



December 1, 2020

TO: Governor Newsom, and Secretaries/Directors of EPA, CDFG, DPR, ARB, CNRA, and OPR

**Re: Implementing EO N-82-20 by Transitioning toward Agricultural Systems that can be Carbon Neutral by 2030**

Dear Governor Newsom:

Thank you for signing the Executive Order (EO), N-82-20, which is critical to advancing California's natural and working lands climate solutions, strengthening our biodiversity, and promoting healthy lands that provide community health and economic benefits. We write to offer our recommendations as you look to advance these efforts.

Transitioning California's fossil fuel-dependent agricultural systems towards agroecological and climate resilient ones is central to achieving the aims of the EO and carbon neutrality by 2045. This transition can further help the state achieve its water conservation, air quality, environmental justice, wildfire resilience, and economic development objectives. Many of the state's farmers and ranchers are already innovators on

this front, producing more organic and conservation-oriented farm products than any other state in the country. Such farming systems deliver ecosystem services and are biologically diverse, low fossil-fuel input, natural resource conserving, and socio-culturally appropriate.

With the right policies, incentives, programming, funding, and leadership we can achieve a carbon neutral agricultural sector in the next decade that also addresses inequitable food access and environmental justice concerns. The transition we recommend to support your success will require a bold framework, funding streams, and California Air Resources Board (CARB) leadership that is committed to environmental and social justice as well as climate resilience.

We met with your secretaries this past March to discuss the *Vision for Carbon Neutral Agriculture by 2030: A Pathway to Economic, Ecological and Social Resilience* developed by the Healthy Soils Network, a coalition of organizations from environmental justice, sustainable agriculture, conservation, public, and environmental health. Below, we summarize the guiding principles and actions from that Vision Document. This framework can help inform the development of a Natural and Working Lands Climate Smart Strategy (Strategy) as set forth in EO, N-82-20.

### **Guiding Principles**

Adhering to the following principles will help California maximize benefits and mitigate unintended consequences. The development of the Strategy should be designed with these questions in mind. Does the Strategy:

- Enhance climate resiliency for agricultural operations and rural communities?
- Advance environmental justice principles, processes and outcomes?
- Promote collaboration and include all voices committed to these goals in decision-making?
- Enhance the long-term viability of agricultural operations across scale and operation type, explicitly supporting socially disadvantaged farmers, organic and regenerative farmers, and small-to mid-scale operations?
- Promote environmental health and maximize on-farm biodiversity?
- Support diversified and equitable rural economies with an emphasis on regional food and farming infrastructure?
- Build capacity for land managers to implement best practices for soil health?

### **Actions**

We recommend that Climate Smart Strategy include the following actions to help deliver the E.O's stated goals:

- Utilize all appropriate organic waste materials for environmentally compliant compost production, and build new compost market opportunities focused on economic and environmental justice.
- Reduce synthetic pesticide and other agri-chemical use and reinvest in alternatives to conventional pesticides and fertilizers (e.g. practices that build soil and plant health) in both rural and urban land management.
- Protect our finite agricultural lands from sprawl development, improving access to agricultural land for future generations of farmers and ranchers, particularly for people of

color and other historically underserved populations, and scale up adoption of healthy soils practices within a whole farm conservation framework.

- Significantly scale up outreach, technical assistance, incentives, demonstration projects, and other opportunities to support farmers, ranchers, land managers, and frontline communities in adopting whole farm approaches to soil carbon sequestration and GHG reduction best practices.
- Include healthy soils outcomes in water policies and programs as a strategy for GHG reduction, water conservation and management, water quality improvement requirements, and agricultural water use efficiency.

### **Identify New Funding Sources**

As the state considers how to advance the EO and related climate efforts, we ask the Administration to begin discussions with the legislature and stakeholders about possible new funding sources to support these efforts. One new source of funding is a possible bond measure that combines climate investments with economic recovery to bring the kind of equitable and transformative community investments we need. Such a bond measure must include investments in just, climate resilient food and farming systems infrastructure while also meeting the needs of California's diverse farmers and ranchers.

### **New CARB Chair Must Lead on Natural and Working Lands Climate Solutions**

In addition to policy actions and related funding, meaningful transformation of California's agriculture will also require leaders with a strong vision who can actualize changes.

As you consider who will be the next Chair of the California Air Resources Board, it is important that they are familiar not only with clean energy, vehicles, and fuels but also with natural and working lands climate strategies that can complement direct greenhouse gas emission and co-pollutant reductions in other sectors. It is critical that the Chair has demonstrated the ability to work across agencies to actualize the climate solutions offered by agriculture and natural landscapes. They must have a history of working successfully with environmental justice, public health, conservation and organic and sustainable agriculture advocates. Without that kind of leader, the Administration will be challenged to meet its economic recovery and climate goals.

Achieving the goals of the EO will require all cabinet secretaries, departments, and agencies to work together. We look forward to engaging with you on these issues as your Administration works to achieve these goals. Thank you for your leadership.

Sincerely,

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