

To: Nora Vargas and Terra Lawson-Reemer  
From: Bea Alvarez, Co-Director  
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Date: 4/29/2022

**RE: Green Jobs and Carbon Sink Farming**

Dear Green Jobs Champions,

Sustainable agriculture is among the most urgently needed work in the United States, for at least three reasons: we face a climate crisis, a health crisis, and a rural economic crisis. Addressing these pressing crises through sustainability transition will require growing our agricultural workforce: both because the current farm population is aging, and because sustainable agriculture is knowledge-intensive work that substitutes experiential knowledge of farm ecosystems for harmful industrial inputs. Given its social value, sustainable agriculture ought to be a welcoming profession. But at present, agriculture is decidedly unwelcoming for nearly all who work in it – making new entry unviable unless significant investments are made to change the trajectory.

As early adopters of climate-smart, sustainable farming practices, we have a handful of recommendations for how San Diego County can elevate the agricultural sector in its efforts to accelerate green employment across our region.

**1) Recognize healthy soil as vital public infrastructure.**

The world grows 95% of its food in the uppermost layer of soil, making topsoil one of the most important components of our food system. But due to conventional farming practices, nearly half of the most productive soil has disappeared and soil on US cropland is eroding 10 times faster than it can be replenished. Soils contain approximately 75% of the carbon pool on land – *three times more than the amount stored in living plants and animals*. Therefore, we must link the loss of topsoil to the climate crisis and accelerate the regeneration of healthy soil as a vital climate solution.

**2) Support carbon sink voluntary incentives to compensate the private sector for its investments in soil infrastructure.**

The vast majority of soil cultivation is undertaken by the private sector. Farmers resist mandates because our individual circumstances are extremely variable. Voluntary incentives are a more appropriate mechanism to influence farmer behavior. We know that carbon sink farming methods create healthier topsoil and that there are significant co-benefits to healthy soil. Yet, County staff seem reluctant to elevate carbon farming as an important climate

solution. We understand the significant barriers presented by existing (or no pre-existing) policy, but encourage the Board of Supervisors to act decisively to invest in a carbon sink incentive pilot that can demonstrate how the private agricultural sector can contribute to climate solutions.

**3) Prioritize purchasing from carbon sink farms to stimulate green job growth.**

The County can demonstrate the value of carbon sink farming and stimulate green job growth on sustainable farms by prioritizing County produce purchases from farms with an active Carbon Farm Plan. The County could utilize existing staff at Agricultural Weights and Measures to verify active practices in a similar way that Farmers Market certification is maintained. Farms with a reliable buyer are more likely to add additional workers and new farmers are more likely to launch farm businesses if they can see a path towards economic viability.

**4) Plan for farmer/farmworker protections during climate events.**

We can assume that climate change will bring higher temperatures and more frequent extreme weather events to San Diego County. Adequate preparation for these events will improve our resilience to them. Therefore, we recommended including opportunities (such as outreach and education about weather warning systems or state and federal disaster mitigation programs) into our local green job plan.

**5) Invest in mentorship, training and new farmer incubation programs.**

Farmers/farmworkers are extremely busy individuals and carbon sink, sustainable, or regenerative practices take time to study, integrate and act upon. Further, the practices are extremely context specific and we are only beginning to have local knowledge to demonstrate. Alongside efforts to incentivize new practices, we need a significant investment in farmer-to-farmer mentorship and San Diego-specific, multilingual, training programs for existing farmers. Resources must also be found to support beginning farmers during their first three to five years of operation to ensure they can successfully launch new green businesses.

**6) Invest in affordable (and green) rural housing to ensure farming is a viable occupation.**

Without affordable housing (particularly in rural and peri-urban parts of San Diego) there is zero chance that green job growth will occur in the agricultural sector. We recommend the County identify resources at the US Department of Food and Agriculture (USDA) and California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) to build or restore the housing stock in San Diego's unincorporated areas. We also recommend that the County actively engage affordable housing developers in the construction of farmworker-specific housing.

**7) Invigorate investments in sustainable agriculture education at community colleges.**

As in any green job sector, adequate training is a key component to success. We recommend the County identifies opportunities at our fantastic community colleges to offer training, certification and associate degrees in sustainable, climate smart agriculture. We encourage these training programs to be bilingual so that the Spanish-speakers that fuel our food system have equal opportunity to participate.

**8) Integrate more science into Farm to School education programs to interest future farmers in pursuing a green career in agriculture.**

Interest in sustainable agriculture as a green career begins early. We firmly believe that farming as a green profession should be more actively integrated into school-based programs such as Farm to School. The County could partner to secure grant funding in this area and utilize programs such as Master Gardeners to teach about the intersection of climate change and our food system.

We sincerely thank you for providing leadership to ensure that San Diegans have quality green jobs in our changing economy. We also appreciate your commitment to equity and ensuring that farmers and farmworkers have a significant place in a greener future.

Sincerely,

**Carbon Sink Farms Network**

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|-----------------------------|---|---------------------|
| Behneman Farm               | Grow Eco Farm                                 | Full Send Farm      |
| A La Vuelta Farm            | Paradise Valley Farm                          | Pixca Farm          |
| Solidarity Farm             | Garden Unidos                                 | Black Mountain Farm |
| Hukama Farms                | Diwa Ng Lupa Farm                             | Sweet Spot Farm     |
| Sage Hill Ranch Gardens     | BeeWorthy Farms                               | Highlands Orchard   |
| Community Roots Farm        | Little Bitty Farm                             | Apple Blossom Farm  |
| Sea + Soil, 1000 Tiny Farms | Bee Valley Farm                               | Elizabeth Vaughan   |
|                             | Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) |                     |

**Organizational Sign On**

