



# Protecting California Farmland and Ranchland

## with the Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation (SALC) Program

The nation's largest agricultural state is in danger of losing significant amounts of valuable farmland and ranchland, which provide a healthy food source for much of the United States. In fact, California loses 50,000 acres of agricultural land to development every year. Approximately 39,000 of these acres are lost to urban development. Yet, an acre of agricultural land in California emits 58 to 70 times less greenhouse gases than developed land. To ensure that California reaches its carbon neutrality goals and continues to support cleaner air standards for public health, the state must implement smart growth practices that include the protection of important agricultural land.

American Farmland Trust (AFT) is the largest national organization dedicated to saving the land that sustains us by protecting farmland, promoting sound farming practices, and keeping farmers on the land. As the leader of the national

agricultural protection movement, AFT worked jointly with California Climate & Agriculture Network (CalCAN) and Community Alliance of Family Farmers (CAFF) to create the **Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program (SALC)** at the Strategic Growth Council. The first SALC grants were awarded in 2015 to support conservation easements on farmland and ranchland. By 2020, there were already 100 agricultural conservation easements funded in 36 counties, covering over 112,000 acres of permanently protected agricultural land.

The SALC Program makes permanent investments in smart growth and greenhouse gas emission reductions through conservation easements. The program is a component of the Strategic Growth Council's Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities Program and is administered by the Department of Conservation (DOC). By funding agricultural conservation easements, the SALC program ensures that the agricultural characteristics of farmland are retained while also incentivizing improved conservation practices. The SALC program has historically been funded by the California Climate Investment Fund, which is supported by cap-and-trade auction proceeds administered by the California Air Resources Board.



## What Are SALC's Priorities?

The SALC program selects projects that:

- Protect lands at highest risk of development
- Promote agricultural sustainability and food security
- Support land use planning processes consistent with the goals of the Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities Program
- Provide multiple co-benefits, such as protecting farmland, reducing urban sprawl, ensuring food security, and helping to reduce atmospheric carbon

## Funding Criteria

The DOC considers several factors, including:

- **Likelihood of Development** — SALC aims to fund projects in areas that otherwise are very likely to be developed. Development potential is indicated by proximity to a city or development boundaries. This consideration encourages smarter and denser city growth instead of perpetuating urban sprawl.
- **Environmental Stewardship** — SALC guidelines encourage projects with environmental conservation value and co-benefits.
- **Water Conservation** — SALC gives points to applicants that incorporate water efficiency practices or otherwise reduce on-farm water use.

## In Summary

SALC recognizes that long-term planning is crucial for California communities to:

- Mitigate and adapt to climate change
- Meet state goals for long-term protection and management of agricultural lands
- Allow smart growth and protect the state's most important agricultural lands

## QUICK FACTS

- ▶ Established and first SALC grants awarded in 2015
- ▶ Administered by Department of Conservation
- ▶ 100 agricultural conservation easements funded in 36 counties covering over 112,000 acres of protected agricultural land
  - ▷ **Counties with SALC grants:** Monterey, San Luis Obispo, Calaveras, Placer, Santa Clara, Mono, San Joaquin, Solano, Madera, Merced, Siskiyou, Shasta, Lassen, Tehama, Butte, Sierra, Nevada, Humboldt, Mendocino, Sonoma, Napa, Yolo, Sutter, Yuba, Sacramento, Solano, Marin, Contra Costa, Tuolumne, Mariposa, Santa Cruz, San Benito, Fresno, Kern, San Bernardino, Santa Barbara
- ▶ 14 planning grants awarded to support implementation of local plans that reduce greenhouse gas emissions
  - ▷ **Planning grant recipients:** City of Yucaipa, County of Madera, City of McFarland, County of Mendocino, City of Arcata, County of Mariposa
- ▶ More than \$180 M awarded since the program's inception
- ▶ Currently in SALC's sixth round of grants

## IN 2019 ALONE

- ▶ \$56.9M awarded: \$55.5M for conservation easements and \$1.4M for planning
- ▶ 31 easements awarded
- ▶ 6 planning grants awarded
- ▶ Easements awarded will protect more than 20,000 acres of farm and rangeland, thus avoiding an estimated 5.19 million metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent:
  - ▷ 34% on irrigated farmland
  - ▷ 53% on rangeland
  - ▷ 13% mixed-use agriculture
- ▶ SALC awarded a grant to a technical assistance provider that supported three local governments applying for planning grants

SALC grants also allow California counties to implement land use planning that incorporates smart development and agricultural land protection. These planning grants support the implementation of local plans that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, encourage cleaner air, and allow farmers and ranchers to continue to feed their communities and the nation.

AFT urges support in maintaining continuous appropriations of GGRF to support this critical program.