

California State Senate

SENATOR
LOIS WOLK

THIRD SENATE DISTRICT



Senate Bill 367 Agriculture Climate Benefits Act

By Senator Lois Wolk

Summary

SB 367 modernizes the Environmental Farming Act of 1995 to ensure that California maximizes its opportunities to achieve voluntary greenhouse gas emission reductions in the state's agriculture sector by developing and promoting projects and on-farm practices that also have other environmental and health benefits. Upon appropriation, SB 367 also directs \$25 million to the Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) for a grant program to support these on-farm demonstration projects, and directs two percent of the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund's annual proceeds to the Strategic Growth Council's Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program.

Bill Details

- Expands the scope of the existing CDFA environmental farming program to include an explicit focus on reducing on-farm greenhouse gas emissions and/or increasing carbon storage in soils and woody biomass.
- Amends the list of services and support to be provided to growers by CDFA to encompass: low-interest loans, technical assistance, educational materials and outreach, permit assistance, and funding of on-farm demonstration projects.
- Increases the membership of CDFA's Environmental Farming Panel to include relevant department/agency executives and additional relevant experts, and directs the Panel to prepare a biennial report and action plan.
- Directs \$25 million to CDFA for a grant program to support on-farm projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and/or increase carbon storage through these practices, among others: soil building and carbon sequestration; irrigation efficiency and water conservation; on-farm alternative energy and energy efficiency; and wildlife habitat conservation.
- Directs at least two percent of the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund's annual proceeds to support the Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program, with FY 2015-16 as the start date of that program's efforts to provide incentives for land management practices that achieve greenhouse gas reductions and store carbon.

Background

California's agriculture industry contributes over \$40 billion annually to our state's economy. Climate change, however, threatens the continued viability of this industry. The latest science suggests that future challenges will include rising temperatures, increases in extreme weather events, constrained water resources, reduced winter chilling hours, and rising sea levels. This fourth year of extreme drought shows that farmers and ranchers are on the frontlines of climate impacts.

California agriculture is also uniquely positioned to provide climate benefits by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. State-funded research suggests some agricultural practices will not only reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but can also help to store atmospheric carbon in soils, trees and other woody plants. Many of the most effective agricultural climate protection strategies provide additional environmental and health co-benefits such as enhanced on-farm resilience to climate impacts, improved air and water quality, water conservation, enhanced wildlife habitat and healthy rural communities.

The Environmental Farming Act of 1995 (Cannella) created CDFA's environmental farming program and the advisory Environmental Farming Act Science Advisory Panel. The program and panel were created to promote farming practices that "contribute to the well-being of ecosystems, air quality and wildlife and their habitat." However, the 1995 Act did not anticipate the agricultural challenges and opportunities presented by climate change and should be updated and funded.

Additionally, the Strategic Growth Council is implementing a program, funded by the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund, to protect agricultural land and promote beneficial land management practices for their climate benefits. However, the Council currently lacks sufficient resources to meet the demand for projects that prevent the conversion of agricultural lands to more greenhouse gas intensive development.

SB 367 gives CDFA and the Strategic Growth Council the authority and resources to more effectively deliver programs and improve growers' access to resources for addressing climate change and other pressing environmental concerns.

Staff contact

Jim Metropulos – 916-651-4003 or jim.metropulos@sen.ca.gov

Support

California Climate and Agriculture Network (co-sponsor)
Community Alliance with Family Farmers (co-sponsor)
American Farmland Trust
Audubon California
Cachuma Resource Conservation District
Californians Against Waste
California Association of Resource Conservation Districts
California Farm Bureau Federation
California League of Conservation Voters
California State Grange
Carbon Cycle Institute
Center for Food Safety
Coastal Environmental Rights Foundation
Community Environmental Council
Defenders of Wildlife
Environment California
Environmental Defense Fund
Environmental Entrepreneurs
Greenbelt Alliance
Peninsula Open Space Trust
Roots of Change
San Mateo County Resource Conservation District
Sonoma Resource Conservation District
Sustainable Agriculture Education
Sustainable Conservation
The Trust for Public Land
West Marin Environmental Action Committee