San Diego County
Local Agency Formation Commission
Regional Service Planning | Subdivision of the State of California

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AGENDA REPORT
Business | Action

June 1, 2020

TO: Commissioners

FROM: Keene Simonds, Executive Officer
Robert Barry, Chief Policy Analyst

SUBJECT: **Authorization to Serve as Lead Applicant for Agricultural Conservation Planning Grant with the State of California Department of Conservation**

SUMMARY

The San Diego County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) will consider authorization for the Commission to serve as lead applicant and apply for a $250,000 agricultural conservation planning grant with the Department of Conservation and its Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program. The proposed grant application partners with other local governmental agencies and organizations for purposes of identifying and monitoring agricultural lands and uses and to inform future enhancement opportunities. Resource Conservation District (RCD) of Greater San Diego would serve as project manager. LAFCO's eligibility for the agricultural conservation planning grant program follows recent amendments and ties to the Commission's statutory task to protect and enhance agricultural uses while facilitating orderly growth. Staff recommends the Commission authorize the planning grant application with additional direction on establishing a memorandum of understanding with the other participants to implement if approved.

BACKGROUND

Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program

The Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program (SALCP) was created in 2014. It is a component of the California Strategic Growth Council and administered by the Department of

Administration
Keene Simonds, Executive Officer
County Operations Center
9335 Hazard Way, Suite 200
San Diego, California 92123
T 858.614.7755 F 858.614.7766
www.sdlafco.org

Conservation. SALCP is primarily funded through the California Climate Investments, a statewide program that provides cap-and-trade funds through agricultural conservation grants for programs intended to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The principal goals of SALCP are stated as:

- Protect agricultural lands to support infill and compact development.

- Further the purposes of Assembly Bill 32 by avoiding increases in the greenhouse gas emissions associated with the conversion of agricultural land to nonagricultural uses.

The current round of SALCP grants are designated for either agricultural conservation acquisitions or agricultural conservation planning. The SALCP grant program guidelines were recently approved in February 2020 for the current grant funding period that extends from December 2020 through December 2022. The guidelines specify eligible applicants for the SALCP agricultural conservation planning grants as counties, cities, LAFCOs, councils of government, municipal planning organizations, regional transportation planning agencies, groundwater management agencies, and special districts with land use or transportation planning authority.[1]

Request by RCD of Greater San Diego

San Diego LAFCO received an initial request in April 2020 from RCD of Greater San Diego to serve as collaborating member for a proposed agricultural conservation planning grant program to identify and track agricultural trends in San Diego County. At the time, it was RCD's intention to serve as lead applicant for the grant with the County of San Diego, San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG), and the San Diego Farm Bureau. LAFCO staff agreed to collaborate on the project given – and among other factors – the parallel timing of reinitiating a scheduled review of the Commission's agricultural and open space preservation policy. However, and as a result of an update to the final grant program guidelines, it was subsequently learned RCDs are not eligible applicants for the planning grants and led the other participants to request LAFCO to assume the applicant role.

DISCUSSION

This item is for San Diego LAFCO to consider authorizing the Commission to serve as lead applicant for a SALCP agricultural conservation planning grant in the amount of $250,000 in partnership with RCD of Greater San Diego, SANDAG, the San Diego Farm Bureau, and the County of San Diego. The grant application is for the specific purposes of identifying and monitoring agricultural lands and their uses and to inform future enhancement opportunities. RCD of Greater San Diego would serve as project manager and coordinate implementation among the participants. LAFCO would be responsible for allocating the awarded planning grant funds and providing quality control with respect to meeting targeted tasks. The deadline for submitting the application is July 28th. Due to the timing of the Commission's meeting,

[1] LAFCOs became eligible for SALCP in January 2019.

staff will apply by the deadline with the understanding to the other participants it will be withdrawn should the Commission not provide its authorization on June 1st. A copy of the application is provided as Attachment One.

