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Community Health Councils

February 24, 2022

The Honorable Anthony Rendon
Assembly Speaker

The Honorable Philip C. Ting
Chair, Assembly Budget Committee

The Honorable Kevin McCarty
Chair, Assembly Budget Sub. No. 2

The Honorable Richard Bloom
Chair, Assembly Budget Sub. No. 3

The Honorable Wendy Carrillo
Chair, Assembly Budget Sub. No. 4

RE: Investments in Farmworker Safety & Wellbeing, Healthy Food Access, Climate Resilient Farms and Regional Food Economies, FY 22-23

Dear Speaker Rendon and Chairs Ting, McCarty, Bloom and Carrillo:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we request \$667.5 million in FY 22-23 investments in our food and farm systems to support farmworker well-being and safety, healthy food access, climate-resilient farms, and regional food economies.

It is now time to scale up equitable solutions to the climate crisis and pandemic recovery that bring jobs to our communities, protect our essential frontline workers, and create a resilient food and farming system. Our request builds on the investments proposed in AB 125 (R. Rivas), a bond proposal designed to create a more climate-resilient and equitable food and farming system in California.

Given the state’s significant surpluses, support from the federal government, and the urgency of the issues outlined above, we feel it is imperative that the state fund a portion of AB 125’s proposed investments now so we can begin to combat rising hunger in the state, protect and support farmworkers, and make our food and farm system more resilient and economically viable. As outlined in AB 125, we support 40 percent of the requested funds benefit disadvantaged communities, socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, and those producers serving disadvantaged communities.

We outline our funding requests for FY 2022-23 below, which builds upon last year’s investments and addresses funding gaps in critical areas.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Andy Naja-Riese
Chief Executive Officer
Agricultural Institute of Marin

Rebecca Spector
West Coast Director
Center for Food Safety

Tim Stein
California Regional Director
American Farmland Trust

Nayamin Martinez
Director
Central California Environmental Justice
Network

Rebekah Weber
Policy Director
California Certified Organic Farmers

Sarait Martinez
Executive Director
Centro Binacional para el Desarrollo
Indigena Oaxaqueno

Jeanne Merrill
Policy Director
California Climate & Agriculture Network
(CalCAN)

Dave Runsten
Policy Director
Community Alliance with Family Farmers

Sarah Aird
Co-Director
Californians for Pesticide Reform

Cesar Lara
Executive Director
Monterey Bay Central Labor Council

Torri Estrada
Executive Director
Carbon Cycle Institute

Arohi Sharma
Water Policy Analyst
Natural Resources Defense Council

Margaret Reeves
Senior Scientist
Pesticide Action Network

Sibella Kraus
President
Sustainable Agriculture Education (SAGE)

Michael Reid Dimock
Program Director
Roots of Change
A Program of the Public Health Institute

Pamm Larry
Director
Butte County Local Food Network

Jo Ann Baumgartner
Executive Director
Wild Farm Alliance

Cathryn Couch
Chief Executive Officer
Ceres Community Project

Meg Davidson
Director, Policy & Advocacy
San Francisco-Marin Food Bank

Miriam Limov
Farm Institute Associate, Sierra Harvest
Coordinator, Nevada County Food Policy
Council

Bill Allayaud
Calif Director of Government Affairs
Environmental Working Group

Jorge Osvaldo Heredia
Executive Director
The Garcia Center for the Arts

Barbara Sattler, RN, DrPH
Leadership Council Member
California Nurses for Environmental Health
and Justice

Laura deTar, MPH, CHES
Executive Director
Fresh Approach

Megan Kenney
Director of Cooperative Distribution
North Coast Growers' Association

Meg Adelman, RN, BSN, MPH
Communications Director
California Nurses for Environmental Health
& Justice

