



To: Members of the RCRC Board of Directors
From: Sidd Nag, Legislative Advocate
Staci Heaton, Acting Vice President Governmental Affairs
Date: April 20, 2021
Re: Assembly Bill 125 (R. Rivas) – Equitable Economic Recovery, Healthy Food Access, Climate Resilient Farms Bond Act of 2022 - **ACTION**

Summary

This memo provides a summary of Assembly Bill 125 (R. Rivas), the Equitable Economic Recovery, Healthy Food Access, Climate Resilient Farms, and Worker Protection Bond Act of 2022. This bill would authorize the issuance of \$3.122 billion in general obligation bonds to finance a variety of agriculture-related investments. If approved by the Legislature and the Governor, the measure could be considered by California voters in 2022. RCRC staff is recommending that the RCRC Board of Directors adopt a “Support” position.

Background

Since 1986, California voters have approved six out of nine bond initiatives that funded state parks, resources, and energy programs, totaling in over \$14 billion in general obligation bond issuance. Similarly, California voters have broadly supported water resources bond initiatives, approving eight out of ten proposals since 1986 for a total of over \$18 billion in new general obligation bonds. Despite this legacy of investment, California continues to grapple with long-term challenges to its water infrastructure and its natural and agricultural resources. Not surprisingly, California legislators continue to propose new voter initiatives to fund ongoing and new priorities in these areas, as water and resources bond proposals tend to be popular among California voters, generally polling high among bond proposals across several policy areas.

In 2018, two bond proposals were considered by California voters: Proposition 68, which was approved by voters in June of that year, authorized \$4 billion in general obligation bonds for parks, natural resources protection, climate adaptation, water quality and supply, and flood protection. The RCRC Board of Directors considered this proposal at its December 2017 meeting and elected to not take a position on the measure.

The second measure, Proposition 3, would have authorized \$8.877 billion in general obligation bonds for a variety of water infrastructure projects, aiming to increase water supply and improve water supply reliability and water quality. This measure was on the November ballot, but was not approved by voters. The RCRC Board of Directors

considered this proposal at its January 2018 meeting and adopted a “Support” position on the measure.

At its April 2019 board meeting, the RCRC Board of Directors adopted a “Support” position to Senate Bill 45, a climate-focused resources bond proposal authored by Senator Ben Allen (D–Santa Monica). SB 45 would have funded resources and water programs dedicated to mitigating impacts from climate change. The proposal focused on building resiliency in California landscapes, including forested lands and watersheds, to help reduce the severity, frequency, and impacts of natural disasters such as wildfire, drought, and flood—all of which have been exacerbated by climate change. Despite broad-based support, SB 45 failed passage in the Assembly.

Issue

In an effort to bear focus and direct funding to priorities in the agricultural sector, Assembly Member Robert Rivas (D–Hollister) has authored Assembly Bill 125, which proposes \$3.122 billion in bond-funded spending toward several agriculture related priorities. Specifically, AB 125 proposes:

- \$75 million for **groundwater conservation**, including \$50 million to groundwater sustainability agencies, counties, local agencies, and NGOs for implementing local programs and multi-benefit land repurposing, \$12.5 million to assist San Joaquin Valley farmers and ranchers achieve local groundwater management goals, and \$12.5 million to San Joaquin and Central Coast groundwater sustainability agencies to assist small and socioeconomically disadvantaged growers meet local groundwater management goals.
- \$447 million to **Department of Food and Agriculture** for grants to farmers and ranchers to promote better soil conservation (\$175 million), water use efficiency (\$100 million), and alternative manure management (\$100 million), along with several other programs in areas such as prescribed grazing (\$10 million), funding for University of California Cooperative Extension (\$10 million), integrated pest management (\$18 million), and support for grower transitions to organic production (\$35 million).
- \$273 million to **Department of Conservation** for several lands conservation purposes, including \$122.5 million for grants to agencies and organizations seeking to acquire title or easements to conserve lands for biodiversity, climate resiliency, pollinator health, and flood protection and groundwater recharge. Additionally, the department would be allocated \$125 million to offer as grants to new farmers, with a priority toward supporting new growers from traditionally socioeconomically disadvantaged communities. The department would additionally be charged to disburse \$5 million to local conservation districts for new hiring.
- \$200 million to Department of Resources, Recycling, and Recovery for grants for the **construction or improvement of compost infrastructure**, including community composting facilities, on-farm composting facilities, and commercial composting facilities.
- \$100 million to Department of Food and Agriculture to restore, upgrade, modernize, and improve **state and county fairgrounds**.

- \$750 million to Department of Food and Agriculture for food access and anti-hunger programs, including popular farm-to-school lunch programs.
- \$637 million to several agencies for public health, housing and well-being programs for California farmworkers.
- \$600 million in grants for local and regional infrastructure, including broadband fiber, to improve agriculture-producing regions.
- \$60 million to develop new or upgrade existing meat-processing facilities, as well as \$10 million to community colleges and technical schools to train new meat-processing facility safety and quality inspectors.

AB 125 requires a two-thirds vote of the Legislature, and is competing for political attention among several bond proposals this year, including two resources bond proposals—Senate Bill 45 by Senators Portantino (D–Glendale) and Allen (D-Redondo Beach), and Assembly Bill 1500 by Assembly Member Eduardo Garcia (D–Coachella). Both SB 45 and AB 1500 largely mirror recent proposals by the same legislators during the previous legislative session, and both proposals prioritize policy objectives with roughly the same template as several recent resources bond proposals.

By contrast, AB 125 breaks the mold by identifying several priorities relevant to the economy and culture of rural California. By focusing on supporting agricultural programs and related infrastructure, the measure will inherently result in a dedicating a far greater proportion of its funds to rural economies. AB 125 is currently supported by a coalition of sustainable agriculture organizations, environmental organizations, farm labor advocates, and food access organizations. Currently, it does not enjoy the support of mainstay agricultural organizations.

Staff Recommendation

RCRC staff recommends the RCRC Board of Directors adopt a “Support” position on the Equitable Economic Recovery, Healthy Food Access, Climate Resilient Farms, and Worker Protection Bond Act of 2022. While the measure may ultimately be sidelined by Capitol leadership interested in advancing the more traditional resources bond proposals, a strong showing of support of this measure may still positively influence those other resources bond measures by convincing their authors to incorporate key aspects from AB 125.

Attachment

- Copy of Assembly Bill 125 (R. Rivas)