ANALYSIS

San Diego LAFCO's statutory responsibilities and legislative intent focuses on facilitating orderly and efficient growth while protecting and enhancing agricultural and open space uses. This includes a directive for LAFCO to independently evaluate potential impacts of all proposed jurisdictional changes on maintaining the physical and economic integrity of agricultural lands. Participating in the agricultural conservation planning grant application with the RCD of Greater San Diego, County, SANDAG, the San Diego Farm Bureau, and the County of San Diego as detailed in the preceding section aligns with LAFCO's statutory role and represents a unique and potentially pertinent pivot for the Commission to more directly contribute to enhancing agricultural uses and opportunities in San Diego County.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended San Diego LAFCO authorize the Commission to serve as lead applicant and direct staff to proceed with an agricultural conservation planning grant application as described. This recommendation is consistent with Alternative One outlined in the proceeding section.

ALTERNATIVES FOR ACTION

The following alternative actions are available to San Diego LAFCO and can be accomplished with a single-motion:

Alternative One (recommended):

(a) Authorize the Commission to serve as lead applicant and submit the SALCP agricultural conservation planning grant application in the amount of $250,000 as provided as Attachment One.

(b) Authorize the Executive Officer to sign the grant award should it be approved and in conjunction with executing a memorandum of understanding with the other grant participating subject to the review and approval of Commission Counsel.

Alternative Two:
Continue consideration to the next regular meeting.

Alternative Three:
Deny the requested authorization.

PROCEDURES FOR CONSIDERATION

This item has been placed on San Diego LAFCO's agenda for action as part of the business calendar. The following procedures are recommended in the consideration of this item:

1) Receive verbal presentation from staff unless waived.
2) Commission discussion.
3) Consideration of the staff recommendation.

On behalf of the Executive Officer,

Robert Barry, AICP
Chief Policy Analyst

Attachments: as stated

SALC San Diego
Led by the Resource Conservation District of Greater San Diego County
APPENDIX D – Planning Grant Pre-proposal

SUBMITTAL REQUIREMENTS

All applicants are encouraged to provide the Department with a structured summary of their proposed project prior to the full application deadline.

By providing basic information about the potential project's scope and goals, the Department of Conservation staff can provide preliminary technical assistance to the applicant in advance of completion of full project proposals.

Please submit the below form to the Department of Conservation via email to SALCP@conservation.ca.gov.

Project Title: Promoting Agriculture in San Diego County: A Planning Vision
Applicant Name: San Diego Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO)
Department/Office: n/a
Federal Employer ID Number: 95-6000934
Mailing Address: 9335 Hazard Way, Suite 200, San Diego, CA 92123

Location (County and/or City): San Diego County
Claiming Priority Population Benefits Status (circle one): **Y** ~~**N**~~
If yes, you will need to submit a Priority Population Benefits Checklist with your application (not with this pre-proposal).
Grant Request Amount: $250,000.00
Matching Funds Pending: $
Matching Funds Committed: $
Total Estimated Project Cost: $

Contact Person: Keene Simonds, LAFCO
Title: Executive Officer
Phone Number: 585-614-7755
Email Address: keene.simonds@sdcounty.ca.gov; sheryl.landrum@rcdsandiego.org

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Executive Summary and Proposed Planning Project
Please provide a brief overview of the project (1-page maximum) that describes the following:
• Provide a brief description of the proposed planning project.
• Why the proposed project is appropriate for protecting agricultural lands in your jurisdiction.
• Participating stakeholders.
• Any critical deadlines.

San Diego Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) plans to collaborate with the Resource Conservation District of Greater San Diego County (RCDGSDC), San Diego County Farm Bureau (Farm Bureau), the County of San Diego (County), and San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) to create a solid foundation for a SALC project. This core team seeks to develop a community vision and strategic plan to increase and preserve San Diego region's agricultural lands and preserve its economic viability in semi-rural and rural communities. More specifically, this diverse team aims to identify and monitor active or historical agricultural lands, land zoned for agriculture, and potential land for conservation practices within the region. This project will leverage existing programs, projects, and policies underway by the core team, including SANDAG's TerraCount project and consider input from local stakeholders to directly strengthen agricultural communities and the economy.

According to the USDA Agriculture Census, the San Diego region is home to more than 5,000 farms on 222,094 acres and is the 19th largest farm economy of over 3,000 counties in the United States. Moreover, agriculture contributed to the local economy through 1.77 billion dollars in revenue in 2018, according to the County of San Diego 2018 Crop Report. On a national scale, the San Diego region is the second-leading producer of avocado and nursery crops, accommodates more small farms (less than 10 acres in size) than any other county, and has the most part-time farmers who create local products and drive the economy. Agricultural management of farmland and rangelands is an essential part of the robust San Diego economy and local food system; however, San Diego agriculture is severely threatened.

