

December 13, 2021

Marin County Board of Supervisors
3501 Civic Center Drive, Suite 329
San Rafael, CA 94903

Honorable Supervisors:

The proposal to shift 10% of Measure A allocations away from farmland preservation to county parks and open space is a mistake that creates significant risks to Marin county. By reducing the county's investment in protecting agricultural land, we turn our backs on a crucial mechanism for achieving our community's priorities and threaten that progress for future generations.

We have all **worked together to help protect agriculture in Marin**. That effort reaps numerous benefits for everyone, including:

- Providing a vibrant local foodshed for the region
- Supporting important jobs for many people in our community
- Preserving open space and viewscapes
- Restoring vital watershed and habitat for local wildlife

Plus, **protecting and stewarding** Marin's agricultural land is crucial for **regional protection against devastating wildfires**, the stated reason for shifting Measure A allocations away from agriculture and into parks.

Measure A Has Achieved Important Successes

Marin County Parks says: "Measure A protects the parks, open spaces, and farmland that make Marin an extraordinary place to live, work, and play." What parks, open spaces, and farmland have in common is that they are all visually open environments with minimal development. How they differ is in the specifics of their land use.

All the agriculture-related Measure A funds are **matched at least one to one with federal, state, and donor funds**—and often more than one to one—making this an extremely efficient and leveraged investment. Measure A funding for farmland protection in the last 10 years has resulted in nearly \$15 million in additional funding coming to Marin from these sources.

To date, the funding provided by the existing allocation of Measure A has contributed directly to the permanent protection of 11 working ranches and 6,691 acres of agricultural land in West Marin. These include:

- Six beef cattle operations and one dairy
- Five dairy replacement heifer grazing operations
- One pasture-raised egg operation
- Two row crop operations
- 32 miles of streams

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- 3,993 acres of grassland
- 1,613 acres of forests
- 32 acres of wetlands

Implications of the Proposed Changes in Agricultural Funding from Measure A

It's important to think through the possible results of shifting 10% of Measure A funds from agricultural protection into the parks category—reducing agricultural support to 10% total—and eliminating the portion of the allocation that preserves farmland through agricultural conservation easements. Consider:

- The 100,000+ acres of agricultural land in Marin dwarfs the 17,000 acres devoted to park land. This means that **what happens on these agricultural lands has an outsized influence on the region as a whole.**
- Farmland preservation and land stewardship contribute significantly to increasing biodiversity, fighting climate change, protecting and improving streams and waterways, and preventing wildfires—all of which were considered to be **important to those who responded to the recent survey undertaken by Marin Parks.**
- People are rightly concerned about wildfires. But moving Measure A funding away from agriculture is the wrong direction to reduce wildfire risks, because **well-stewarded agricultural land is crucial for regional fire protection.** Well-managed rangelands reduce fire risk by diminishing fuel loads through livestock grazing and by promoting wet, green, healthy riparian zones that can act to slow a wildfire's progress.
- Once active agricultural land is developed, it is gone and never comes back. **Losing agricultural land to development would create a host of environmental problems** for the region, from increased pollution, traffic, and fire risk to loss of the natural scenic beauty so important to defining the character and value of Marin County.
- Loss of agricultural land would also mean losing the land stewardship of farmers and ranchers. Well-managed agricultural land—and the key phrase here is *well-managed*—contributes to a healthy environment in many important ways, including **climate resilience, wildfire protection, habitat health, and water quality.**
- Farmers and ranchers who tend carefully to their land not only **provide sustainably grown food and fiber to our local community, they also improve the ecological health of the whole region.**

Farming and ranching are difficult, skilled activities with uncertain economic rewards, even in the best of times. Despite all of our work, people are still ranching and farming on the edge—and the drought and climate change are only making matters worse.

For many farmers and ranchers in Marin, agricultural conservation easements are the only way they can avoid selling their land to developers. In addition, financial help to steward their land can make a huge difference in both agricultural productivity and environmental health.

Given the enormous benefits that West Marin agricultural lands provide to the entire county, we should be doubling down on our investment in preserving and protecting these lands, not diminishing those investments.

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We have come too far to risk Marin's future by reducing funding in agriculture by 50%. By all means, devote part of the Measure A agricultural-related funding to land stewardship. But please reject the suggested reallocation of funds and maintain the current allocation of 80% of Measure A funds to parks and 20% to farmland preservation and protection.

Sincerely,

Robert McGee
Chair, MALT Board of Directors

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