

LOCAL AGENCY FORMATION COMMISSION FOR SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY

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DATE: MAY 13, 2020 
FROM: SAMUEL MARTINEZ, Executive Officer
TO: LOCAL AGENCY FORMATION COMMISSION

SUBJECT: Agenda Item #13: Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation (SALC)
Program Planning Grant Application

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the Commission:

1. Authorize the Executive Officer to submit the SALC Program Planning Grant pre-proposal to the CA Department of Conservation;
2. Direct staff to continue to work with the Inland Empire Resource Conservation District in finalizing the full application; and,
3. Prior to actual submittal of full application, return to the Commission for review of document(s) and to adopt resolution approving the submittal of the SALC Program Planning Grant application to the CA Department of Conservation.

BACKGROUND

The Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation (SALC) Program is a component of the Strategic Growth Council's Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities Program that is administered by the California Department of Conservation (DOC) in conjunction with the Natural Resources Agency. It is a statewide program that supports California's greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction goals by making strategic investments to fund projects that protect agricultural lands that are at risk of conversion to non-agricultural uses through the purchase of agricultural conservation easements or development of agricultural land strategy plans.

LAFCO 2019 Strategic Planning Workshop

In January 2019, the Commission held a strategic planning workshop and identified vital strategies for LAFCO to prioritize in the next few years. One of the items it considered was

the adoption of open space and agricultural preservation policies and directed staff to formulate such policies for consideration by the Commission. One of the key issues identified was the lack of an existing local agency in the region that currently has an established agricultural conservation program that can provide for protection of agricultural lands in the area.

In June 2019, the DOC held a number of workshops throughout the State on the SALC Program, one of which LAFCO staff attended. In our region, the DOC partnered with the Inland Empire Resource Conservation District (IERCD) to host a workshop. Since then, LAFCO staff and IERCD staff have been working together to develop a project proposal in consultation with other local and regional stakeholders (e.g. County of San Bernardino Land Use Services Department, City of Ontario, City of Yucaipa, SCAG, Loma Linda University, etc.).

Types of SALC Grants

The SALC Program provides two types of awards – Agricultural Conservation Planning Grants and Agricultural Conservation Acquisition Grants.

- Planning grants support the development of local and regional land use policies and economic development strategies to protect critical agricultural land. The program funds strategies related to establishing and implementing goals, policies, and objectives to support the economic viability of the local agricultural sector. It also supports planning processes to identify and designate priority lands for conservation and development.
- Acquisition grants are used to permanently protect croplands and rangelands that are at-risk of conversion to sprawl development. Agricultural conservation easements are deed restrictions that landowners voluntarily place on their property to preserve the land's agricultural uses.

The following link provides information on the grant guidelines and information on the Agricultural Planning Grant and Acquisition Grant applications:

<https://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/grant-programs/SALCP/Documents/California%20Sustainable%20Agricultural%20Lands%20Conservation%20Program-%20Grant%20Guidelines%20%26%20Applications.pdf>

Proposed SALC Planning Grant Project:

After months of coordinating and evaluating ideas, IERCD and LAFCO staffs are proposing to submit a SALC Program planning grant project that aims to create a local tool for the preservation of agriculture, which does not currently exist in the region. By establishing an agricultural conservation program and developing a mitigation program that classifies important farmland that can be targeted for agricultural preservation, farmland in the San Bernardino valley could potentially be preserved in perpetuity.

The project intends to provide the following deliverables:

1. Mapping and identification of priority mitigation lands to develop a connected corridor of preserved agricultural lands in the San Bernardino valley as opposed to disconnected pockets. Land priority will focus on highest value agricultural land with the best soils, most abundant water resources, and other evaluation and ranking criteria.
2. Analysis of all policies that the County and the 24 cities have related to open space and agricultural preservation to determine if policies include mitigation requirements or otherwise address agricultural preservation. If not, efforts will be made to work with the County and/or cities to update policies that would allow for agricultural mitigation within the region. One goal would be to encourage policies (or update policies) that would primarily ensure that the required mitigation first consider lands within the individual localities where the conversion of agricultural lands occur and perhaps secondarily lands within the County itself, before considering lands located in other parts of the State.
3. Demonstrate IERCD's ability to manage agricultural lands set aside for conservation by developing mitigation program guidelines, legal documents, program protocol, and fee structure to ensure a sustainable mitigation program that can meet its objectives.
4. Incorporate proposed regional mitigation program into SCAG's Sustainable Communities Strategy as a regional program available to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The goals of this project would be to encourage the long-term preservation of agricultural lands within San Bernardino County (generally the Valley region of the County) and develop local mitigation tools to provide a way for municipalities to preserve agricultural lands while continuing to address housing and growth needs. The DOC has shown support of IERCD and LAFCO's planning grant proposal and selected the project to receive technical support from its consultant team.

Originally, IERCD was taking the lead on the SALC planning grant but was recently informed that resource conservation districts are not eligible applicants for the SALC Planning Grant (resource conservation districts are only eligible to apply for Acquisition grants). Therefore, since IERCD can no longer officially submit the Planning Grant application or serve as the applicant, LAFCO staff proposes that it serve as the official applicant pending the Commission's support and approval.