Erin Tormey
Director
Coastside Farmers' Markets

Liana Orlandi
Chair
Marin Food Policy Council

Ann Thrupp, PhD.
Director
California Food is Medicine Coalition

Lendri Purcell
President
Families Advocating for Chemical and
Toxics Safety

Chandra Alexandre
Chief Executive Officer
Community Action Marin

Debbie Friedman
Founder & Lead Strategist
Food | Climate | Strategies

Dave Brown
Alameda County Supervisor
District 3

Ellie Cohen
CEO
The Climate Center

Derek Polka
Policy & Research Manager
Los Angeles Regional Food Bank

Michael Janis
General Manager
The SF Market

Reba Meigs
CEO
Innovative Health Solutions

Ellee Igoe
Co-Director, Carbon Sink Farms
Co-Owner, Solidary Farm

Dr. Tamara Hicks
Founder/Co-Owner
Toluma Farms & Tomales Farmstead
Creamery

Sara Housman MPH, RD
Co-Chair
Nutrition & Fitness Collaborative of the
Central Coast

Rebecca Burgess
Executive Director
Fibershed

Veronica Flores
CEO
Community Health Councils

Jamie Nessel
Vice President of Assortment
Good Eggs

Tara Barauskas and Andy Hattala
Co-Chairs
LA Chapter of The Climate Reality Project

Oussama Mokeddem
Director of State Policy
Public Health Advocates

Hester Parker, PhD
Executive Director
Everyone's Harvest

Lucia Sayre
Regional Director
Health Care Without Harm

Ellen Burke
Steering Committee Chair
San Luis Obispo Food System Coalition

Diana Weynand
Chair
San Fernando Valley Climate Reality
Project

California Department of Community Services and Development

Home Weatherization: We support \$25 million for the Farmworker Housing Component of the Low-Income Home Weatherization Program.¹ The Governor's January budget includes \$25 million proposed funding for CSD's Low-Income Home Weatherization Program but it does not include funding for the Farmworker Housing Component of the program. We support an additional \$25 million to fund the Farmworker Component of this program. The need for new HVAC systems (for heating, cooling, and filtering pesticide-contaminated air), energy efficiency measures and solar installation on existing farmworker housing remains high and

¹ See: <https://www.csd.ca.gov/Pages/Farmworker-Housing-Component.aspx>

should be an ongoing strategy to address heat exposure issues for essential workers while achieving energy savings and emission reductions.

California Department of Conservation

Farmland Conservation, Tribal Consultation, and Land Access: \$125.5 million

Farmland Conservation: We support \$100 million for the California Farmland

Conservancy Program (CFCP).² The CFCP can help achieve the state’s 30x30 conservation goals by providing grants for the protection and enhancement of agricultural lands, including the acquisition of fee title or conservation easements that improve climate resilience by protecting agricultural lands that support pollinator habitat, California native biodiversity, flood protection, or groundwater recharge.

Background: Established in 1995, CFCP is the state’s longest running farmland conservation program. The program relies on limited bond dollars to provide funding for conservation easements and improved land management on protected agricultural lands. The program had just \$7 million dollars for its 2021 solicitation, which provides funding for conservation easements and improved land management on protected agricultural lands. As the state continues to lose an average of 50,000 acres of farmland every year, more is needed to stem the loss of this finite resource and meet the state’s 30x30 conservation goals. An increase in funding will allow for CFCP to pivot to incorporating climate resilience and biodiversity as areas of focus for future conservation easement and fee title investments.

Tribal Consultation: As part of CFCP, we support \$500,000 for DOC to develop a process with Tribes to determine where traditional Tribal lands are located for the purpose of offering Tribes the first right of refusal to purchase the land and develop it collaborative management processes for land management consistent with Tribal goals and access rights.

Background: This funding request builds upon the work of the state to improve relationships with the Tribal governments and organizations in California.³ The funding would allow DOC to set up a process, in consultation with Tribal governments and organizations, for how the state might engage Tribes in land conservation activities that include collaborative management processes and first right of refusal.

Land Access and Tenure Grants: We support an additional \$25 million for CFCP to improve land access and tenure for socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers as well as beginning farmers and ranchers. Eligible projects include acquisition of fee title projects for the purposes of selling or leasing the acquired agricultural land to socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers as well as beginning farmers and ranchers (known as “Buy, Protect, Sell/Lease” projects).

Background: Access to farmland in California remains difficult for many beginning farmers and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. To improve land access and tenure, we propose new funding at DOC to work in partnership with land trusts to develop “Buy, Protect,

² See: <https://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/grant-programs/cfcp>

³ See: <https://tribalaffairs.ca.gov/>

Sell/Lease” farmland conservation projects that permanently protects land and makes it available to under resourced producers.⁴ These kinds of programs exist in other states and can be used in California to improve land access and tenure, which is critical for the state to improve equity in the farming system and address an aging farming population.

