



Item #13-12-6 Action

Land Use & Natural Resources Committee

November 27, 2013

Proposal for 2014 Specialty Crop Block Grant

Issue: Should SACOG submit a concept proposal and full proposal for the 2014 Specialty Crop Block Grant funds.

Recommendation: That the Land Use & Natural Resources Committee recommend that the SACOG Board authorize the Chief Executive Officer to submit proposals for the 2014 Specialty Crop Block Grant program.

Discussion: The California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) expects that up to \$17 million in block grants from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will be made available next year to support and enhance specialty crop production. Specialty crops are defined as fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, and nursery crops. These crops account for 52 percent of U.S. farm gate value according to the USDA and make up much of California's agricultural production. Non-profit and for-profit organizations; local, state, and federal government entities including tribal governments; and public or private colleges and universities are eligible to apply for awards between \$50,000 and \$400,000. SACOG has received past awards from this grant program for work related to the Rural-Urban Connections Strategy (RUCS). It should be noted that funding is contingent upon passage of a Farm Bill and available funding from the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service.

Staff is working on two proposals. The main proposal will build upon past agriculture economic viability work for the RUCS project to provide data and information on environmental services, such as habitat, groundwater recharge and carbon sequestration, that are provided by specialty crop production areas. The study would also examine how changing production practices and land management practices may enhance these services. Once these services and practices are identified, the study would then analyze how policy and regulations affect the implementation of the practices. SACOG staff is also working with partners to develop a possible companion proposal that would focus on technical work, specifically data and model development, to provide analytical capacity commensurate with the agricultural land use and economic analysis capabilities available in the UrbanFootprint model.

This proposed work would enable SACOG to address the environmental sustainability objectives of RUCS and implement open space and sustainability policies and strategies adopted in the last Metropolitan Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy listed in Attachments A and B. The work is significant to specialty crop production because it would demonstrate that value can be derived from not only crop production, but also environmental services.

SACOG's conceptual proposals are under development at the time of the agenda packet mailing, but will be distributed at the committee meeting. Conceptual proposals are due on December 6 and invitations to submit full proposals will be announced in February 2014. Full proposals are due to CDFA by March 21, 2014. Staff is seeking approval to submit a concept proposal and full proposal if the conceptual proposal is accepted.

Approved by:

Mike McKeever
Chief Executive Officer

MM:DS:ts
Attachments

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MTP/SCS Policies and Strategies Related to Regional Working Landscapes Effort

1. Policy: Provide information, tools, incentives and encouragement to local governments that have chosen to grow consistent with Blueprint principles.

1.4. **Strategy:** Create and invest in a rural strategy and program to improve transportation systems that affect the economic viability of rural areas located in jurisdictions that implement good growth patterns, consistent with the Blueprint Principles, the Rural-Urban Connections Strategy, or other rural initiatives.

2. Policy: SACOG intends to educate and provide information to policymakers, local staff, and the public about the mutually supportive relationship between smart growth development, transportation, and resource conservation.

2.10 **Strategy:** Provide technical analysis and education to inform policy and decision makers, local staff, and regional stakeholders about the benefits of strategic growth management on the region's open space resources and the economic and environmental benefits they provide.

6. Policy: SACOG encourages local governments to direct greenfield developments to areas immediately adjacent to the existing urban edge through data-supported information, incentives and pursuit of regulatory reform for cities and counties.

6.5. **Strategy:** Encourage local jurisdictions to use RUCS data and tools to analyze possible impacts to agriculture and natural resources from the urban growth footprint.

7. Policy: Implement the Rural-Urban Connection Strategy (RUCS) which ensures good rural-urban connections and promotes the economic viability of rural lands while also protecting open space resources to expand and support the implementation of the Blueprint growth strategy and the MTP/SCS.

7.1. **Strategy:** Use research, data and modeling to inform a stakeholder-driven process to conceptualize approaches to sustainable rural land use policies encompassing, at a minimum, issues such as agricultural practices, natural resource and agricultural land conservation, economic development and market influences (including markets for energy, carbon sequestration and other environmental services), rural development practices (including methods to encourage jobs-housing fit and minimize the impact of rural development on agriculture), and infrastructure needs.

7.2. **Strategy:** Ensure consistency between the RUCS and local Habitat Conservation Plans and Natural Communities Conservation Plans.

