



AB 838 – Farmer Equity and Innovation Center

SUMMARY:

The bill seeks to ensure the economic viability of small farms and ranches run by socially disadvantaged farmers/ranchers in order to promote greater diversity and equity across California’s agricultural sector.

This would be achieved by establishing a coordinated, statewide program based in the ANR branch of the University of California system, utilizing the existing Small Farm Advisors, and would prioritize support for limited resource farmers/ranchers and socially disadvantage farmers/ranchers (collectively “operators”) through a program called the FARMER EQUITY AND INNOVATION CENTER.

BACKGROUND:

California’s farmers and ranchers are some of the most diverse across the United States. California has the largest population of Asian-American farmers and ranks third in the nation of Latino farmers. The quickly changing demographic trends in California show a decline in aging, white farmers, and an increase in the proportion of farmers of color.

More than 25,000 California farmers and ranchers identify themselves as people of color. These farmers of color account for nearly 21% of agricultural producers in the state. While increased diversity among farmers and ranchers is encouraging, data from the most recent agricultural census shows that farmers of color tend to own less land, make less money, and receive less federal and state support than their white counterparts. These farmers of color in California are also typically under-resourced and are often underrepresented.

In 2017, the Farmer Equity Act was enacted where it defined a “socially disadvantaged farmer” to be a farmer or rancher who has been subjected to racial, ethnic, or gender prejudice. The Act also mandated that the California Department of Food

& Agriculture adopt policies that would ensure the inclusion of socially disadvantaged farmers in the creation and enforcement of food and agriculture laws, regulations, and programs.

Although the Farmer Equity Act is just now being implemented to address deficiencies in the inclusion of socially disadvantage farmers at CDFA, there is no program directly targeting socially disadvantaged farmers on the ground in their communities.

UC ANR previously operated a program called the Small Farm Program. The Program was based on UC Davis’s campus where they provided outreach to small farmers on the ground through “Small Farm Advisors” deployed through county UC Cooperative Extension offices throughout the state. Due to budget cuts following the Great Recession, this program was cut down from six, to four Small Farm Advisors. Additionally, the center and staff established on the UCD campus were dispersed throughout different departments, and the center was effectively shut down in 2010.

As it stands today, four Small Farm Advisors currently work through the UC Cooperative Extension providing as much assistance as they can to thousands of socially disadvantaged farmers. This imbalance serves as a prime example of how under-resourced socially disadvantage farmers in the state of California are.

THIS BILL:

The Center will be built up to assist these operators with farm/ranch management, marketing for direct to consumer and local retail sources, and research projects specific to operator growing trends and issues. It will eventually conduct outreach regarding education of other existing programs, provide multilingual services and materials to suit the regional needs, and conduct workshops relevant to specific regional needs.



AB 838 – Farmer Equity and Innovation Center

The Center will also be allowed to direct operators to grant/financing sources and technical assistance focused nonprofits. Additionally, the Center will be authorized to eventually provide partial reimbursement for any operator who participates in an internship or on-the-job training related to small farming/ranching.

Finally, the bill would also mandate a study be conducted no later than 5 years after the creation of the program to assess the viability, successes, and weaknesses of the program. It will also report on the demographic breakdown of those operators assisted through the Center. The breakdown will include information about location, race and ethnicity, acreage of farmland or rangeland, acreage of land owned, acreage of land leased, crops grown and the acreage of each crop, crop yields, and gross and net profits..

SUPPORT:

Community Alliance with Family Farmers (Co-sponsor)
California Farmer Justice Collaborative (Co-sponsor)

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Office of Assemblymember Eggman
Lilliana Udang
Lilliana.Udang@asm.ca.gov
916.319.2013