New Farmer Training: \$15 million

Regional Farmer Training Centers: We support \$15 million for grants to develop and expand regional farmer training centers that provide culturally relevant assistance for socially disadvantaged farmers, beginning farmers, and farmworkers.

Background: Over the past three years, half a dozen organizations have worked together to develop a Central Valley Agroecology Center in Tulare County. They received multiple philanthropic and one government grant to develop a business plan and have spent the last year-and-a-half developing that plan. To rollout the program, they will need funding through 2024 to build and develop infrastructure. Other regional farmer training centers that would benefit from infrastructure investments to scale up their work include: the Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA) based in Monterey County; Sierra Harvest’s Farm Institute for beginning farmers, based in Nevada County; Center for Land-Based Learning, based out of Yolo and Sacramento Counties; Huerta del Valle in Riverside County has started a new 6-month farmer training program, primarily with low-income Latino residents.

Workforce Development and Resources Management: \$15 million

Tribal Resource Conservation Districts and Resource Conservation Districts: We support/request \$15 million over two years to hire and train Resource Conservation Districts (RCD) and Tribal Resource Conservation Districts (TCD) staff with expertise in organic and sustainable agriculture, conservation planning, climate resilience and mitigation management, and culturally competent provision of services to socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.

Background: Tribal RCDs (TCD) are established in coordination with USDA, however, there are no federal or state funds attached to the establishment of a TCD. As a result, there are TCDs on the books in the state which have never been able to get off the ground. TCDs can serve as the community nexus point for food and agriculture related educational programming, food access initiatives, community nutrition education engagement, and more. They can operate as an independent, but integrated entity within the Tribal community to leverage resources and partnerships specifically geared towards food systems and producer assistance. Furthermore, many of the state’s RCDs are being asked to increase their workload to address a variety of issues, but have not recovered financially since the Great Recession. Many RCDs lack the resources to adequately respond to local land conservation management needs, especially in times of greater weather extremes.

California Department of Education

Agricultural Career Technical Education Incentive Grant program: We support the Governor’s proposed increase of \$2 million ongoing Prop. 98 General Fund to support an

⁴ See: https://www.youngfarmers.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/AgEasements_Final.pdf

augmentation to the program. We would like to see these dollars focus on agricultural and natural resources management training that includes sustainable and organic agricultural practices, climate resilience and mitigation, and the culturally competent provision of services to socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. We must begin to shift agricultural career training toward management practices that support improved resource management and helps achieve climate resilience, sustainability, and equity in agriculture.

California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA)

Climate Smart Agriculture: \$170 million

Healthy Soils Program: We support \$85 million for the program as proposed in the Governor’s January budget.⁵ The program provides financial and technical assistance to farmers and ranchers to adopt healthy soils practices that increase carbon sinks and reduce overall greenhouse gas emissions. Farmer demand for the program in FY 21-22 exceeded available funding of \$67.5 million with more than \$74 million in farmer application requests.

State Water Efficiency and Enhancement Program (SWEEP): We support \$70 million for the program as proposed in the Governor’s January Budget.⁶ SWEEP provides financial and technical assistance for farmers to improve on-farm water management to save water and energy and reduce related greenhouse gas emissions. Farmer demand for the program in FY 21-22 exceeded available funding of \$43 million with more than \$83.6 million in farmer application requests.

Pollinator Habitat Program: We support \$15 million for the program proposed in the Governor’s January budget. This new program will provide financial and technical assistance for farmers and ranchers to install pollinator habitat on their operations. This is the second year of funding as proposed in last year’s natural resources and agriculture funding packages.

California Organic Transition Program: \$15 million

Organic Transition: We support \$15 million a three-year organic agriculture transition pilot program to support underserved producers, including smaller scale farmers and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. These funds administered through a pilot program will help farmers access financial and technical assistance during the three-year transition to organic certification (as required by the National Organic Program). This program would expand upon the \$7 million set aside in FY 21-22 to focus on underserved producers and include technical assistance in market development, financial planning, and agronomic support for those wanting to transition to organic agriculture production.