High San Diego land and water costs, the latter which are rising faster here than anywhere else in Southern California, are driving many farmers to halt agricultural production and, in some cases, sell their lands. By identifying important agricultural lands in San Diego region and building a community vision for sustaining them, we believe we can counter this trend. A SALC project will support San Diego County's Climate Action Plan and its goal of reducing GHG emissions, especially if San Diego County lands are strategically protected and stewarded through integrated policies, planning, investment, and collaborative action. This project work and results would also directly benefit the Climate Action Plans developed by Oceanside, Carlsbad, and Escondido because they have similar CAP goals related to agricultural lands.

While this project is under direction of the above-mentioned entities: LAFCO as lead applicant, RCDGSDC as project leader and manager, and the Farm Bureau, SANDAG, and County as core support, we will collaborate with multiple relevant agencies involved with land use, climate change, and agricultural and environmental concerns. These agencies include the University of California Cooperative Extension, Natural Resource Conservation Service, and San Diego Food System Alliance. LAFCO and these stakeholders are members of the San Diego Carbon Farming Task Force, which consists of several multi-sector regional organizations engaged in the movement to identify, adopt, and promote climate-friendly and soil health practices countywide. A San Diego SALC project will create a high-priority action plan to promote and scale-up agricultural management to help producers maintain economically-viable agricultural operations.

Questions and Responses
The questions below are designed to solicit specific facts regarding how the planned project will address the SALC Program goals and objectives. More detailed information and documentation will be required in the complete application.

1. Describe the proposed planning project. What outcome and deliverables are expected?

Describe the agricultural land base, economy, and regional food systems and infrastructure within the project area? What amount and quality of agricultural land that can be expected to receive protection through the proposed project?

Include maps of important farmland, jurisdictional boundaries, and other pertinent data that would portray the project scope (as attachments to the application).

Why and to what extent agricultural land is being converted to other uses within the project area? To what extent those conversion risks are expected to continue. How will the proposed project address those conversion risks?

Response:

The proposed project will identify, monitor, and assess the ownership of active agricultural lands within the San Diego region to determine effective methods to preserve, promote, and enhance agricultural production and the growing agricultural economy. Upon developing a full inventory of agricultural lands within the County, the core team will identify causes of agricultural land conversion and then develop a suite of actions to assist producers to ensure the preservation and enhancement of their lands. A partnership approach, with an emphasis to work with producers, will support our overarching goals to significantly expand on current projects and programs to champion their needs and gain buy-in on our suite of actions. This approach will also strengthen the agricultural economy, and help meet local, regional, and statewide greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets. The County's Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement (PACE) Program currently promotes the long-term preservation and oversight of agricultural land and resources in the unincorporated region[1]. Additionally, the California Air Resources Board (CARB) has several funding strategies to help meet statewide goals. These efforts will be complemented by SANDAG as a part of the TerraCount assessment, which will provide an estimate of the region's land-based greenhouse gas emissions. Ultimately, this project will build a community vision that outlines potential strategies to protect the San Diego region's deeply rooted agricultural heritage, economic viability, and working lands base.

The proposed planning project area includes both unincorporated and incorporated areas within the San Diego region, totalling approximately 4,260 acres and including 3.22 million residents.

[1] County of San Diego Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement (PACE) Program. (2014). https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/dam/sdc/pds/advance/PACE/PACE-Guidelines.pdf

Unincorporated San Diego County encompasses 3,570 square miles, with a 2015 population of 504,330 residents under the land use and planning jurisdiction of the County of San Diego[2]. The unincorporated area includes 26 distinct communities that vary from suburban densities adjacent to neighboring cities, to lower density rural communities surrounded by hillsides, deserts, and agricultural lands. Incorporated San Diego County encompasses 690 square miles, with a 2019 population of 2,723,166 residents. The incorporated area holds 84.4% of the total population in jurisdictions across 18 distinct communities, including Oceanside and Vista in the north, National City and Imperial Beach in the south, and Lemon Grove and Santee in the east.

