approve the staff recommendation to award \$56,896,857 in FY 18-19 funds to support the identified 31 agricultural easements and six planning grants in this report through Round 5 of the Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program.

Attachments:

Attachment 1: Project Summary Sheets

Attachment 2: Statewide Project Map

Attachment 3: List of all Project Applications Received