Agency Roles:

As the applicant, LAFCO would be responsible for submitting invoices and reports to the DOC and communicating important updates from DOC to IERCD staff:

- Provide final review of SALC Planning grant application and submit to DOC for consideration;

- If awarded, enter into the grant agreement with DOC and an MOU with IERCD;
- Serve an administrative role between the IERCD and DOC, including:
 - Collecting invoicing materials from IERCD to provide to DOC; and,
 - Collecting reports from IERCD to provide to DOC.
- Support IERCD staff in carrying out the scope of work as outlined in the grant application; and,
- Ensure IERCD staff is aware of information related to grant implementation.

IERCD will be responsible for carrying out the scope of work detailed, along with partners identified, in the grant application. IERCD can be expected to:

- Draft the SALC Planning grant application and collect feedback from stakeholder organizations to strengthen the application;
- Hire and manage staff and consultants necessary to carry out scope of work;
- Provide office space, computer, supplies, and other supply needs for the work;
- Manage grant reporting requirements and provide to LAFCO in a timely manner; and,
- Manage much of the financial aspects of the grant (paying consultants, staff payroll, and purchasing supplies) and submitting detailed invoices and backup to LAFCO.

Financial Considerations:

Planning grants will reimburse grantees and participating stakeholders for all direct costs, including staff costs incurred during the grant performance period and related to the project. The grant request can be up to \$250,000. The application must include a minimum ten percent (10%) match funding with at least five percent (5%) of the requested grant amount a cash match and the balance may be in-kind.

IERCD is able to cover the 5% cash match (up to \$12,500) and the remaining 5% (up to \$12,500) will come from in-kind services, including staff time from LAFCO and/or stakeholders. LAFCO can also request administrative/staff funding through this grant to cover time spent implementing the goals and administration of the planning grant.

Important Dates to Remember:

- July 1, 2020 - Pre-proposal due
- August 28, 2020 - Full Application due
- December 2020 - Project Awards

Applicants are encouraged to submit a Planning Grant pre-proposal to the DOC for a preliminary review of the proposed project prior to submission of a full application. Pre-proposals are reviewed, and technical assistance is provided to facilitate the development of the application as needed.

Planning Grant pre-proposals are due no later than July 1, 2020; however, submitting as early as June 1 is recommended to allow DOC staff to provide comments and make necessary adjustments prior to the final deadline. The final Planning Grant application is due on August 28, 2020.

The Planning Grant Pre-proposal (draft copy attached) is currently being reviewed by stakeholders. Any changes prior to the actual submittal, if any, would be technical and not change the overall information outlined in the document.

CONCLUSION:

As outlined in Government Code Section 56301, “Among the purposes of a commission are discouraging urban sprawl, preserving open-space and prime agricultural lands...” Adopting agricultural preservation policies and coordination with other jurisdictions to do the same in order to protect agricultural lands from conversion to urban or rural residential development promotes smart growth, ensures open space remains available, and supports a healthy agricultural economy.

It should also be noted that, pursuant to Section 56378(b), the Commission “may apply for or accept, or both, any financial assistance and grants-in-aid from public or private agencies or from the state or federal government or from a local government.” Therefore, LAFCO does have the authority to submit a SALC Program Planning Grant application.

Therefore, LAFCO staff is seeking the Commission’s support in submitting the SALC Program Planning Grant pre-proposal and continue working with IERCD staff on finalizing the full application and, return to the Commission for final adoption of resolution approving the submittal of the Planning Grant application.

Staff will be happy to answer any questions of the Commission prior to or at the hearing.

Attachment: Draft Planning Grant Pre-Proposal

SALC PLANNING GRANT PRE-PROPOSAL

LAFCO for San Bernardino County

May 2020

DRAFT

PROJECT INFORMATION:

Project Title	San Bernardino Valley Agricultural Planning and Preservation Program	
Applicant Name	Local Agency Formation Commission for San Bernardino County	
Department/Office	NA	
Federal Employee ID Number	32-0422397	
Mailing Address	1170 W. Third Street, Unit 150, San Bernardino, CA 92415-0490	
Project Title:	San Bernardino Valley Agricultural Planning and Preservation Program	
Location (County and/or City)	San Bernardino County Valley Region	
Claiming Priority Population Benefits Status (circle one)	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Y <input type="radio"/> N	If yes, you will need to submit a Priority Population Benefits Checklist with your application
Grant Request Amount	\$250,000	
Matching Funds Pending	\$	
Matching Funds Committed	\$25,000 (cash and in kind)	
Total Estimated Project Cost	\$275,000	
Contact Person	Samuel Martinez	
Title	Executive Officer	
Phone Number	909-388-0480	
Email Address	smartinez@lafco.sbcounty.gov	

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The proposed planning project would perform an analysis of existing agricultural resources and agricultural policies to better inform future development decisions in the San Bernardino Valley region. The proposal will also create a local program for the preservation of agriculture, which does not currently exist in the region. By establishing an agricultural conservation program that classifies and prioritizes important farmland for agricultural preservation, farmland in the San Bernardino Valley, as well as the local agricultural economy, could potentially be preserved in perpetuity.