This project planning area includes 242,554 acres of agricultural land, with an economic output of $1,769,815,715 in 2018[3]. This equates to a 0.2% decrease from the 2017 total value of $1,774,206,410 and an equivalent decrease of 0.2% in production acres, down from 243,029 acres in 2017[4]. The agricultural economy in the San Diego region remains within the top 20 counties in the United States but has lost significant ground in growing citrus and avocados due to decreasing farmland acreages. This decrease in producing acres between 2015 and 2016 resulted in the San Diego region becoming the second-leading producer of any county in the nation, after Ventura County[5]. Since 1984, the County has seen 50% of its irrigated agricultural land transition to non-irrigated uses and has lost over 30,000 acres total in agricultural lands due to high water costs during drought years and land use conversion from prime, statewide, and unique farmland to non-agricultural uses[6]. According to the 2015 California Farmland Conversion Report, San Diego region has consistently ranked in the top 10 counties in California with the largest net loss of irrigated farmland since 1994. San Diego region also accounted for 20% of the state total for urban development, with 5,775 acres of new urban and built-up lands. Between 2006 and 2018, agricultural land in the San Diego region decreased by 60,381 acres, which was a loss of 24%[7].

Rising land values, escalating costs of water for irrigation, and a complex regulatory environment equally result in agriculture land conversion in San Diego County. Agricultural land in the County has declined significantly in the past decade and especially dropped precipitously between 2007 and 2011 due to the loss of about 10,000 acres of orchard trees. To date, the region has less than 40,000 acres of land in fruits, vegetables, and vine crops[3]. A shortage of labor and complex farming regulations on local, state, and federal levels also contributes significantly to financial stress to the local agricultural community and therefore significant loss of agricultural land.

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[2] SANDAG. (2016). Demographics in the San Diego Region. https://www.sandag.org/uploads/publicationid/publicationid_2001_20213.pdf
[3] County of San Diego Department of Agriculture, Weights and Measures. (2018) 2018 Crop Report.
[4] County of San Diego Department of Agriculture, Weights and Measures. (2017) 2017 Crop Report.
[5] California Avocado Commission. (2016) Acreage Inventory Summaries. https://www.californiaavocadogrowers.com/sites/default/files/documents/2016-Acreage-Inventory-Survey-Results-WEB%20Version.pdf
[6] California Department of Conservation. (2015).California Farmland Conservation Report. Division of Land Resource Protection (DLRP), Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP).
[7] County of San Diego Department of Agriculture, Weights and Measures. (2006) 2006 Crop Report.

The composite crop production in San Diego County is also shifting. Nursery crops and ornamental plants have increased to 71% of the total agricultural production value, indicating a transition away from food crops[8]. The region now boasts the largest nursery, greenhouse, floriculture, and sod value in California, second in the nation. The increase in nursery products to 29% of the total crop yield shows a trend toward crops that garner a steady income. The high value of nursery crops is expected to continue, putting additional pressures on farmers to choose products that command a high value rather than producing food crops such as fruit, nuts, vegetable, and vine crops. The value of fruit and nut crops and of vegetable and vine crops decreased by 3% and 4% between 2017 and 2018, respectively. One exception is avocados, which represent the commodity with the greatest amount of planted acreage at 8% of total crops, with an increase in acres planted over the past year; however, the total value of avocados decreased by 1% due to the decrease in price per ton. Citrus value also had a slight decline of 1% due to reductions in citrus acreage and the price per ton.

The average age of producers in the San Diego region in 2012 was 62 years old, and compared to 2007, fewer multi-generational families are continuing the farming and/or ranching professions, which is a 14% decrease from farm numbers[9]. The majority of producers are males, with a 4-year college education or higher degrees, and those with an income outside of farming[10]. San Diego region has the highest number of small and certified organic farms of any county in the nation[11], many of which are farmed by younger generations. This indicates an opportunity area for growth and education that could be further explored through an analysis of how to inform and recruit young farmers, support the transition of land management to younger generations without prior family farm ownership, and expand affordable access to agricultural land and its resources.

