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FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

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RESILIENT FOOD SYSTEMS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Requested Actions:

- **Support priority food system infrastructure projects.** The Woodland Research and Technology Park, including first phase infrastructure and utilities, for food processing and research/lab facilities including; the Yolo Food Hub facility retrofit for 20,000 square feet of energy and resource efficient storage, aggregation, packing, and distribution to institutional customers, food banks, and other food hubs, along with emerging facilities in the Food Hub Network. The Plant@ California, is a new innovation node for food, agriculture, and health R&D that will anchor the Woodland Research and Technology Park, and Aggie Square--a new UC Davis innovation hub in the city of Sacramento.
- **Support H.R. 4173** (LaMalfa, Carbajal, Miller and Spanberger). **The Advancing Automation Research and Development in Agriculture Act**, a bi-partisan act to include a \$20 million R&D grant program exclusively for specialty crop mechanization and automation projects in the 2024 Farm Bill (co-sponsors include Costa, Duarte, Harder, Panetta and Valadao).
- **Support S. 1205** (Brown) and **H.R. 2723** (Pingree). The Local Farms and Food Act to reauthorize and reduce barriers to the umbrella Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP) programs at USDA, including the Farmers' Market Promotion Program (FMPP) and Value-Added Producer Grants (VAPG), and reauthorize impactful nutrition incentives (Co-sponsor includes Congressman Josh Harder (CA-9)). The bill will make it easier for smaller-scale organizations and producers to access federal program funding to invest in their local food systems, including by reducing match requirements and investing in infrastructure.

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- **Support H.R. 6569 (Adams) and S. 3390 (Markey).** The EFFECTIVE Food Procurement Act (Enabling Farmer, Food Worker, Environmental and Climate Targets through Innovative, Values-Aligned, and Equitable - EFFECTIVE) would direct and support USDA to shift toward values-aligned food procurement. The Act would help build resilient supply chains, increase opportunities for small producers and distributors, and expand healthy food choices for schools, shifting procurement from evaluating bids on cost only, to include broader benefits.
- **Clarify the federal definition of “Rural”** used for funding allocations, as our region is often “locked out” of rural programs, including broadband and other USDA programs, because of our proximity to urban areas.

Additional 2024 Farm Bill Recommendations and Requested Actions:

- **Title VII** – Support programs that would maintain or expand funding for investments in agricultural research, development, and extension, and advancing technologies, given UC Davis’s important contributions to California and the country’s agricultural industry and food security. Reauthorize the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) and increase or maintain the \$700 million authorization per FY. Support the establishment of the USDA-NIFA-NSF Artificial Intelligence Research Institutes as an ongoing program and expand research funding to address agricultural challenges. Research is needed in areas such as weather extremes facing California producers, pesticide alternatives, agricultural technologies, and food safety research education and training.
- **Title II Conservation** – Support climate programs and investments that provide multiple public benefits while improving agricultural production. Increase funding for working lands programs including Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and easement programs including the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP).
- **Title V** – Reauthorize the Farming Opportunities Training and Outreach (FOTO) Program, including the Beginning and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP); increase/maintain mandatory funding of \$50 million and remove the matching fund requirements for BFRDP.
- **Title I** – Ensure a stronger, more robust Farm Safety Net to mitigate the increasing impacts of climate risk. This includes improving the Price Loss Coverage (PLC) Program to cover higher costs of production for California producers and provide more support for specialty crops.
- **Title XI** – Support expansion of insured commodities including specialty crops, and improved crop insurance options.
- **Title III** – Increase funding for marketing and trade programs to ensure an equitable marketplace and prioritize and increase funding for the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP); develop a process to consider new commodities for inclusion in the program.

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Business Nexus

As America's Farm to Fork Capital, the region's vibrant agricultural economy generates billions of dollars in economic impact each year. With its renowned food and agricultural assets, the region produces a large diversity of high-quality crops and products for the region, nation, and world. Climate impacts, worker shortages and regulatory requirements are driving adoption of more sustainable growing practices, technology-enabled solutions, and renewable energy, creating opportunities for innovative producers and companies alike. A new Brookings economic assessment of region affirmed our competitive advantage in the AgTech and Biomedical Sciences and Food and Agriculture clusters. With the assets of UC Davis – a top-tier (R-1) research and land grant university and the nation's number one, and world's number two, ranked university in agriculture - and a growing food and agriculture innovation ecosystem, the region's companies and institutions are specializing in vital areas such as seed research, crop biologics, healthy foods of the future and climate smart agriculture. We are generating the cutting-edge solutions to meet global food challenges while supporting a more resilient food system locally.

BACKGROUND

The region is poised to scale its impact as a global center of innovative and sustainable food systems, building on successful federal investments in the region's cluster by EDA, USDA, and SBA, among others. This includes the region's leadership role in the new USDA Food Business Center program. With a five-year \$35 million USDA grant, the University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources (UC ANR), in partnership with Valley Vision and the California Dept. of Food of Agriculture, has launched the Southwest Regional Food Business Center, expanding market channels, capacity and resources for farmers, ranchers, and food producers across four western states, part of the new USDA-funded national network of twelve centers to reshape the food system (<https://swfoodbiz.org/>).

Despite our great abundance, the region has persistent high levels of food insecurity, lack of access to healthy affordable foods, and families facing economic challenges, all aggravated by the pandemic. The 2021 Sacramento Region Food System Action Plan identified priorities to accelerate economic recovery and increase the resiliency of the regional food system. These include investments to strengthen institutional procurement of local foods and expand food system infrastructure such as food hubs and processing facilities to increase farmer and producer access to new markets. Each dollar spent on locally purchased food by large institutions such as schools and hospitals can generate up to an additional \$2.16 in local economic activity.