The project will result in the following deliverables:

1. Mapping and identification of priority mitigation lands to develop a connected corridor of preserved agricultural land in the San Bernardino Valley.
2. Analysis of agricultural policies for city and county jurisdictions to determine if policies include mitigation requirements or otherwise address agricultural preservation.
3. Develop IERCD's capacity to manage agricultural easements by developing mitigation program guidelines, legal documents, program protocol, and fee structure to ensure a sustainable mitigation program.
4. Inform, educate, and gain interest among municipalities and agricultural organizations about the agricultural conservation program and incorporate the proposed regional mitigation program into SCAG's Sustainable Communities Strategy as a regional program available to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The San Bernardino Valley region has lost over 70% of its important farmlands between 1984 and 2016 according to Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) data. This number has undoubtedly increased over the past four years as the California housing crisis and new industries have placed pressure on farmers and land values. As one of the epicenters of the state's logistics industry, San Bernardino County is quickly urbanizing, resulting in rapid conversion of agricultural land. Compounding this issue is the threat of invasive pests to the existing citrus industry. In addition to these pressures on the agriculture industry, San Bernardino County is also a region with low rankings on several environmental, public health, and economic factors. Notably, the area suffers from heavy air pollution and limited access to open space and healthy food options. This poses a great opportunity to preserve farmland as a means to improve local food access and conserve working lands.

There is strong local support for this project from cities, local agencies, agricultural organizations, universities, and community groups. We plan to continue growing the list of stakeholders to include more individuals from the agricultural community and city planners. A meeting was held in November 2019 where stakeholders shared their ideas for regional agriculture, which included discussion of a local mitigation option and a comprehensive vision for the sustainability of our agriculture. Committed stakeholders include, LAFCO for San Bernardino County, Inland Empire Resource Conservation District (IERCD), County of San Bernardino, Southern California Association of Governments, SB County Farm Bureau, local municipalities, and community groups further described in question #9.

There are several current projects and impending threats that this project would plan to address. The County of San Bernardino is in the process of updating its General Plan, which contains a proposed element for preservation of agricultural land, including a mitigation element. SCAG is in the process of updating their Sustainable Communities Strategy, calling out regional mitigation as a tool available to help implement their SCS. SCAG is also developing its regional Greenprint, which could utilize much of the information developed through this planning process to inform the development of the interactive planning tool. In addition, the sense of urgency to address the need for housing has taken precedence over discussions on land preservation. This effort would help bring those important discussions back into regional planning in a strategic way. This program will enable cities to make better decisions on where to place housing and industry and where to preserve agriculture within the valley region. Lastly, Huanglongbing is continuing to threaten the local citrus industry and many of those growers will soon be faced with decisions on whether to switch crops or sell their land. This mitigation program would provide an additional option to help offset the financial strain to these at-risk growers.

QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

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

Description of Proposed Planning Project

The proposed planning project aims to improve communication among regional planning, conservation, and agricultural organizations by collecting and presenting important data on agricultural resources and engaging in and elevating conversations around existing agricultural policy. The proposed program will also create a local tool for the preservation of agriculture, which does not currently exist in the region. By developing a mitigation program and identifying important farmland that should be targeted for preservation, farmland in the San Bernardino Valley will be preserved in a way that currently does not exist. The project will result in the following deliverables:

1. Mapping and identification of priority mitigation lands to develop a strategically connected corridor of preserved agricultural land in the San Bernardino Valley as opposed to disconnected pockets. Land priority will focus on highest value agricultural land with the best soils, most abundant water resources, proximity to other conserved lands, and other evaluation and ranking criteria.
 - This mapping will in part be guided by the DOC's Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) Model, Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) data as well as other statewide datasets and local information. This resulting map product will be used to inform regional prioritization for agricultural preservation and also contribute to the in-progress regional Greenprint
2. Analysis of agricultural policies for city and county jurisdictions to determine if policies include mitigation requirements or otherwise address agricultural preservation. If not, efforts will be made to work with the County and cities to update policies that would allow for agricultural mitigation. A primary goal is to encourage or update policies that would ensure that the required mitigation strategically preserve lands within the individual localities, or within the County, where the conversion of agricultural lands occur instead of the current practice of mitigating on lands located in other parts of the State.
 - This deliverable will be met through meetings with stakeholders and individual cities to review existing policies and propose updates that would encourage local mitigation for farmland. For those municipalities that already include a mitigation policy, efforts will be made to update policies so that land is conserved locally to prevent further loss within the San Bernardino Valley.
 - An assessment of properties owned by either the County and or/or the cities that are currently held for agricultural preservation (including current management of said properties) and any additional farmlands that could potentially be set-aside for agricultural preservation.
 - Review additional areas that could potentially be used for agricultural purposes in perpetuity through consultation with individual property owners.
3. Develop IERCD's capacity to manage agricultural easements by developing mitigation program guidelines, legal documents, program protocol, and fee structure to ensure a sustainable mitigation program that can meet its objectives.