Agriculture Weights and Measures, a department within the County of San Diego, produces an annual crop report with data on acreage, crop production, total value, and statistics on trends. What the County does not track, currently, is the amount of carbon sequestration provided by agricultural and working lands, the co-benefits provided by agriculture such as wildlife habitat, fire resilience, soil health, soil stabilization, and water retention.

This SALC grant opportunity could provide a mechanism to evaluate conversion risks and better understand the socio-economic and ecological services that agriculture provides the San Diego region. This grant would be instrumental in exploring new farmer training and farmland access programs and evaluating the policies, incentives, and programs supporting producer operations for food and agricultural production and implementation of regenerative agriculture practices to build soil health, strengthen fire resilience, and boost local economies. Our overarching focus is

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[8] County of San Diego Department of Agriculture, Weights and Measures. (2018) 2018 Crop Report.
[9] USDA National Agricultural Statistical Service (NASS) (2012). Census of Agriculture: San Diego County, California. https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2012/Online_Resources/County_Profiles/California/cp06073.pdf.
[10] University of California Cooperative Extension San Diego. (2018). Growers Needs Assessment for Sustainable Food Production in San Diego County. Final Report.
[11] Jasperse, Pairis, and Flint. (2019). Climate-smart agriculture in San Diego County.

to improve human health in San Diego region directly through healthy food production and carbon sequestration, which will indirectly offer direct benefits to the environment.

2. How will the project avoid or reduce greenhouse gas emissions?

Response:

This SALC planning project will avoid and potentially reduce greenhouse gas emissions through targeted planning and implementation of carbon sequestration or carbon farming practices on agricultural lands. An adaptive strategy to building soil and ecosystem health, carbon farming engages a suite of agricultural practices to sequester carbon in vegetation and soil, ultimately reducing atmospheric greenhouse gas emissions. Between 1990 and 2006, greenhouse gas emissions increased by 18% to 34 million metric tons (MMT) carbon dioxide equivalent (CO_{2E}), an increase associated with population growth of San Diego County by 435,000 people over a sixteen-year period[12]. This grant will also assist our core team to quantify the amount of carbon sequestered in agricultural lands currently, and land management practices that yield greenhouse gas reduction benefits, which will, in turn, offer multiple co-benefits to the land. Widescale carbon farming across San Diego also has the potential to boost biological activity, water quality and efficiency, soil structure, and nutrient cycling and provide healthy foods for millions of residents and tourists.

Agriculture in San Diego region is the fifth largest economy and currently represents 242,554 acres, or 8% of the region[13]. Over 200,000 acres of the region's soils are classified as Important Farmland, which includes farmland that is prime, unique, of statewide importance, and of local importance[14]. Rangelands represented the majority of agricultural lands on roughly 194,013 acres, or 80% of agricultural lands; the remainder is cropland, orchards, or vineyards on 48,541 acres[15]. Agriculture, combined with forestry and land use in the emission inventory, contributes to 2% of greenhouse gas emissions in the San Diego region[9]. Agriculture-based emissions are associated with poor land and soil management, fertilizer use and production, livestock production, and fuel for farm equipment and transportation. For example, a single quarter-inch application of compost to all grazing lands in San Diego could potentially sequester 5.8 MMT CO_{2E} per decade[16]. Similarly, an increase in soil organic carbon from 1% to 2% on San Diego agricultural lands would sequester 11 MMT CO_{2E} and also increase associated water-holding

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[12] Anders, S. J. et al. (2008). San Diego County Greenhouse Gas Inventory: An Analysis of Regional Emissions and Strategies to Achieve AB 32 Targets. Executive Summary. University of San Diego Energy Policy Initiatives Center

[13] San Diego Gas & Electric. (2017). TL 695 & TL 6971 Reconductoring Project Final IS/MND: Agriculture and Forestry Resources. https://www.cpuc.ca.gov/environment/info/panoramaenv/TL695_TL6971/Pendleton_DraftMND.html

[14] California Department of Conservation. (2015). California Farmland Conservation Report. Division of Land Resource Protection (DLRP), Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP).

[15] County of San Diego Department of Agriculture, Weights and Measures. (2018) 2018 Crop Report.

