

October 30, 2020

JT Austin
Senior Policy Advisor, Natural Resources & Environment
Office of the Governor
PO Box 40002
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

Dear JT,

As members of the Washington State Food Policy Forum and as key stakeholders in Washington's agricultural conservation community, we are writing to respectfully and enthusiastically express our support for the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) 2021-2023 Decision Package 3B-Farm and Food System Resiliency.

The Decision Package in question is a flexible spending proposal that responds to COVID-19 and aligns with the Food Policy Forum's August 2020 "Early Implementation Action Report," and its 2019 "Food System Recommendations Legislative Report."

In addition to supporting local food system infrastructure, marketing, farm to school, and child nutrition programs, the \$24 million proposal includes \$2.9 million to support farmland preservation strategies and farmland access for new and beginning farmers. This line item is of particular interest and significance to us, as we see an urgent need for a new suite of land protection tools and strategies to effectively protect our agricultural land base in the face of challenges posed by COVID-19.

To quote the "Early Implementation Action Report" which we helped draft,

"COVID-19 has created unprecedented economic uncertainty and reduced access to markets for agricultural producers across Washington, especially for farms selling at the regional and local level. In the near future, this will have the effect of forcing smaller-scale producers to leverage additional debt, pull acreage out of active production, or even sell to the highest bidder where there is significant development potential. This not only undermines our regional food security and the resilience of our food systems, but puts the important ecological benefits that farmland provides at risk."

According to American Farmland Trust's recent "Farms Under Threat: The State of the States" report, one of the *best ways* states can combat agricultural land loss and support farm viability is to "facilitate the transfer of land to a new, more diverse generation of farmers and ranchers". The WSDA's proposed Decision Package would do just that: it would provide the funding needed to make meaningful investments in the future of our agricultural landscapes and economies.

Washington has a robust, coordinated network of farmland protection partners that is well positioned to help deploy this funding once it becomes available and use it to leverage additional resources. On behalf of that network, we strongly encourage the Governor to include the WSDA's 3B-Farm and Food System Resiliency Decision Package in his 2021-2023 Budget.

Sincerely,



Nick Norton, Executive Director
Washington Association of Land Trusts



Melissa Campbell, Executive Director
Washington Farmland Trust



Addie Candib, Pacific Northwest Regional Director
American Farmland Trust