- IERCD, and other conservation groups, will work collaboratively to develop a mitigation priority plan and program guidelines to ensure readiness to accept mitigation within the San Bernardino Valley so that important agricultural lands may be preserved in perpetuity.
4. Inform, educate, and gain interest among municipalities and agricultural organizations about the agricultural conservation program and incorporate proposed regional mitigation program into SCAG's Sustainable Communities Strategy as a regional program available to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
 - Stakeholders will work to ensure the resulting analysis of agricultural lands and policies is shared widely with municipalities and organizations who may find this information valuable. Presentations will be made to municipalities on the agricultural mitigation program and other options for agricultural conservation in their jurisdictions. These presentations will connect back to SCAG's SCS and work to meet some of the SCS goals through this program.

The ideal outcomes of this planning process include:

1. A regional comprehensive vision for the sustainability of agriculture in the San Bernardino Valley
2. Long-term preservation of important and highly functioning agricultural lands through conservation easements or direct purchase by local conservation agencies
3. Identification of farmland that would be good candidates for the Department of Conservation's SALC Agricultural Easement Program
4. Increased communication between cities, county, agencies, and community organizations on agricultural priorities and opportunities by developing a stakeholder group that will continue to work on implementation beyond this grant.
5. Connection of new/beginner farmers with land opportunities within their community to farm
6. Improvement in land management and sustainable farming techniques by protecting more resilient lands. Currently, many urban farmers only have access to leased lands and are often hesitant to apply conservation practices on their properties since their lease length might not enable them to see the benefits of their investment. We believe permanently preserved agricultural lands will provide more opportunity for conservation agencies to work with farmers to implement soil health and water efficiency practices.

Future agricultural goals, beyond this planning process, to ensure success of local agricultural industry:

1. Helping expand existing agricultural markets to provide more opportunities for urban farmers, including a Buy Local Campaign
2. New farmer trainings and support for farmers transitioning crops (ex. citrus to avocados)
3. Development of infrastructure for existing and new farm products including the grape industry in Yucaipa

Land Base and Economy

San Bernardino County is the largest county in the United States, covering over 20,000 square miles. The County extends from Los Angeles County to the Arizona border and contains the Mojave National Preserve, the San Bernardino Mountains, and the Inland Valley. Because of the large size and diverse landscapes within the County, this proposal focuses only on the valley region, south of the San Bernardino Mountains where 80% of the population resides and the majority of the agriculture industry exists. The valley's level terrain makes the land extremely suitable for farming, but these same characteristics also make for desirable and profitable development opportunities.

San Bernardino County continues to maintain a large agricultural industry bringing in approximately \$493 million in 2018 according to San Bernardino County Annual Crop Report with the largest output products consisting of livestock and poultry (64%), nursery products (17%), and vegetable crops (9%). The portion of San Bernardino County that will benefit from the proposed project includes 84% of the total industry, only excluding the North Desert and South Desert regions. As of 2018, the County had 1,429,360 acres in agriculture, a majority of which consists of field crops in the desert regions. The valley region, in comparison, contains less than 15,000 acres of remaining agricultural land while making up 84% of the industry's economic output.

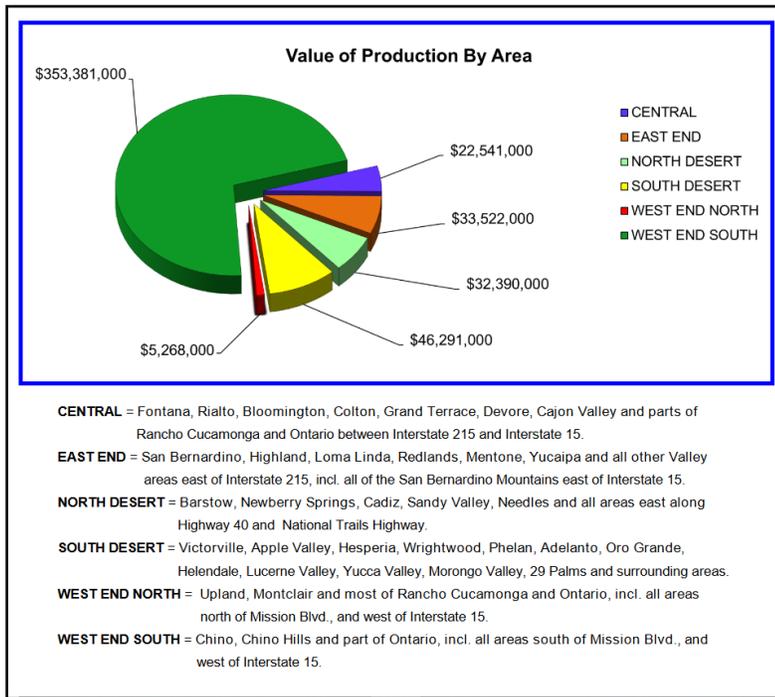


Figure 1: This chart shows the value of the agricultural industry in SB County. The majority of the industry is located in West End South within the cities of Ontario, Chino, and Chino Hills

2. Risk of Conversion

Like much of the state, San Bernardino County is experiencing housing shortages and increased development to meet state requirements. The population of San Bernardino County was 2,153,000 as of 2018 and is projected to continue growing. Approximately 80% of the County's total population is located in the San Bernardino Valley region where this project is proposed to occur. The San Bernardino Valley region only accounts for 2.4% of the total land area in the County, but carries 84% of the agriculture industry. Because the remainder of the county is either mountainous or desert landscape with insufficient water resources, there is little potential for the agricultural industry to move from the valley region, containing the majority of productive land, to other parts of the County.

