May 10, 2020

Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors
70 West Hedding St.
San Jose, California 95110

RE: Santa Clara County Agricultural Resilience Incentive Grant Program - SUPPORT

Dear Chair Chavez, and Supervisors of the County of Santa Clara:

On behalf of the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority (Authority), I write to express our strong support for approval of the Policies and Procedures Guide for the Agricultural Resilience Incentives (ARI) Grant Program, as recommended in the staff memo dated May 12, 2020, submitted by Planning Director Onciano.

The Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority is a public, independent special district created by the California State Legislature in 1993 at the urging of community leaders who saw the importance of maintaining the ecological integrity of the region. The Authority conserves the natural environment, supports agriculture, and connects people to nature by protecting open spaces, natural areas, and working farms and ranches for future generations.

The Authority has been engaged in a long-standing partnership with the County of Santa Clara. One very important outcome of this partnership was to secure the first-in-the-State planning grant from the Strategic Growth Council’s Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation (SALC) program, which led to the creation of and County Board of Supervisors approval, in January 2018, of the Santa Clara Valley Agricultural Plan (Ag Plan). The Ag Plan was awarded the Governor’s Environmental and Economic Leadership Award (GEELA) in December 2018, and continues to receive significant recognition for the leadership it represents.

The SALC program has also awarded approximately $15,000,000 for the purchase of agricultural conservation easements in Santa Clara County, with the objective of protecting local agricultural lands as a climate mitigation strategy and to help build climate resilience for the County’s agricultural systems and our local communities, as laid out in the Ag Plan.

The ARI Grant Program represents a unique and very timely opportunity to give a clear signal to local growers and ranchers that the County of Santa Clara is willing to support their efforts to promote soil carbon sequestration and conservation practices that increase regional climate resilience through enhancement of the vital ecosystem services that agricultural lands can provide. ARI would incentivize farmers and ranchers for climate-smart ag
practices and could become a model for stewardship practices that sustain soil, water and wildlife in our region.

The Authority, which published in 2014, both the Santa Clara Valley Greenprint that identified the highest priority conservation actions for our region, and the Healthy Lands Healthy Economies report which demonstrated the economic value of ecosystem services provided by natural and working lands, applauds the County’s attention to connecting the benefits our communities derive from priority conservation and stewardship actions, to the policies and programs necessary to achieve those actions.

The current public health crisis is making clear the value of resilience. The resilience of our residents to adapt to changes in order to protect themselves and their loved ones, the resilience of our communities that work so closely together to support those most in need, and the resilience of our economic and food distribution systems to provide essential services. Reports from agricultural growers around the State are demonstrating the great resilience of small farms and regional distribution systems in the face of impacts from COVID-19, and underscore the findings of the Santa Clara County Food System Alliance’s Small Farms, Big Potential report, published earlier this year.

Clearly, we have, in Santa Clara County, the components of an agricultural food system that can serve as a model throughout the State: small and medium-sized farms and ranches that provide local healthy foods and important ecosystem services, an Ag Plan that prioritizes agricultural preservation as a climate strategy and garners significant State support, and, perhaps most importantly, leadership that recognizes how to put all the components together through bold policy actions.

We respectfully request your approval of the Policies and Procedures Guide for the Agricultural Resilience Incentives Grant Program. We also look forward to working closely with the County to model new partnerships and practices that support both healthy lands and healthy communities.

Sincerely,

Andrea Mackenzie
General Manager

c: Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority Board of Directors
Director of Planning, Jacquelyn Onciano
Michael Meehan, Bharat Singh, County Planning Department