[16] USDA NRCS, and Colorado State University (2019). COMET-Planner, to Evaluate Potential Carbon Sequestration and Greenhouse Gas Reductions from Adopting NRCS Conservation Practices.

capacities by 56,000 acre-feet[17]. These analyses indicate agricultural management is a monumental piece in the solution to lower or stabilize increasing greenhouse gas emissions.

The TerraCount tool is a scenario planning tool involving the use of greenhouse gas and natural resource implications of a suite of management activities and development patterns[18]. It is specifically designed to identify areas where conservation goals align directly with that of greenhouse gas emission reductions, as well as carbon sequestration into vegetation and soil. TerraCount is funded independently of this work in a collaborative effort through several local, state, and non-governmental organizations. This tool is based on five data sets, including the landscape carbon inventory, predefined development patterns and footprints, land management and agricultural activities and adoption caps, complementary co-benefits, and user-defined development footprints and land conservation. The compilation of these sets can produce specific outputs on landscape carbon and complementary co-benefits for the San Diego region and support the results from this project to better inform our suite of actions and local climate action plans.

Stakeholder support, producer assistance, and agricultural incentives are an important piece to protect agricultural land at risk of conversion to non-agricultural uses. Current projections of land use indicate decreasing urban conversion and increasing conversions of irrigated lands to non-irrigated lands. With decreasing food production systems and increasing nurseries occurring regionally, San Diego may need to focus on both the expansion of non-irrigated lands and the protection of the remaining irrigated and other agricultural lands, as all of these parcels can indirectly remain a resource for carbon sequestration while avoiding the simultaneous greenhouse gas emissions that the conversion may pose. Ultimately, these lands must remain in production for conservation, hydrologic, and sequestration benefits to support resilience within the San Diego region.

3. How will the proposed project implement an adopted or draft Sustainable Communities Strategy or, if a Sustainable Communities Strategy is not required for a region by law, a regional plan that includes policies and programs to reduce greenhouse gas emissions? Provide references to the specific goals, objectives, or policies that the project supports.

Response:

The project aligns directly with the current Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) included within San Diego Forward: the 2015 Regional Plan[19]. The most applicable policy aligns well with this project's goals to prioritize landscape-scale approaches to conservation and greenhouse gas emission reductions and continue tracking land conservation rates, while also streamline land management functions, and support producers to maintain long-term stewardship of their

[17] Creque, J. (2016). Carbon Farming: Increasing Carbon Capture on California's Working Lands. Adapted from calculations by Carbon Cycle Institute.
[18] Department of Conservation (2018). TerraCount. https://maps.conservation.ca.gov/terracount/
[19] SANDAG Board of Directors (2015). San Diego Forward: The 2015 Regional Plan. https://www.sdforward.com/2019-federal-rtp/2015-regional-plan

operation and/or lands. In all, this work is an excellent opportunity to assist producers and land managers in expanding and promoting agricultural lands, open space, farmland, and rangeland, while protecting sensitive habitat and the environment within the San Diego region. The proposed project will also inform SANDAG's 2021 Regional Plan, specifically to meet or exceed state climate goals; this Plan will be adopted by the SANDAG Board of Directors in late 2021[20].

4. How is the proposed plan consistent with the State's Planning Priorities?

Response:

This plan consistently mirrors California's Planning Priorities, specifically to protect the environmental and agricultural resources by protecting, increasing, and enhancing California's most valuable resources, including working landscapes, natural lands, recreation lands, and landscapes with locally unique features (ex. of cultural and historic significance) and areas identified by the state as deserving special protection (ex. wetlands and wildlands)[21]. The US Census Bureau has projected a population of 50 million residents by 2050; this expansive growth must be accommodated with improvements to the environment and economy, increased quantities of healthy foods, and preservation of natural and working landscapes. California consistently faces multiple severe and frequent climatic events, including droughts, wildfire, flooding, and air and water quality challenges, all of which result in a downtown to the economic and environmental state and also declines in public health and safety. Safeguarding agricultural lands in the San Diego region directly aligns with California's Planning Priorities to combat these issues in coming decades.