Agriculture conversion is a major risk in the valley region. Land values have soared as a result of the growing logistics industry as well as increased housing demands. The dairy industry in Chino/Ontario has been experiencing rapid development and movement to the Central Valley. At its prime, the Chino Basin contained the highest density of dairy animals found anywhere in the world, with approximately 354 dairies in operation in 1989. According to the latest Crop Report only 52 dairies remain. While this is just one example, many cities in the San Bernardino Valley are experiencing similar loss of agriculture and difficulties balancing development and open space needs. This project

intends to support municipalities in addressing these issues and introduce conservation strategies and programs they can use within their jurisdictions or apply in other, less developed, parts of the valley.

Aside from development pressures, the region's citrus industry has been threatened by the Huanglongbing disease (also known as Citrus Greening) carried by the Asian Citrus Psyllid. As of November 2019, a large portion of the San Bernardino Valley citrus is in quarantine, limiting the movement of citrus. Many citrus growers are responding to the California citrus threat by removing their citrus and selling their land. This is a major loss to our agricultural industry and local culture and many organizations are assisting these growers to manage for the pest or switch to new crops.

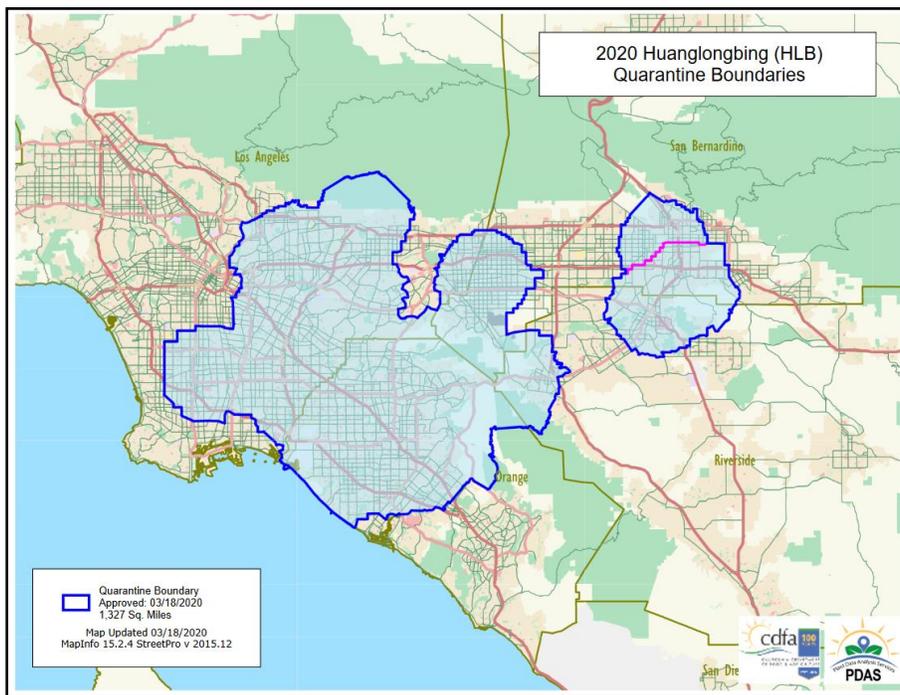


Figure 2: Map showing current Quarantine boundaries for citrus in San Bernardino and Los Angeles counties. (Source: CDFA)

3. How will the project avoid or reduce GHG emissions?

The project will primarily avoid GHG emissions by reducing conversion to other land uses, including commercial and residential development, which typically have higher GHG emissions from construction, utilities, and increased vehicle miles traveled for both trucking and residential trips. One of the priority areas for the mitigation program will be to preserve agricultural lands that contain the greatest existing GHG reduction benefits, or the greatest potential to sequester GHG emissions. Once lands are permanently conserved through the mitigation program, the Inland Empire Resource Conservation District (IERCD), along with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), will work to support those farmers in implementing practices that improve soil health and carbon sequestration potential on the land. The IERCD has been involved in carbon farming efforts for several years, which implements practices on farms that are known to sequester carbon into the soil. IERCD's carbon farming program is expected to develop simultaneously with the proposed mitigation program. The RCD will support farmers in accessing funding from California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) through their Healthy Soils Program to ensure that lands preserved through the SALC program are meeting their greatest potential to reduce GHG emissions.