Background: Organic produce sales and production continue to grow rapidly, with increased consumer interest in organic produce since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Organic produce sales and volume grew 14.2 and 16 percent respectively in 2020, outpacing conventional produce.⁷ CDFA’s recent draft report, *Farmer-and Rancher-Led Climate Change Solutions*

⁵ See: https://calclimateag.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/CalCAN2021_CSFactSheet.pdf

⁶ See: https://calclimateag.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/CalCAN2021_CSFactSheet.pdf

⁷ State of Organic Produce 2020. Organic Produce Network https://www.organicproducenetwork.com/amass/doc-get-pub/document/27/OPN_2020_StateofOrganic_v3.pdf

Listening Sessions, cited the importance of investing in financial support and technical assistance for farmers transitioning to organic.⁸ Farmers, especially smaller scale and historically underserved producers, face numerous financial and agronomic challenges through the three-year transition period required to become certified organic.⁹ This program would help offset some of the risks.

Support 21st Century Ecological Pest Management: \$2 million

Biological Control/Insectaries Infrastructure: We support \$2 million in infrastructure grants to construct insectaries that produce beneficial organisms in support of ecological integrated pest management. This initial investment comes at an important time as the state is attempting to address pesticide pollution issues that continue to plague many rural communities.

Background: Biological control is a cost-effective approach to non-toxic pest control first developed in California more than 100 years ago.¹⁰ Unfortunately, in recent years, California has under-funded biological control as a method to control pests. We cannot afford to continue underinvesting in this area because biological control will become even more important with a changing climate. As temperatures rise, California is experiencing new pests that threaten crops and human health – from the Asian Citrus Psyllid to tropical mosquitos now found in the Central Valley. We propose a modest initial investment in developing beneficial insectaries in the state that can support biological control efforts.

Wildfire Management for Agriculture and Prescribed Grazing: \$8 million

Prescribed Grazing Infrastructure: We support \$8 million in grants for farmers and ranchers to install prescribed grazing infrastructure, including fencing and water stations, to support wildfire prevention, improved livestock management, and biodiversity enhancement.

Background: Multiple vegetation management practices must be scaled up in California to improve wildfire prevention while also protecting biodiversity. Among those practices is prescribed grazing on grass and rangelands, which can reduce fire intensity and shift grasses from a highly flammable and effective fire *spreader* into a natural fire *barrier*. This shift has both ecological and safety benefits. Researchers at the UC Hopland Research and Extension Center observed that sheep grazing in the Center’s oak woodlands prior to the Mendocino Complex Fire in 2018 reduced the fire intensity, which resulted in less tree damage (trunk scorching and canopy loss), higher tree survival rates, and less seed mortality. In 2015, the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection’s Range Management Advisory Committee released a white paper outlining the benefits, limitations, best management practices, and CEQA considerations for prescribed grazing projects.¹¹ Prescribed grazing has gained recognition as a fire mitigation strategy in state policy in recent years and our funding request will support additional efforts.

⁸ https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/oefi/climate/docs/C DFA_Farmer_Rancher_Led_Climate_Solutions_Meetings_Summary.pdf

⁹ <https://thecounter.org/farmers-face-barriers-to-becoming-certified-organic-usda/>

¹⁰ See: <http://calag.ucanr.edu/Archive/?article=ca.2018a0027>

¹¹ See: <https://bof.fire.ca.gov/board-committees/range-management-advisory-committee/>;
<https://bof.fire.ca.gov/media/7208/white-paper.pdf>

Workforce Development for Climate Resilient Agriculture: \$15 million

There are a number of workforce development proposals in the Governor's January budget. We support funding for the University of California to address workforce development to hire and train the next generation of agricultural professionals proficient in climate resilience. The state must also address the outstanding staff needs at UC Agriculture and Natural Resources (UCANR), including hiring staff with organic agriculture, small farms, and climate resilience and mitigation expertise. There is also a need to assist Tribes and Tribal organizations with funding to hire and train staff to address more complex food safety initiatives.

University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE): We support \$10 million to the UCCE to hire farm advisors, community educators and extension specialists with specialties in certified organic agriculture, small farm advising, and climate resilience and mitigation management. This additional staff should be proficient in providing culturally competent services to socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.

