

Assembly Bill 1289

The Smart Climate Agriculture Program

Assembly Member Ash Kalra

SUMMARY

AB 1289 would establish a grant fund to assist small and mid-sized farms that want to shift from livestock farming to sustainable plant-based crops.

By assisting farmers in transitioning from animal agriculture to plant-based agriculture, California can play a leadership role in reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, provide food for our growing population, and help keep family farms in business.

BACKGROUND

California has some of the world's most productive agricultural lands. However, studies reveal that large portions of agricultural lands across the United States are predominantly used to cultivate feed crop for livestock. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, crops like corn, barely, oats, and sorghum are frequently used to feed livestock throughout the country, with 36% of corn crops and 75% of soybean going directly to farms to feed livestock.

The state has seen a notable increase in field crops like haylage, greenchop, and alfalfa, which are cultivated and used to feed livestock. These field crops are predominantly in areas of the state where there are dairy farms or feedlots.

GHG emissions, like methane and nitrous oxide, from animal agriculture are a significant contributor to climate change. Animal agriculture contributes an estimated 14.5 percentage of the world's total anthropogenic GHG emissions.ⁱ In addition, the amount of GHG emitted from manure storage and enteric fermentation has increased, contributing to rising GHG levels.

Although federal agencies and state governments have supported methane digesters to help reduce GHG emissions, digesters are costly. Methane

digesters have also inadvertently contributed to polluting our air and water systems.

Despite dairy being one of the largest segments of the livestock industry, farmers are experiencing a decline in demand due to overproduction, international competition, industry consolidation, and milk alternatives.ⁱⁱ As a result, farmers are incurring debt and struggling to keep their businesses operating.

Family farms that have transitioned from livestock, dairy, or crop feed farming to plant-based crops have been able to generate new job opportunities and business growth as the market for plant-based products continues to grow—a \$5 billion industryⁱⁱⁱ that some experts say could be worth \$85 billion by the year 2030.^{iv}

California dairy farmers are already discovering the benefits of this new market. Cornell Kasbergen, a dairy farmer in Tulare County, has said, "You're better putting your money into trees...almonds, pistachios, grapes. There's a lot of alternatives that provide a higher return than milking cows."

As the world seeks to feed a growing population with our global population reaching 8.6 billion people by the year 2030 and 9.8 billion by the year 2050, plant-based farming can support the future demands placed on our food supply.

Expanding the supply of locally grown fruits and vegetables can provide greater distribution to communities that are located in food deserts. According to a number of studies, plant-based diets help lower cholesterol, increase the consumption of naturally occurring vitamins and minerals, and lower the risk of chronic health conditions.^v By increasing supplies of plant-based foods, Californians can generate more healthful food options.

SOLUTION

AB 1289 will keep small and mid-sized farms in operation as smart climate agriculture. In doing so, the state can diversify its working lands, increase agricultural revenue, and make California a leader in supplying and processing plant-based foods and products.

The Legislature has taken significant steps towards establishing policies and programs to preserve and protect the environment, combat climate change, provide for the health and well-being of all people, and support California farmers. AB 1289 exemplifies and furthers these Californian values.

SPONSORS

Social Compassion in Legislation (SCIL)
The Good Food Institute (GFI)

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ⁱ Giampiero Grossi, Pietro Goglio, Andrea Vitali, Adrian G Williams, “Livestock and climate change: impact of livestock on climate and mitigation strategies,” *Animal Frontiers*, Volume 9, Issue 1, January 2019, Pages 69–76, <https://doi.org/10.1093/af/vfy034>

ⁱⁱ Nosowitz, Dan. “America’s largest dairy producer files for bankruptcy,” *Modern Farmer*, November 14, 2019. Retrieved January 22, 2021, from <https://modernfarmer.com/2019/11/americas-largest-dairy-producer-files-for-bankruptcy/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Plant-Based Market Overview, *The Good Food Institute*, November 27, 2018. Retrieved February 05, 2021, from <https://www.gfi.org/marketresearch>

^{iv} Splitter, J. “Poultry to plant-based: Animal farmers are now working with vegans to get out of the meat business,” *Forbes*, January 15, 2020. Retrieved February 05, 2021, from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jennysplitter/2020/01/14/poultry-to-plant-based-some-animal-farmers-are-working-with-vegans-to-get-out-of-the-meat-business/?sh=2547cac4738f>

^v Smith, Carol. “New Research Says Plant-Based Diet is Best for Planet and People,” *United Nations University*, November 15, 2014. Retrieved February 8, 2021 from <https://ourworld.unu.edu/en/new-research-says-plant-based-diet-best-for-planet-and-people>.