4. How will the proposed project implement an adopted or draft Sustainable Communities Strategy?

Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) is in the process of developing their 2020 Sustainable Communities Strategy. The plan calls for several objectives and policies that would be directly implemented through this proposed project

The proposed project supports 3 of the 10 overall SCS plan goals including:

- *Promote conservation of natural and agricultural lands and restoration of habitats.* Preserving the region's natural resource areas will ensure that future generations will be able to enjoy Southern California's unique landscapes as we do.
- *Reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve air quality.* Agricultural lands conservation helps avoid emissions and depending on the crop type or practice, promotes carbon sequestration.
- *Encourage regional economic prosperity and global competitiveness.* Productive farm and range lands bring billions of dollars into Southern California's economy, creating jobs and providing food security.

In addition to supporting these overall goals, the proposed SCS also outlines several policies and strategies that would be met through this project including:

Relevant Policies/Next Steps in Technical Report (page 21-22):

- *Facilitate Partnerships and Collaboration:* Encourage, cultivate, and facilitate partnerships and collaboration on natural/ farmlands policies and programs between public, educational and non-profit agencies throughout the SCAG region.
- *Encourage Regional Conservation Planning:* Seek and expand engagement with resource and permitting agencies, County Transportation Commissions, Caltrans, California High Speed Rail Authority and other partners on regional advance mitigation and integrated regional conservation planning
- *Support Innovative Land Use Policies:* Recognize the region's growth potential and its inherent connection between the conservation of existing natural/farm lands and strategies to promote infill, such as transfer of development rights and land banking, which relieve pressure to expand the urban footprint. Additionally, continue efforts to work toward identifying priority conservation areas, including habitat and farmland areas, to permanently protect as part of future regional plans.
- *Align with Funding Opportunities:* SCAG aims to help local agencies seek planning funds, such as Cap-and-Trade auction proceeds that could help prepare for local action on acquisition and restoration.

We would specifically like to note the "encourage regional conservation planning" policy, which directly supports regional organizations in developing a local strategy for conserving agriculture through a mitigation or land banking program. In early conversations, SCAG staff and leadership have demonstrated enthusiastic support for this effort as it allows for a way to plan regionally for development needs while considering the most important agricultural lands and developing a program to ensure long-term success of these lands. SCAG also explicitly calls out the SALC program in their Technical Report as an opportunity to meet their SCS goals.

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

The proposed project is consistent with 2 of the 3 State Planning Priorities including:

1. Protect the state's natural and working lands, including agricultural land, lands of cultural and historic significance, wetlands, and wildlands.
 - a. By mapping existing agricultural resources, reviewing and enhancing local policies, and developing an agricultural preservation program, this project will support the State's goals of protecting natural and working lands.
2. Develop in an efficient manner that limits sprawl and minimizes costs to taxpayers.
 - a. The project will work with cities and other planning agencies to strategically prioritize important agricultural lands and reduce urban sprawl into more rural communities.

6. What economic, environmental, public health, or other co-benefits would arise from the project and how will those co-benefits be measured?

1. Economic Benefits:

The proposed project has several economic benefits both to the local economy and for individual farmers. As previously mentioned, the agricultural industry in SB County brings in over \$493 million a year. By protecting farmland, we can continue to maintain that local economic resource. Inland Empire farmers also have a great marketing opportunity, with over 2 million residents residing in the valley region, and the City of Los Angeles within 50 miles, there is an enormous market in which to sell locally grown produce and establish a more local food system. There are also economic benefits for farmers through this proposed project. Farmers who are interested in permanently conserving their land through easements may have the opportunity to be compensated for the value of the easement through mitigation credits or SALC's easement program. In addition to an upfront payment, farmers will receive ongoing economic benefits through reduction of annual taxes due to the decreased property value once an easement is recorded, as well as Federal and State tax incentives for land preservation. Because easements reduce the value of the land, future farmers will be able to access more affordable agricultural lands therefore preserving future agricultural jobs and elements of the existing agricultural economy.

2. Environmental Benefits:

There are several environmental benefits that are expected from this proposal, including improved groundwater quality and quantity, reduced GHG emissions, and increased habitat for wildlife species. With much of the valley region developed, runoff from storm events is primarily channelized and not naturally absorbed by the landscape. Preventing conversion of agricultural lands would allow the land to serve as an important recharge station for our groundwater resources and watershed health during rain and irrigation events. As mentioned previously, this project has a great opportunity to reduce GHG emissions by reducing land conversion and promoting infill development, thereby keeping working lands working. These working lands will then be encouraged to implement agricultural practices that reduce GHG emissions so that the land use becomes even more beneficial for GHG reduction goals.

3. Wildlife Habitat:

The San Bernardino Valley contains sensitive habitats home to plant and animal species that are designated as threatened or endangered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Preserved agricultural lands serve as important open space to preserve habitat for these species. Agricultural lands also provide habitat components for bird species and pollinators, especially as a food source. The edge habitat can be enhanced for habitat value through conservation programs like the Natural Resources Conservation Service's EQIP Program and the CDFA Healthy Soils Program. These funding programs support not only soil health and water efficiency projects, but also projects that enhance wildlife habitat including windbreaks and pollinator hedgerows. The Inland Empire is also home to many threatened and endangered species that can use agricultural lands near riparian areas for habitat, including the Least Bell's Vireo and Southwestern Willow Flycatcher.

