

August 30, 2022

Ana María Ruiz, General Manager
Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District
5050 El Camino Real
Los Altos, CA 94022-1404

Dear Ana,

San Mateo Resource Conservation District appreciates the opportunity to provide comments to support the development of Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District's new Agricultural Policy.

Since 1939, the San Mateo Resource Conservation District has supported the agricultural community through voluntary conservation projects. Our agricultural work includes developing water storage, increasing irrigation efficiency, building soil health and carbon farming, enhancing pollinator and wildlife habitat, and the Agricultural Ombudsman program. We do all this work in partnership with San Mateo County farmers and ranchers.

Through these relationships, we have learned of the challenges that producers experience in San Mateo County. We believe that the following recommendations will lead to greater voluntary conservation and investment in agricultural lands:

- Land tenure: Many producers in San Mateo County have short lease terms. Short-term leases make it difficult for producers to invest in the land, especially with conservation practices. Increasing soil health, which takes years to see the benefits of, becomes hard to rationalize when you don't know if you will continue to farm the property. Multiyear planning projects for costly practices, like developing water storage, or establishing infrastructure to facilitate conservation grazing, requires a long-term release. Similarly, many grant programs that fund agricultural conservation projects require the tenant to have control of the land for at least 3-5 years, if not longer. Providing longer lease terms would enable greater investment in conservation projects on MROSD's agricultural lands.
- Timeliness: Farmers and ranchers work with the whims of the unpredictable weather and nature. They must react and adapt quickly to keep their operations functioning. The agricultural policy should recognize that there will be unforeseeable circumstances and develop a mechanism to provide responsive and timely support.

- Leveraging Funding Opportunities: There are numerous funding programs for farmers and ranchers to adopt conservation practices. However, farming in San Mateo County is expensive, and the financial support provided by these grants does not always cover the project's total cost. MROSD can leverage state and federal funds and increase conservation by supporting producers in accessing these programs and providing cost-share particularly through MROSD's partnership with the RCD.
- Integrated operations: Increasingly, producers are diversifying their businesses. There are several operations in San Mateo County that both farm and graze. There are also partnerships between ranchers and farmers to integrate animal agriculture into farming operations. Leases should allow for these types of operations, which could look like allowing livestock to graze cover crops, or a producer who wants to lease both agricultural fields and adjacent rangeland. Agricultural operations are evolving, and MROSD should allow for leases that allow for unconventional agricultural models.

We appreciate the work the Board of Directors and MROSD staff has undertaken to develop an agricultural policy. If you have any questions or want more information, please contact me at (650) 712-7765x102 or kellyx@SanMateoRCD.org.

Sincerely,



Kellyx Nelson
Executive Director