



April 3, 2019

The Honorable Robert Rivas  
State Capitol, Room 5158  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: AB 986 (R. Rivas) Regional Economies and Equity in Agricultural Land (REEAL) Act of 2019 - SUPPORT**

Dear Assemblymember Rivas,

On behalf of the Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF), I am writing in support of your bill – AB 986 (Rivas) – which will establish the Regional Economies and Equity in Agricultural Lands (REEAL) Program. This program will increase access to farmland and capital for socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers to secure agriculture lands for the preservation of farming.

For over 40 years, CAFF has worked on behalf of family farmers in California to build sustainable food and farming systems, through on-the-ground services, as well as statewide advocacy. We support the viability and success of farmers that put food on California's tables.

California loses 50,000 acres of farmland and rangeland each year, threatening our food production and agricultural economy. At the same time, the price of farmland has risen 35% in just the last 5 years, and continues to be the biggest barrier to entering farming. This challenge is compounded for socially disadvantaged farmers who face additional barriers as members of historically underserved communities. While the number of socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers attempting to farm in urban and rural areas is increasing; many of these farmers do not receive essential support from federal or state assistance programs, making it nearly impossible to acquire land, the most basic necessity to farm.

According to the 2012 USDA National Agriculture Statistics Survey, diversity of farmers continues to increase annually. California has the largest population of Asian- American farmers and has the third most Hispanic farmers in the nation. However, farmers of color tend to have smaller farms, earn less money, and receive 36% less in government funding than their white counterparts.

In 2017, the Legislature passed the Farmer Equity Act of 2017 (AB 1348, Aguiar-Curry\_ which requires the California Department of Food and Agriculture to ensure the inclusion of socially

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disadvantaged farmers and ranchers in state food and agriculture policy making. In order to establish parity within assistance programs providing aid to farmers and ranchers, the Legislature must continue to enact policies that ensure programs and funds are provided to support socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.

AB 986 seeks to establish the REEAL Program within the Department of Conservation to conserve agricultural land and provide capital for socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers to better access farmland and rangeland.

For the above reasons, we are pleased to support AB 986 and we thank you for your leadership on this critical issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Towers', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Paul Towers  
Executive Director