



March 7, 2025

The Honorable Catherine Blakespear, Chair
Senate Environmental Quality Committee
1021 O Street, Room 3230
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SB 279 (McNerney) – Scaling Up California Composting – Co-Sponsor (SUPPORT)

Dear Chair Blakespear,

As the co-sponsors of SB 279, we write in strong support of this bill, which will expand composting capacity, divert more food scraps from landfills, and provide California growers with a sustainable, climate-friendly alternative to open burning. With the state's ambitious organic waste diversion and climate goals at stake, SB 279 presents a timely and necessary opportunity to enhance composting infrastructure at all levels.

The 2025 prohibition on open agricultural burning highlights the urgent need for alternative and sustainable waste management solutions for growers. SB 279 directly addresses this by expanding on-farm composting options and allowing growers to incorporate off-site organic inputs, such as manure, into their composting processes. These changes will not only reduce reliance on open burning but also enrich California soils and enhance agricultural resilience. Composting agricultural materials rather than burning them helps avoid methane emissions, improve soil health, increase water retention, and reduce reliance on synthetic fertilizers. Recycling whole orchards and vineyards, along with other agricultural byproducts like manures, provides farmers with a cost-effective and environmentally beneficial way to manage organic waste while contributing to the state's carbon sequestration goals.

Additionally, California must scale up its organic waste processing infrastructure to meet the goals of SB 1383 (Lara, 2016). Organic materials, including food scraps and yard trimmings, make up half of what Californians send to landfills and account for 20% of the state's methane emissions. Despite significant private investment, CalRecycle estimates that California still needs 50 to 100 new or expanded organic waste processing facilities to meet its organic waste reduction targets. However, permitting and constructing large-scale composting facilities is a long and complex process. SB 279 provides an immediate and practical solution by allowing

Notification Tier composting facilities to process up to 10% food waste, thereby expanding capacity and accelerating food scrap diversion efforts.

Community composting plays an essential role in achieving California’s ambitious climate and waste reduction goals as well. These small-scale, locally-rooted operations are at the forefront of redefining food scraps as a resource rather than waste. By diverting organics from landfills to local gardens and farms, community composters directly educate the public, build healthy soils, and strengthen local food systems. However, their ability to establish sites in places where a larger processing capacity is feasible such as rural towns, RCDs and public parks, is currently limited by an inconsistent and unfounded regulatory cap of 100 cubic yards on-site before triggering costly and complex compost facility permitting requirements. SB 279 slightly increases the Title 14 CCR volume limit for “excluded activities” to 500 cubic yards, aligning it with the Water Board’s scientifically-based de minimis exclusion for on-farm composting and synchronizing Air Quality Monitoring District rule exemptions for small-scale sites, while maintaining local enforcement authority over nuisance and odor complaints. This empowers a decentralized network of local resource recovery efforts to compost as much organic material within the same jurisdiction where it is being generated as is feasible and safe for the public.

Finally, SB 279 builds on recent legislative progress to support local composting efforts. With the passage of AB 2346 (Lee, 2024), the legislature recognized the importance of community composting by allowing jurisdictions to count locally produced compost toward their organic waste procurement targets under SB 1383. By expanding community composting capacity, SB 279 ensures that jurisdictions can leverage *more* locally sourced compost, strengthening California’s compost market and keeping the environmental and economic benefits of composting within the communities where waste is generated.

Without increased composting capacity at all levels—on-farm, mid-sized, and community-based—California risks falling short of its organic waste diversion and climate goals. SB 279 provides urgently needed solutions to expand composting infrastructure and support the transition to a more sustainable, circular organic waste system.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge your “aye” vote for SB 279.

Sincerely,



Kournii Brown,
Co-Founder & CEO
**California Alliance for
Community Composting**



Michael Miiller,
Director of Government Affairs
**California Association of
Winegrape Growers**



Erica Parker,
Policy Associate
Californians Against Waste



Baani Behniwal,
Carbon Drawdown Director
The Climate Center



John Heywood,
Executive Director
**People, Food and Land
Foundation**



Roger Isom,
President/CEO
**Western Tree Nut Association
& California Cotton Ginners
and Growers Association**

CC:

Senator Jerry McNerney
Senate Environmental Quality Committee
Senate Environmental Quality Committee, Members