



Land Use & Natural Resources Committee

January 30, 2014

USDA Agriculture and Food Research Initiative Grant

Issue: Should SACOG submit a grant proposal for the USDA Agriculture and Food Research Initiative Foundational Program grant program?

Recommendation: That the Land Use & Natural Resources committee recommend that the SACOG Board authorize the Chief Executive Officer to submit a concept proposal and full proposal for the USDA Agriculture and Food Research Initiative Foundational Program grant program.

Discussion: The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) established the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) to make competitive grants for fundamental and applied research, education, and extension to address food and agriculture. There are six priority areas including: 1) plant health and production and plant products; 2) animal health and production and animal products; 3) food safety, nutrition, and health; 4) renewable energy, natural resources, and environment; 5) agriculture systems and technology; and 6) agriculture economics and rural communities. SACOG would be submitting a proposal under the agriculture economics and rural communities priority area. Specifically, the proposal would fall under the Environmental and Natural Resources Economic project area of the priority area. A letter of intent for this priority area is required by February 19, 2014. The full application is due on April 28, 2014.

Staff is currently working on the concept proposal and will present a draft at the committee meeting. A key grant priority is to promote economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable agriculture and resilient rural communities. Staff believes that the RUCS project is uniquely capable of conducting analysis that fits the grant objectives. Generally, the proposal will outline work that will assess strategies and scenarios that maximize various objectives such as profitability, job creation, water conservation, environmental services, and others. It will include analysis relating to management strategies for these various purposes under drought conditions. Comparison of these scenarios will provide an understanding of the tradeoffs between various objectives and management strategies and help public and private stakeholders understand how to achieve objectives and possible consequences from those strategies.

Approved by:

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Chief Executive Officer

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DRAFT Concept Proposal for USDA Agriculture and Food Research Initiative Competitive Grants Program

Proposal Title: Sustained Agricultural Viability in the Sacramento Region: Management Strategies to Maximize the Economic and Environmental Services of Open Lands

Rational: The Sacramento region has a long agricultural tradition and continues to evince a unique diversity of farm size, crop type, and working landscape habitat. Despite this heritage the region until recently lacked a corresponding focus on rural issues, with most research targeted towards urbanization. In response SACOG created the innovative Rural-Urban Connections Strategy (RUCS), a research platform to look at sustainability in the Sacramento region from a rural perspective. This work has helped fuel a renaissance in agriculture, bringing to the forefront how the Sacramento region can leverage and better manage its natural resources to create new economic value and jobs while protecting the environment and preserving rural quality of life.

Goals and Objectives: The goal of this submission is to assess strategies and scenarios that maximize the economic and environmental services of agriculture in the Sacramento region. On the economics side this includes crop changes and resulting job creation and profitability, while environmental services will look at groundwater recharge, habitat and flood control (an issue of particular relevance for the Sacramento region). The specific objectives are to work with stakeholders to identify and analyze landscape level management strategies that enhance the services of open lands operating under a series of future conditions.

Approach: SACOG intends to utilize the innovative RUCS framework to approach these questions. The first component of the proposal is to measure agricultural viability through a series of economic scenarios drawing on the RUCS analytical platform. A key task of the proposal would be to then build out data and analysis on the environmental services of different crops, landscape types and market strategies to complement existing knowledge on the economic benefits of open lands. One scenario of interest is the effect of drought conditions on both economic and environmental services. Finally, the results of these scenarios would be synthesized into management strategies tailored to specific outcomes of the agricultural system.

Impact and Expected Outcomes: The results of scenario analysis by landscape type will showcase the tradeoffs between various economic and environmental objectives and corresponding production regiments. In particular, it will provide integrated strategies that embrace both production and sustainable resource management while helping a broad array of public and private stakeholders understand the consequences of various management strategies. The impact of this work is not limited solely to the Sacramento Valley but is highly relevant throughout California, the nation's largest agricultural state.