The proposed project also seeks to implement several regional plans that seek to protect the health of agricultural lands, while ensuring their resilience against climatic events and further increases in greenhouse gas emissions. In 2018, the County of San Diego adopted a Climate Action Plan (CAP) to build and move its existing programs towards mitigation and resilience, environmental stewardship, and sustainability within the unincorporated County. The CAP contains measures that preserve agricultural lands through the placement of agricultural easements, increase carbon sequestration through tree planting, open space conservation and restoration, and educational and outreach components that contribute towards meeting the County's 2020 and 2030 greenhouse gas emissions reductions targets. While this plan is centered on the unincorporated County, adjacent local jurisdictions would still directly benefit from the regional impacts to climate change, as there is no limitation by jurisdictional boundaries. These jurisdictions would also benefit from their local CAPs, whose goals directly align with the unincorporated County CAP.

This work is consistent with the goals of the California Climate Investment program to utilize a diverse mix of landscape-scale management actions that follow industry standards and will make an ecologically-meaningful difference by providing enduring and sustainable co-benefits

[20] SANDAG Board of Directors (2020). Developing the 2021 Regional Plan. https://www.sdforward.com/about-san-diego-forward/developing-the-2021-regional-plan
[21] California Laws | Government Code, Planning and Land Use, Planning and Zoning: Section 65041.1

and accelerating carbon sequestration towards greenhouse gas reductions. These activities coincide with the statewide strategic plans, including Forest Carbon Plan and Natural and Working Lands Implementation Plan, to increase forest reforestation rates by 2020 and expand high priority habitat areas by 5% above baseline levels by 2025. While creating lands resilient to future wildfires, pest outbreaks, and climatic events, this project also matches well with our Regional Forest and Fire Capacity Grant from the Department of Conservation, with several jurisdictions in the San Diego region listed as a targeted priorities for their Regional Fire Protection Plan.

5. What economic, environmental, public health or other co-benefits that would arise from the project?
How will those co-benefits be measured?

Response:

As part of this project, RCDGSDC and project partners will learn more about existing barriers to agricultural production and what tools, programs, and policies can support agricultural production, preservation, and expansion.

The County of San Diego currently manages a Purchase of Agricultural Easements program (PACE) to acquire permanent easements on land that was downzoned through the County's General Plan update process. As of 2018, the PACE program has preserved local agriculture over 28 easements and 2,035 acres. The County's Climate Action Plan Measure T-1.2 takes into account PACE acquisitions since 2015 (793 acres of easements) and aims to reach a goal of 4,873 acres by 2030 through implementation of Climate Action Plan Measure T-1.2. The County currently targets properties that received an allowable density decrease during the General Plan update process. This grant program will help to support this existing program and help the County spur economic development and achieve climate action targets by providing detailed information on agricultural and land management practices occurring in the County.

As part of the grant program, SANDAG will utilize the TerraCount tool developed by the Department of Conservation to evaluate the application of agricultural management activities that can avoid conversion or loss to development. Once an inventory has been conducted on existing carbon stocks within the region, SANDAG will also evaluate the carbon sequestration potential of pursuing various types of carbon farming and sustainable land management practices on County parkland and private lands. With substantial producer input on agricultural practices, we believe that this process will identify what carbon farming practices have the greatest potential for carbon sequestration to aid San Diego County in achieving statewide greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets. Carbon farming offers multiple co-benefits on air, soil, water, plants, animal habitat, production, and efficiency to ultimately build regional resilience. As a County with a large agricultural land base, the SALC grant program provides an opportunity to help evaluate how increased carbon sequestration can be achieved, in part, through land-based management programs on County-owned lands and affirmative easements requiring active production of working lands, as well as incentives for carbon sequestration on private lands.

6. How will the proposal complement other efforts in the region, including comprehensive planning efforts (e.g., Greenprints, general or special plan objectives or goals), and agricultural land use policies (e.g., Williamson Act)?

How would the project leverage other permanently protected lands to promote location and resource-efficient development?

Response:

San Diego region is covered under the Williamson Act, and the County has designated approximately 402,100 acres as Agricultural Preserves. Over 100 contracts within these Preserves exist totaling approximately 80,500 acres in the San Diego region. We believe that this project will be the first step in identifying important agricultural lands for future funding efforts to protect them from development.