Background: Only 13 out of 269 UCCE advisors and specialists work on organic farm systems, despite California being the leading organic agriculture state in the country.¹² The state has only one specifically organic-focused Cooperative Extension Specialist and the UCANR budget does not fund their role. At the same time, organic farming has seen rapid growth in recent years, and organic farmland now makes up 10.6 percent of farm acreage in California.¹³ Declines in other UC specialists, including small farm advisors have hurt science-based, technical assistance outreach in the state. Over the past 20 years, state funding for UCANR has decreased by more than 50 percent.¹⁴ Thirty-seven states provide more public funding for agricultural research and Cooperative Extension per unit of agriculture production than California.¹⁵ Our funding request starts to address this significant gap in technical capacity.

Tribal Resources: We support \$5 million in grants for Tribal agriculture and food system managers and food inspectors. This effort is intended to support Tribal governments and organizations in hiring Agricultural or Food System Managers and Tribal Food Inspectors to further food sovereignty initiatives.

Background: There is little to no operational funding to sustain Tribal agricultural and food systems programs. Tribal food systems programs are often managed by staff who split a portion of their limited time managing other work and who are employed under different departments. Our funding request would provide critical financial support to make Tribal food system programs sustainable while also hiring staff to implement Tribes' cutting-edge solutions on food safety inspection.

¹² Muramoto, J. 2021. California organic systems researcher map (Feb. 2021). <https://sarep.ucdavis.edu/organic-research>

¹³ California Agriculture Statistics Review 2019-2020. CDFA. https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Statistics/PDFs/2020_Ag_Stats_Review.pdf

¹⁴ See: <https://www.agri-pulse.com/articles/13304-farm-groups-press-to-restore-ag-extension-staff-and-funding>

¹⁵ Greg Perry, Agricultural and Resource Economics, Colorado State University, Briefing provided to Western Association of Agricultural Experiment Station Directors, March 31, 2021. Data from USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture based on 2018 allocations and farm gate receipts.

Expand Healthy Food Access and Combat Hunger: \$100 million

Climate-Friendly Healthy Food Access Infrastructure: We support \$100 million over two years to create a new grant program that funds infrastructure to increase access to healthy food.

Background: Even though almost half of the fruits and vegetables produced in this country come from California, nearly a quarter of California households lack access to healthy foods.¹⁶ Inequitable access to healthy foods like fresh produce contributes to food insecurity and poor health outcomes, especially in low-income communities of color, rural, and Tribal communities. Existing law requires the California Healthy Food Financing Initiative Council to implement an initiative to expand access to nutritious food in underserved, urban and rural communities and to eliminate food deserts in California. To these efforts, we propose a new grant program that funds infrastructure, training, and workforce development to ensure communities and Tribes are able to obtain or produce healthy, nutrient-dense, culturally relevant foods grown, raised, caught, or gathered with certified organic or other climate-friendly practices across a variety of community-based settings.

Communities and tribes should have control over where their food comes from without having to rely on industrial food chains that are often expensive, out of reach, and low in nutrient value. This program will allow for communities and Tribal organizations to invest in infrastructure that will increase community food security and self-reliance, and incentivize producers who use ecologically sound growing practices and animal grazing methods. Such infrastructure investments may include food processing, cold storage, distribution—including ZEV vehicles—land conversion, production scale commercial kitchens, building improvements to expand capacity, as well as workforce training programs, technical assistance, business operation support and more. Ultimately, this program is intended to nourish communities and result in more just and equitable food and farm systems for all.

Expand Investment in Farm to School: \$33 million

Farm to School program funding: We support \$30 million to expand the Farm-to-School grants (F2S) program and \$3 million in ongoing funding to increase staffing capacity and ensure successful implementation.

Background: With its declared purpose of encouraging schools to buy from small or medium sized farms and farms run by Latino, Black, Indigenous, and other producers of color, as well as its intention to connect schools to producers that use climate-friendly organic and regenerative practices, the California Farm to School program is a fertile testing ground for how to reshape our food system. The proposed FY 2022-2023 funding will help expand participation in F2S grant programs and help schools establish new procurement relationships.