4. Public Health Benefits:

Public health benefits are a major element of this proposal, because the project is located within a highly developed region serving millions of residents, there is great potential to address and improve public health. Agriculture is considered important open space and while it might not serve as recreation, it does maintain important green space and offers opportunities for community members to improve mental health. According to the 2017 San Bernardino Food Security and Obesity report, 28% percent of adults are considered obese and the median rate of obesity for children in school districts is 41%, which is connected in part to food insecurity as well as socio-economic issues. It is well documented that nutrition and food security are significantly linked, making local farming extremely important to provide opportunities in our region for easy access to healthy produce. The recent COVID-19 pandemic has also brought to light the importance of maintaining a local food system to serve communities during times of uncertainty for our globalized food system.

7. How will the proposal complement other projects in the region?

There are several projects ongoing in the San Bernardino valley region that will complement the project we are proposing. Some of these projects include:

1. SCAG's 2020 Sustainable Communities Strategy
 - As further described in question #3, SCAG is in the process of finalizing their 2020 SCS update. The current draft of this update recognizes the importance of working lands in regional conservation and has outlined several goals and strategies to preserve agriculture as a strategy for GHG reduction. The implementation of this proposed project would support several of the goals and strategies of the SCS.
2. SCAG's Greenprint
 - SCAG is also beginning the process of developing a Greenprint for the region. Once completed, this conservation tool will enable jurisdictions, land use planners, and developers to make land use decisions that reduce their impact on valuable land resources. Many of the stakeholders on this SALC proposal will be participating in the development of this Greenprint and providing input throughout the process, especially as it relates back to this SALC proposal.
3. County of San Bernardino General Plan Update
 - The County is in the final stages of updating its General Plan. The current draft Soils and Agriculture policy addresses the preservation of important farmlands by requiring an agricultural resource

evaluation on projects proposing to convert more than 20 acres of farmland and includes a mitigation requirement if conversion is deemed significant. The draft policy also supports conservation and preservation programs and establishing new or maintaining existing Williamson Act contracts.

4. Williamson Act Contracts

- There are currently over 190 parcels with existing Williamson Act Contracts, totaling approximately 2,800 acres within the San Bernardino Valley. The mapping and planning efforts will take into account existing and expiring contracts and use this data to inform placement of contiguous permanently preserved agricultural areas.

5. San Bernardino LAFCO agricultural policy development

- SB LAFCO participated in a Strategic Planning process in January 2019 where their Commission directed staff to return with a discussion on adopting open space and agricultural conservation policies. One proposed policy is the addition of a mitigation requirement for annexation projects. This policy would require, to the extent possible, that mitigation of agricultural land remain in the jurisdiction or County in which the impacts are made. The SALC proposal would directly support this effort by developing policies and a local mitigation program that could meet this policy requirement.

6. Rivers and Lands Conservancy 2016 Farmland Conservancy Program

- In 2016, RLC received funding from the DOC through which they were able to perform mapping of important farmlands in western San Bernardino and Riverside Counties. The project also enabled them to review and develop a report on existing policies for jurisdictions in the region. This SALC proposal will utilize and build off these initial efforts to further develop priorities for agricultural preservation, develop a mitigation program, and work directly with cities on reviewing policies.

7. GROW Riverside

- There has been recent momentum in Riverside and San Bernardino counties to build a regional marketplace for local food systems and advance public policy as it relates to food and agriculture. The Grow Riverside effort extends into all Inland Empire communities and works to support farmers in reaching marketplaces and supporting jurisdictions in updating agricultural policies.

8. Applicant's Experience Developing and Implementing Similar Projects

This proposal will be carried out as a joint effort between all stakeholders listed above, as well as additional stakeholders that will be identified as this project develops. LAFCO for San Bernardino County and the Inland Empire RCD will lead the effort and manage the program to ensure success criteria are met.

San Bernardino LAFCO is the submitting applicant for this proposal and will be working alongside Inland Empire RCD to carry out the scope of this project. One of LAFCO's missions is preserving open space and prime agricultural lands. SB LAFCO will help lead the policy review effort, along with IERCD staff and consultants. LAFCO will put together the data on Williamson Act contracts and Agricultural Preserves, in coordination with the County and cities, and reviewing other pertinent data with the stakeholder group.

The Inland Empire Resource Conservation District will be taking a lead role in the implementation of the SALC proposal, specifically in the regional mapping of agricultural resources and development of a mitigation program. The IERCD will also communicate with the stakeholder group and organize stakeholder meetings and facilitated working group sessions to carry out project scope. The IERCD is a public agency focusing on open

space preservation, habitat restoration, urban agriculture, and education and outreach. As part of their programming, the IERCD facilitates a habitat mitigation program to carry out mitigation requirements required by regulatory agencies. IERCD's mitigation program has been in place for over 15 years and holds over 1,000 acres of conservation easements and has carried out habitat enhancement and restoration for more than 5,000 acres. Most recently, the IERCD developed an Army Corps of Engineers certified In-Lieu Fee program, allowing for a more programmatic and strategic mitigation option in the Santa Ana Watershed. Prior experience in developing and implementing these mitigation programs will enable IERCD to create an agricultural mitigation program that prioritizes land for conservation and properly determines the costs for implementing such a program, including land costs, appraisals, legal fees, and staff time. IERCD is also involved in many urban agriculture efforts and has been awarded over \$300,000 in funding to support local farmers and urban agriculture projects, including the National Association of Conservation District's Urban Agriculture Conservation Grant and funding through the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