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A new study from the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG) identified the infrastructure needed to sustain the viability of agriculture across the region. In addition to increased water, flood, transportation and broadband infrastructure, food system infrastructure including new processing facilities was identified as a need by leaders in every county. Several major development projects are in the pipeline that require investment to create these types of needed facilities along with incubators, wet labs, fermentation labs, greenhouses, and other types of research and commercialization facilities. Along with existing federal funding programs, the 2023 Farm Bill provides an opportunity to support the region's food and agricultural industry – a vital part of the California economy and the nation's largest agricultural producer, food processor and exporter.

Increased Institutional procurement is one of the biggest opportunities for growing the local food economy. It is also a high priority for an inclusive economic and community development strategy. A regional priority is to develop food system infrastructure that can help smaller farmers, food producers, and entrepreneurs, including those who are BIPOC and socially disadvantaged, get connected to larger markets and grow their businesses. Purchasing policies, regulatory constraints, limited budgets, lack of capacity, lack of adequate infrastructure such as food hubs to aggregate and deliver crops from farm to institution, and lack of processing facilities are some of the long-standing barriers to local procurement. Changes in federal policies, such as USDA's Foods Commodity program, would enable more local purchasing by schools and meet USDA Farm to School goals.

New projects such as the Woodland Research and Technology Park will be a major asset for the region, with dedicated research, innovation, and manufacturing facilities on approximately 350 acres that build on the City of Woodland's Food Front Initiative. The Park will provide new state-of-the-art facilities for food processing and for expansion of AgStart's successful wet lab/food lab/incubator funded in part by EDA, along with needed research and testing facilities such as greenhouses and fermentation labs and with training facilities to upskill the workforce. The project will require funding for utilities and roadway infrastructure in and around the park.

The Plant@ California will create a new node for food, agriculture, and health R&D that will further expand the region's innovation capacity. Led by the University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources (UCANR) in partnership with UC Davis Innovation Institute for Food and Health and other public and private sector organizations, this catalytic investment will accelerate commercialization by providing the facilities and programming needed for early-stage firm scale-up, open innovation, and corporate research, all within close proximity to UC Davis. The Plant will anchor the Woodland Research and Technology Park; the project team is seeking funds for the construction design and planning phase.

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The Yolo Food Hub Network partners, led by New Season CDC, are retrofitting a historic barn in Northwest Yolo County to support small, new, BIPOC and other growers, ranchers, and food producers to reach new markets through sourcing locally grown foods to regional institutions. With high demand for the space, funding is needed to complete the first phase of Barn's retrofit. This builds on Yolo County's \$2 million investment of ARPA funds to purchase the site and philanthropic funding for a comprehensive site design for a model sustainable food storage, aggregation, and processing facility, and will support existing and emerging food hubs across the region.

UC Davis is the future home of Aggie Square, a 1.1 million-square-foot district in the city of Sacramento focused on translating food and biotechnology innovations into needed products and services. Once complete, Aggie Square will offer needed wet lab facilities, startup and scale-up space for food bioeconomy entrepreneurs, offices, mixed-use spaces, housing, and other amenities. A Community Benefits Partnership Agreement among UC Davis, the City of Sacramento and developer Wexford Science & Technology will ensure that Aggie Square benefits local communities and boosts inclusive economic growth. The District is slated to open its first facilities in the first part of 2025.

Other challenges are facing the food system that can be addressed through the Farm Bill and other legislation and federal resources. The industry faces an aging workforce, which federal immigration policy limitations are exacerbating. The region is focused on innovative training programs and apprenticeships to develop the next generation of farmers and food producers. There is long-term well-documented lack of broadband infrastructure connectivity in the region's rural and agricultural communities. Broadband is a critical enabling technology for competitive business operations, including adopting agrifood technologies to better manage resources such as water and energy and address workforce shortages, and for health and safety, especially in the face of climate change. Although there are major federal broadband investments coming to California, there will be gaps needing ongoing federal investments.

Climate change and adaptation poses another major challenge for the industry. Agriculture is on the front lines of the climate crisis. Drought, heatwaves, wildfires, freezes, and intense periods of rain and snow have battered the Capital Region in recent years. Insufficient electrical grid infrastructure compounds the problem, with frequent power shutoffs. Resilience in this new reality will require adopting more sustainable growing practices; investing in water, flood control, transportation, and broadband infrastructure; facilitating the shift to zero-emission power sources; and assisting farmers, ranchers and food producers with this transition.

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Other Potential Legislation:

- **H.R. 1840 (Pingree) and S. 1016 (Heinrich)- the Agriculture Resilience Act of 2023**, to establish, expand, and revise multiple programs and activities of USDA primarily to reduce carbon emissions from the agriculture sector, increase climate adaptation mitigation, and address food waste. (Co-sponsors include Carbajal, Matsui, Panetta and more California representatives.)
- **H.R. 2378 (Kaptur) – the Farmers Market and Food Bank Revitalization Act**, to increase funding for programs like the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) and WIC, provide an infrastructure funding program for farmers’ markets, and establish a pilot program for food banks to source produce from local growers.
- **H.R. 5915 (Adams) and S.2591 (Fetterman) - the Urban and Innovative Farming Act of 2023**, to expand the reach of USDA farm services to better serve the emerging population of urban, small-scale and indoor growers. (Co-Sponsor Sen. Butler).