

COUNTY OF EL DORADO BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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August 25, 2020

California Department of Conservation
Division of Land Resource Protection
801 K St
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear SALC Review Committee:

I am writing to share El Dorado County's support for the Sacramento Area Council of Governments' (SACOG) "Coordinated Rural Opportunities Plan" proposal to the 2020 Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program. We are interested in being a collaborative project partner on the working group for this project should it be funded. We believe that this grant will be an opportunity for us to collaborate with SACOG, six-county planning staff, and agricultural representatives to build upon work SACOG and other regional partner organizations have completed and create a plan which will support the economic viability and preservation of agriculture in our region's many rural communities.

The gross crop value for the County of El Dorado was over \$75 million in 2018. El Dorado County has production and processing of various specialty crops, such as apples, wine grapes, peaches, and blue berries. These crops entice customers from many regions to come visit our farms.

We believe that a project like this will help to better connect the local work that is happening here in El Dorado County to support and enhance agricultural production, processing, and land preservation. It also has the potential to link our efforts within the SACOG six-county region as a whole. We find value in having a six-county focused plan that will feature information on regional and local approaches to agriculture business development, expansion and preservation in our region.

The foundational work SACOG has completed as part of the Rural-Urban Connections Strategy (RUCS) project provides on-the-ground applications that promote and enhance agriculture and

benefit our community and the region. The proposal builds upon that cutting-edge work and would provide more capacity to support both our community and ag industry. Furthermore, SACOG has demonstrated their ability to rally the region's agriculture industry to advance regional economic and environmental objectives. For these reasons the EL Dorado County Board of Supervisor's supports this innovative project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brian K. Veerkamp". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "B".

Brian K. Veerkamp, Chair
Board of Supervisors
El Dorado County

Attachment A:

**Attachment A:
SACOG Preproposal Draft 7/1/20
Executive Summary and Proposed CROP Planning Project**

The Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG), is the council of governments and the metropolitan planning organization for six counties and the cities within them including: El Dorado, Placer, Sacramento, Sutter, Yolo, and Yuba. Across the six counties, approximately 40 percent of our lands are agricultural. Agriculture has deep roots in our region's history and future as we have some of the most productive farmland in the world. In our region, agriculture is a \$2 billion industry. Growing food and fiber in our region creates opportunities for jobs and income on and off the farm through supporting and value-add activities related to food production, agritourism, local food serving restaurants, and more. But there's more to what we get from agriculture than this economic activity. Keeping land in agricultural production helps to provide clean air, clean water, recreation, tourism, and wildlife habitat.

For the last 15 years, SACOG has worked through its Rural-Urban Connections Strategy to understand and support the potential for our region's rural, agricultural, and natural resource lands. Most recently, in May 2020, the Regional Prosperity Partnership, comprised of the Greater Sacramento Economic Council, Valley Vision, the Sacramento Metro Chamber of Commerce, and SACOG released a regional prosperity strategy that identified food and agricultural systems as a top priority for fostering inclusive economic growth. This strategy calls for a proactive effort to identify areas with potential to enhance the region's agricultural economy through focused infrastructure investments in assets like transportation and broadband. Much like urban areas, rural economic viability is fundamentally derived from land use decisions and investments in supportive infrastructure. Our region has demonstrated a commitment to agricultural preservation and investment at the local level. What is needed now is a regional view of the economic and infrastructure (land, transportation, water, broadband) investment challenges and solutions that will affect agriculture over the coming decades. Because needs and opportunities will vary throughout the region's agricultural areas, regional efforts and investment need to complement local plans, policies, and programs. Agriculture in our region ranges from large operations growing crops for national and international markets, smaller operations generally serving local markets, agritourism centers focused on importing customers rather than exporting commodities, and everything in between. This means there is no one-size-fits-all strategy for agriculture business development, expansion and preservation in our region.

To create a regional strategy, this proposal would develop a Coordinated Rural Opportunities Plan (CROP) that will focus on three areas:

(1) inventory all of our previous RUCS research related to agriculture along with all of the agricultural plans, strategies, and programs throughout the six county region and distill that information to understand the challenges facing agriculture today and the current strategies to address them,

(2) identify general themes and geographies where existing strategies are not working as planned or where no strategies have been identified,

(3) create a framework for implementation identifying what infrastructure investments are needed to support the continued viability of agriculture in our region.

A potential fourth task would be to support Yolo County on their SALC grant proposal, Yolo County Agricultural Conservation Priority Plan, which proposes to analyze the feasibility of acquiring conservation easements and to analyze alternative high value agricultural areas for Yolo County to consider preserving in a mitigation bank. Dependent on funding availability, SACOG may also procure and utilize a land use and transportation scenario modeling tool to help evaluate development pressure on farmland as a means for helping to prioritize their conservation efforts.

This project assumes the local efforts to protect agricultural land will be bolstered by CROP. CROP aims to complement any local preservation efforts and needs by highlighting the economic incentives for agriculture and creating a strategy that will help our members and partners compete for grants and secure other available funding to preserve and expand critical agricultural infrastructure necessary for commodity production, local grown initiatives, agritourism, and other related efforts. Critical partners include each of the six counties, agricultural commissioners, farm bureaus, local land trusts, the Regional Prosperity Partnership, and other relevant regional stakeholders. Additional partners and stakeholders will be identified with the help of these critical partners.