7.3. **Strategy:** Ensure that the RUCS is coordinated with the Blueprint and MTP/SCS to support each of these planning efforts individually, as well as collectively.

7.4. **Strategy:** Conduct analysis on how various rural land use strategies affect vehicle miles of travel, mode share and air emissions, as well as rural economic viability and environmental sustainability.

7.5. **Strategy:** Invest in transportation projects that help implement the RUCS recommendations. Investment recommendations may include agritourism-related and goods movement projects and funding rural road improvements between cities when the county implements growth patterns consistent with the Blueprint.

7.6. **Strategy:** Support improved farm-to-market access, including investments along key rural truck corridors and cost-effective short-line railways and connectivity improvements to the Port of West Sacramento.

7.7. **Strategy:** Continue to refine SACOG funding criteria to ensure that they adequately recognize the unique needs of rural areas and provide proper incentives to reward rural land use and transportation practices that benefit the region and local areas.

9. Policy: Use the best information available to implement strategies and projects that lead to reduced Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions.

9.4 **Strategy:** Create an alternative fuel vehicle and infrastructure toolkit for local governments, create a public education program on individual transportation behavior and climate change, and create a regional open space strategy that is informed by RUCS.

MTP/SCS RUCS Appendix Related to Regional Working Landscapes Effort

Environmental Services: Understanding and enhance environmental sustainability

As mentioned throughout this report, the rural landscape not only produces food and fiber, but also provides a range of recreation and environmental services including: carbon sequestration, energy production, flood protection, groundwater recharge, habitat, and a wide range recreational uses. The RUCS objective is to work with stakeholders to develop strategies that enhance economic viability and environmental sustainability. Much of the RUCS work to date has focused on policies and plans that protect rural lands and support the agricultural and forestry industries. This work is helping the region improve the economic viability of rural industries which, coupled with smart urban growth strategies, is a critical component for conserving land. It is being accomplished through understanding challenges and opportunities, and using technical tools to assess current and future conditions and compare scenarios. This same approach will be applied to environmental services topics. While some of the environmental work has been included in RUCS accomplishments to date, SACOG intends to work with stakeholders to develop a richer understanding of the parks and open space challenges and opportunities and build data and modeling tools that help the region use better information for better decision making.

SACOG envisions providing the wealth of existing information developed through RUCS and future research to all stakeholders to identify regional goals and objectives, as well as strategies for achieving them. The land use section of this report includes such an objective as an innovation for addressing land conservation and environmental sustainability. Three examples of similar efforts are cited in that discussion and could provide a framework for how a similar effort in the SACOG region could be structured. With Board direction, SACOG could be a member of this collaborative and offer its range of planning and technical capacities to support it.

To support any new regional objectives, an inventory of existing data on recreational and open space lands could be assembled and analyzed for gaps. A recent example of such an effort is the Six County Aquatic Resource Inventory, which gathered aquatic resource data in the region and then identified where more data is needed to inventory resources. A similar effort can be conducted for other resources. Some possible data include:

- Groundwater recharge areas
- Riparian areas that contribute to floodplain protection

- Carbon storage
- Habitat connectivity/critical linkages
- Soils
- Vegetation data
- Habitat values for terrestrial and aquatic species
- Climate adaptation (measure of stress or vulnerability)
- Recreation (parks, trails and open space)
- Protected areas and priority conservation lands (habitat and working lands)

Where possible, these data could be integrated with the RUCS modeling platform to perform analysis of not only agricultural viability, but also environmental sustainability. Particularly where there are market opportunities for environmental services, these data and modeling results can help stakeholders and policy makers understand and promote resource conservation opportunities.

A rich set of information on the current and prospective uses for recreational and open space lands combined with goals and strategies could help the region secure and leverage state, federal and private funds to identify and invest in key areas that serve multiple benefits, such as flood protection, groundwater recharge, recreation, and natural resources and agricultural preservation. Some possible sources of funding include:

- Mitigation funds from development and infrastructure projects
- State water bonds (current and potential future)
- Private philanthropic dollars
- AB 32 auction revenues (or other sources) for conservation actions that sequester carbon and/or avoid conversion that releases carbon

As opportunities arise, SACOG will continue to work with stakeholders to capitalize and leverage any opportunities to achieve the rural economic and environmental sustainability objectives of the RUCS project.