



## Assemblymember Lori D. Wilson, 11<sup>th</sup> Assembly District

### AB 408 – The Climate Resilience Farms, Sustainable Healthy Food Access, and Farmworker Protection Bond Act of 2024

Last Revised: 3/6/23

#### SUMMARY

Assembly Bill 408 will place the Climate Resilience Farms, Sustainable Healthy Food Access, and Farmworker Protection Bond Act before the voters in 2024. The bond's investments will improve the state's climate change readiness while also increasing healthy food access for Californians, and protecting our essential food and farm system workers. Specifically, AB 408 will make investments related to regional food processing and market infrastructure, expanding resources for the safety of essential agricultural workers, bolstering California's food access infrastructure to combat hunger, and advancing sustainable agriculture that improves climate resilience, biodiversity and public health outcomes.

#### ISSUE

A secure, resilient, sustainable, and equitable food and farming system is essential for the economic and social well-being of the people of California. The climate crisis already adversely affects many parts of the state's food and farming system. In recent years, the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing supply chain disruptions have laid bare the vulnerabilities of this system. California's low-income communities of color and Tribal communities bear a disproportionate impact of these challenges. Approximately 20 percent of Californians, or 7.9 million people, are food insecure. Black, Latino, Native American, and other Californians who identify with two or more racial categories have higher rates of food insecurity compared to their non-Latino, white counterparts. At the same time, food banks do not have the means or resources to provide for the large number of hungry Californians.<sup>i</sup>

Farmworkers, a primarily Latino and immigrant workforce, who often lack access to safe, affordable housing and live in overcrowded housing conditions, are particularly vulnerable to extreme weather events, wildfire smoke exposure, heat related illness, and work interruptions as the climate crisis intensifies. The farmers and ranchers that feed us are not immune to these challenges and many are struggling to make ends meet as input costs have skyrocketed and ongoing supply chain challenges threaten the viability of agricultural operations, particularly for small-scale farms and farmers of color. In these times of increasing drought frequency and intensity, California's water rights system has

disproportionately harmed small, new and beginning farmers, particularly women and those historically underserved, forcing some to cease operating. With California agricultural land prices increasing 10 percent between 2021 and 2022<sup>ii</sup>, accessing agricultural land and securing land tenure continue to present obstacles.

Meanwhile farmers who relied on restaurant and institutional markets experienced a 50 percent loss in markets at the beginning of the pandemic and continue to experience volatile markets.<sup>iii</sup> Farmworkers, many of whom live in overcrowded conditions, have been especially vulnerable to contracting COVID-19. One study found that Monterey County farmworkers were three times more likely to contract COVID compared to other workers in the county.<sup>iv</sup> These bleak realities require judicious and ongoing support from the state. California's Fourth Climate Assessment predicts that even if greenhouse gas emissions are reduced at a moderate rate, extreme heat days as measured in Fresno would still increase from an average of 4 per year in 2005 to 26 per year in 2050<sup>v</sup>. The statewide increased temperatures are expected to translate to up to 4,300 excess deaths in 2025 and up to 11,300 in 2050.

#### SOLUTION

The time is now to scale up just solutions to bolster our economy and expand local food sources in order to strengthen supply chain resilience amidst the climate crisis. Assembly Bill 408 will protect jobs in our communities and our essential food system workers, and create a secure and resilient food and farming system. Strategic investments in infrastructure projects that support California's workforce, climate resilient farms and ranches, regional food supply chains, and increased access to healthy foods will help build California's economy, while increasing overall resilience against future catastrophes, including climate change. The bond will invest in four main areas:

1. Investing in California's regional and local food processing, distribution, and market infrastructure: The state can spur economic growth through investments in regional and local infrastructure critical for food access, market diversity, and economic resiliency. California needs many more food hubs to aggregate supply from

producers, as well as food processing, meat processing and livestock slaughter facilities, cold storage, and distribution facilities – all with an eye towards building sustainable and resilient local and regional food systems. We have already seen examples of how government investment in these areas can make a difference with the state’s Office of Farm to Fork, the Farm to School Program, and with the federal farm bill programs, but those dollars are limited and often require matching funds. With the proposed bond, we will have an opportunity to scale this work up across the state.

2. Expanding resources for the safety and well-being of essential farm and food system workers: Farmworkers and other essential workers across the food chain -- from production, processing, and packing to retail and delivery – are disproportionately vulnerable to impacts of climate change. Smoke, heat and flooding are common threats to farmworker communities and decades of disinvestment have left many communities without access to safe, affordable housing. This bond will include a range of investment areas to proactively address farmworkers’ health and safety needs.

3. Bolstering investments in California’s food access infrastructure to combat hunger: California food banks have been hit hard during these challenging times. With an estimated 7.9 million food insecure Californians, a more focused level of state engagement and investment in infrastructure to support anti-hunger efforts in the state is desperately needed. Improving food access for the most vulnerable Californians to combat hunger in the state is a key component of this measure.

4. Advancing sustainable agriculture and investments that improve climate resilience, biodiversity and public health: Diverse, organic, and regenerative cropping systems help reduce farmers’ economic vulnerabilities by expanding market opportunities. These structures also rebuild soil health and improve on-farm resilience to droughts, floods, and pest outbreaks. The state can invest in existing programs like the Climate Smart Agriculture

programs, UC Cooperative Extension, Cal Recycle’s Waste Reduction program, and CDFA’s Biologically Integrated Farming Systems program to support a healthier industry. California must make significant investments in successful, multiple-benefit programs to support farmer resilience to future climate change and market volatility to uphold California’s unique and prosperous agricultural production.

Together, these important efforts will accelerate our state’s economic recovery while combating climate change, improving food security, and protecting our essential food and farm system workers.

## **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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## **SUPPORT**

Agriculture Institute of Marin  
American Farmland Trust  
California Climate & Agriculture Network (CalCAN)  
California Certified Organic Farmers  
California Nurses for Environmental Health and Justice  
Californians for Pesticide Reform  
Carbon Cycle Institute  
Center for Food Safety  
Central California Environmental Justice Network  
Centro Binacional para el Desarrollo Indígena Oaxaqueño (CBDIO)  
Community Alliance with Family Farmers  
Food Forward  
Healthcare Without Harm  
Mandela Partners  
Monterey Bay Central Labor Council  
Natural Resources Defense Council  
Pesticide Action Network  
Roots of Change  
Sustainable Agriculture Education

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<sup>i</sup>See: [https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/Brief\\_Local%20Impact\\_10.2020\\_0.pdf](https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2020-10/Brief_Local%20Impact_10.2020_0.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> [https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/Todays\\_Reports/reports/land0822.pdf](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/Todays_Reports/reports/land0822.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> #FarmersFeedtheNeed – a coordinated effort to provide food to needy Californians. April 30, 2020. CDFA blog. <https://plantingseedsblog.cdfa.ca.gov/wordpress/?p=21213>

<sup>iv</sup> Increased Risks and Fewer Jobs: Evidence of California Farmworker Vulnerability During the COVID-19 Pandemic. Villarejo, D. July 25, 2020. CIRS.

[https://www.cirsinc.org/phocadownload/farmworker\\_vulnerability\\_covid-19\\_research-report\\_final\\_villarejo\\_07-26-2020.pdf](https://www.cirsinc.org/phocadownload/farmworker_vulnerability_covid-19_research-report_final_villarejo_07-26-2020.pdf)