This proposal supports current efforts by the County of San Diego to purchase agricultural conservation easements for agricultural preservation. By providing an inventory of local agricultural lands, it will provide the necessary land use data needed to consider how best to support carbon farming and sustainable land management practices in the region. This project would help the County of San Diego better understand the carbon sequestration potential of carbon farming practices on working lands in the region. This project directly aligns with and supports the County's work to implement its climate action plan which includes existing measures and supporting efforts for conservation land acquisition, agricultural easements, local food production, and carbon farming practices. This project also directly aligns with the San Diego County LAFCO Open-Space and Agricultural Lands Policy, which will be updated by the end of the fiscal year; these updates will include directive to protect against the loss of open space and agricultural lands and reorienting objectives to continue preserving and enhancing lands in San Diego County[22]. Additionally, San Diego producers will be instrumental in demonstrating the value of land management strategies, especially those that improve environmental and financial co-benefits.

7. Which stakeholders will participate in the proposed project? How will these stakeholders participate?

Response:

LAFCO will be the lead applicant for this project. The project administrator and manager will be the RCDGSDC, which has significant experience soliciting and managing grants and other funds from federal, state, and local agencies, as well as from foundations, private donors, and contracts. The RCDGSDC is a non-enterprise Special District founded in 1941 under Division 9 of the California State Public Resources code and is tasked with voluntary natural resources

[22] San Diego County LAFCO. (2020) Administrative Draft | Update on Agricultural and Open Space Lands Policy. https://www.sdlafco.org/home/showdocument?id=4816

conservation on public and private lands. The organization has a 70-year track record of successful program management and currently manages twenty-six major grants and contracts, totaling $3,274,265. Outside of these efforts, the RCDGSDC allocates approximately $50,000 annually to its Special Discretionary Projects committee to reinvest within the San Diego Community. Environmental education, support for farmers, and conservation of natural resources are at the heart of our mission as a Resource Conservation District. To date, the RCDGSDC Executive Director, Sheryl Landrum, and RCDGSDC Conservation Ecologist, Dr. Chandra Richards, are working on a Regional Fire Priority Plan with a diversity of fire agency partners and stakeholders; this plan will identify and prioritize project areas requiring funding for regional fire prevention efforts.

The RCDGSDC will coordinate, manage, and report on the outcomes for the group; the RCDGSDC will also be active in promoting our work with our Board of Supervisors, local legislators, and stakeholders, as well as informing policy makers in Sacramento of our results to generate more funding and interest in a statewide initiative. The Farm Bureau is our connection to the agricultural community and will be instrumental in ensuring that the farming community can be included to approve of all recommendations. SANDAG has an exceptional planning department with the capacity to advance the goals and larger vision of this work and effect change. They also have an extensive collection of regularly-scheduled meetings, including on environmental mitigation, all of which can be leveraged to gain input and reach a diversity of audiences. SANDAG has ongoing work with many local jurisdictions to prepare, update, implement, and monitor their Climate Action Plans, and their work with these local groups is instrumental to increase capacity and communication with the larger review team.

The County of San Diego will be instrumental in ensuring that our plan hits the objectives of the Climate Action Plan, PACE Program, and other land use plans instrumental to our region. Our review team of stakeholders includes city and county leaders, NRCS, San Diego River Conservancy (SDRC), water districts, agricultural producers, and tribal communities - whose input will be valuable towards the completion of the full SALC application. All of these agencies will work together to bring the necessary stakeholders to the table. Our core team is quite proficient and has an excellent ability at success to preserve agricultural lands while strengthening the agricultural community across the region.

Map(s) of the Project area

Please provide a map or image depicting the area to be covered by the proposed project. The map should generally depict the area, including the extent of its agricultural resources, urban and/or rural land uses, and any ancillary map data to support the need for the proposal. Examples of maps include Important Farmland Maps, Spheres of Influence, priority planning areas, and other protected lands. Protected lands databases can be found at the following locations:

National Conservation Easement Database: http://nced.conservationregistry.org/
California Protected Area Database: http://www.calands.org/data
California Conservation Easement Database: http://www.calands.org/cced

Maps or images must print into an 8 ½" x 11" sheet of paper.
Geographic information system (GIS) data may be submitted along with digital map products. Contact SALC Program staff if you are interested in submitting data in this manner.