9. Which stakeholders will participate in project?

Stakeholders met in November 2019 to discuss regional needs for the preservation of agriculture, all of the stakeholders in attendance voiced their support for this project and plan to participate in various ways detailed below. This initial group will be further expanded to include missing stakeholders as the project continues, including additional city planning staff, local farmers, local ag industry voices, and more. This work will be carried out with staff and consultants who will hold opportunities for stakeholder engagement throughout the process, including input on the mapping and evaluation ranking of agricultural lands, drafting of policy language for local municipalities, and developing the structure and priority plan for the regional mitigation program. We envision this stakeholder group to grow into a long-term regional working group for agricultural policy and program development.

Several of the stakeholders and their proposed roles are included below. All stakeholders will be engaged throughout this process through bimonthly meetings. Additional working groups will be set up to work on specific elements on the SALC proposal:

- **LAFCO for San Bernardino County:** LAFCO will lead the policy effort by example, by creating a policy ensuring that an annexation applicant mitigate any conversion from agriculture land use to another land use by placing a condition of approval in the annexation resolution. LAFCO will also support the SALC project through review of policy for local municipalities and supporting policy updates. LAFCO will provide information on Williamson Act contract data and other regional information.
- **Inland Empire Resource Conservation District (IERCD):** IERCD will work alongside SB LAFCO to review local agricultural policies and encourage jurisdictions to update policies to include local mitigation requirements. IERCD will also develop an agricultural mitigation program to ensure that a program is available to accept future agricultural mitigation and agricultural easements. IERCD will also work to identify important lands that would be good candidates for the SALC Easement Program. Lastly, IERCD staff will lead the stakeholder meetings and ensure regional collaboration around the SALC grant
- **Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG):** SCAG will provide support in moving forward this effort forward as it directly benefits their ongoing SCS plan. Specifically, SCAG intends to serve a role in the stakeholder committee as well as helping to bring in additional stakeholders through their Regional Affairs Officers.

- **County of San Bernardino:** The County will support this work by attending stakeholder meetings and providing input on mapping, draft policies, and mitigation program development. The County will also work to help identify farmers within the County who may be interested in permanently protecting their lands and help set up meetings with interested municipalities.
- **City of Ontario:** The City of Ontario has been interested in expanding urban agriculture projects in their community. Most recently, the City was awarded the Transformative Climate Communities (TCC) grant, which includes an urban agriculture composting project. The City will continue to collaborate with stakeholders to discuss opportunities (including shared use) to appropriately integrate agricultural uses into the City's urban fabric to increase sustainability, food security, and community and cultural amenities.
- **City of Yucaipa:** The City of Yucaipa was awarded a SALC planning grant in 2019 for their efforts in establishing a grape growing industry in their City. The City will collaborate to find ways in which their SALC project fits into the proposed regional program.
- **San Bernardino County Farm Bureau:** SB County Farm Bureau will provide input on the criteria development for the mapping efforts and the mitigation program. Farm Bureau will also connect us with additional agricultural industry stakeholders and farmers who might be interested in conserving their farmland through the mitigation program.
- **University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE):** UCCE will serve on the stakeholder committee and provide valuable input on the development of the mapping product and the mitigation program. UCCE staff and volunteers will also provide outreach to educate farmers on conservation programs available to them.
- **Huerta del Valle Community Garden:** HDV is a non-profit partner that has developed extensive urban agriculture projects directly benefitting disadvantaged communities. HDV is interested in policy development as it relates to agriculture and accessing farmland, especially in more urban environments. HDV staff will be involved in policy review, especially in the jurisdictions in which their projects occur. HDV is also interested in connecting farmers from their new farmer-training program with land conserved through this effort.
- **Rivers and Lands Conservancy:** RLC has been a stakeholder in agricultural land conservation for several decades. In 2016 they received funding to perform a mapping analysis of agricultural resources which will be used to inform the current proposed mapping project. RLC is also an accredited land conservation organization, authorized to perform perpetuity conservation and may also develop an agricultural conservation program as part of the SALC process.
- **Robert Redford Conservancy:** The Robert Redford Conservancy will support this effort by providing outreach around land conservation issues and co-sponsoring a conference on sustainable agriculture and land use. The Conservancy would like to serve as a public platform to share this work and vision.
- **Loma Linda University:** Loma Linda University is interested in this project as it relates to public health and increasing opportunities for residents to access local food. They also are interested in seeing an increase in job opportunities in the agricultural sector as opposed to warehouse jobs and similar work.
- **UCR Center for Social Innovation:** The Center for Social Innovation focuses on community engagement and policy innovation for the Inland Empire. This organization is another great public platform for this project and can help broaden the reach of this effort to both community groups and important policy makers.

10. Maps

Project Area Boundary