Schools continue to be a lifeline for millions of food insecure children, who are predominantly low-income students of color. A thriving F2S Program will improve healthy food access for millions of California's low-income school children now and in the future; stabilize school food supply chains; provide much needed stable markets for California's historically disadvantaged

¹⁶ Northwestern Institute for Policy Research. <https://www.ipr.northwestern.edu/state-food-insecurity.html>

producers; and encourage the adoption of climate-friendly, organic, and regenerative agricultural practices.

Department of Housing and Community Development

Farmworker Housing: We support \$100 million for the Joe Serna Jr. Farmworker Housing Grant program to fund the development of multi-unit, family housing for farmworker families and households.

Background: California is home to the greatest number of farmworkers in the country, ranging from 500,000 to 800,000.¹⁷ Many farmworkers live in overcrowded and unsafe conditions. The investment of \$100 million in Joe Serna in FY 21-22 should be considered a down payment toward addressing the need for farmworker housing in the state but more is needed. In Monterey and Santa Cruz counties alone, an additional 45,600 units of farmworker housing are needed.¹⁸ The pandemic further highlighted the need to end overcrowding and unsafe housing for the state's farmworkers.¹⁹ Despite this need, no additional funds for farmworker housing were included in the Governor's January budget. Our funding request addresses this gap.

Department of Water Resources

SGMA Implementation for Small Farmers: We support \$10 million for grants to UCCE, RCDs, TCDs, nonprofits, and other qualified ag professionals to conduct outreach, education, and engagement to small farmers, especially socially disadvantaged and BIPOC small farmers, about the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) and its requirements.

Background: A study by Clean Water Action of 14 Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSPs) showed almost no consideration of small farmers or outreach to them. There has been very little participation by small farmers in the development of GSPs even though management actions such as pumping fees, allocations, and water markets will have the greatest effects on small farms. The state can improve SGMA compliance and support the ongoing viability of small farmers in the state by providing resources to conduct outreach and education to the state's small farmers, especially socially disadvantaged and BIPOC small farmers, on SGMA implementation requirements.

Calfire

Prescribed and Cultural Burns Infrastructure: We support \$5 million for Tribal governments and Tribal organizations to fund equipment, storage to support prescribed and cultural burns as wildfire prevention strategies.

Background: Controlled burns consist of low-intensity fires that are intentionally lit in ideal weather conditions to treat a specified area to achieve specific objectives (e.g., reduce fine or ladder fuels, enhance native species, and/or manage invasive species). Many Tribes in California have used controlled burns to steward fire-adapted landscapes and protect their communities for

¹⁷ See: <https://farmworkerfamily.org/information>

¹⁸ See: https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/8d7a46_7f3fe90582cb4c19bf9f90e86d0bbd8b.pdf

¹⁹ See: <https://civileats.com/2022/01/18/farmworkers-bear-the-brunt-of-californias-housing-crisis/>

thousands of years. CalFIRE’s Forest Carbon Plan sets a target of implementing approximately 500,000 acres of vegetation treatment per year, which includes both thinning and controlled burns in *non-federal* forests, woodlands, and chaparral ecosystems.²⁰ Individual landowners, tribes, businesses and non-profits – which collectively own approximately 40 percent of the state’s forests and a sizable share of the state’s grasslands – will all need to play a role to achieve this target. Several Tribes are actively seeking partnerships with government agencies that respect their sovereignty and enable them to re-introduce controlled or cultural burns to the landscape. We heard from Tribal leaders that worker housing is especially needed as they expand their cultural burns projects.

Dual Purpose Facilities in the Middle Klamath Sub-Basin: We support \$15 million to construct a dual-purpose facility in the Middle Klamath sub-basin that can serve as a community resilience, prescribed fire, cultural burning, and shared stewardship center. This facility will serve as a base of operations for disaster refuge and the conduct of training, planning, implementation, research/monitoring and adaptive management.

Governor’s Office of Emergency Services

Heat and Smoke Notification for Farmworkers: We support \$12 million to develop a cell phone-based notification system for farmworkers to warn them of high heat and smoke exposure days.

Background: With increasing temperatures and catastrophic wildfires, the number of days with extreme heat and smoke from wildfires are also increasing, threatening the health and safety of farmworkers. A multi-lingual, text-based notification system is needed to inform essential frontline workers about conditions like heat and smoke that can impact their health. This notification system would be complementary to the one the state is currently developing for pesticide notification.

²⁰ See: <https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/resources/documents/forest-carbon-plan>