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AB-2377 Agriculture: Cannella Environmental Farming Act of 1995: technical assistance grant program.
(2017-2018)

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Assembly Bill No. 2377

CHAPTER 868

An act to add Section 570 to the Food and Agricultural Code, relating to agriculture.

[Approved by Governor September 28, 2018. Filed with Secretary of State September 28, 2018.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 2377, Irwin. Agriculture: Cannella Environmental Farming Act of 1995: technical assistance grant program.

Existing law, the Cannella Environmental Farming Act of 1995, requires the Department of Food and Agriculture to establish and oversee an environmental farming program to provide incentives to farmers whose practices promote the well-being of ecosystems, air quality, and wildlife and their habitat. The act requires the Secretary of Food and Agriculture to convene the Scientific Advisory Panel on Environmental Farming, as prescribed, for the purpose of providing advice to the secretary on the implementation of the Healthy Soils Program and the State Water Efficiency and Enhancement Program and assistance to federal, state, and local government agencies on issues relating to the impact of agricultural practices on air, water, and wildlife habitat, as specified. Existing law requires the department, in consultation with the panel, to establish and oversee a Healthy Soils Program to seek to optimize climate benefits while supporting the economic viability of California agriculture by providing incentives, including, but not limited to, loans, grants, research, and technical assistance, and educational materials and outreach, to farmers whose management practices contribute to healthy soils and result in net long-term on-farm greenhouse gas benefits.

This bill would require the department to establish a technical assistance grant program to provide funds to technical assistance providers, as defined, to provide assistance to Healthy Soils Program, alternative manure management practices programs, and State Water Efficiency and Enhancement Program applicants. The bill would require the secretary to make available to the grant program not less than 5% of the funds appropriated to the department for those programs, but not more than \$5,000,000, for the purposes of providing technical assistance to farmers and ranchers who apply for grants from those programs, prioritizing that technical assistance to farms and ranches that are 500 acres or less, and supporting annual information sharing among technical assistance providers, the department, and other relevant stakeholders for the continuous improvement of programmatic guidelines, application processes, and relevant climate change and agricultural research. The bill would require the department, on or before January 31, 2021, to provide an update to the panel on the grant program.

Vote: majority Appropriation: no Fiscal Committee: yes Local Program: no

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:

SECTION 1. (a) The Legislature finds and declares all of the following:

(1) California's 77,000 farms and ranches are uniquely vulnerable to the effects of climate change, including rising temperatures, increased occurrences of extreme weather events, constrained water resources, new pest and disease pressures, reduced winter chilling hours, and rising sea levels.

(2) As described in the state's 2017 update of the scoping plan prepared pursuant to Section 38561 of the Health and Safety Code, the state's farms and ranches are also uniquely positioned to mitigate climate change by reducing potent greenhouse gas emissions, increasing carbon storage in agricultural lands, saving water and energy, and producing on-farm and on-ranch renewable energy.

(3) Many of agriculture's climate change mitigation strategies provide numerous agronomic, environmental, and public health benefits, including increased water retention in soils, groundwater recharge, and energy and water savings, improved crop and forage yields, improved air and water quality, and enhanced wildlife habitat.

(4) California's climate smart agriculture programs provide important financial resources to encourage farmers and ranchers to adopt farm and ranch management practices that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions, increase carbon sequestration, and help the state meet its 2030 greenhouse gas emissions reduction target. It is in the interest of the state that these resources be used as effectively as possible to maximize the programs' benefits to farmers, ranchers, and the state.

(5) Improved delivery of technical assistance to farmers and ranchers, including during project design, the grant application process, and project implementation, will allow for a greater number of farmers and ranchers to successfully participate in climate smart agriculture programs. Increased technical assistance for farmers and ranchers will also improve project implementation and increase the overall impact of climate smart agriculture programs.

(6) Small and moderately scaled farmers and ranchers, socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, and women farmers and ranchers, who may not have ready access to technical assistance, are especially in need of greater support to increase their participation in climate smart agriculture programs.

(7) Because agriculture is a management intensive business that requires ongoing knowledge transfer, California has developed public and private technical assistance programs for farmers and ranchers, including local resource conservation districts, the University of California Cooperative Extension, and nonprofit organizations, to improve agriculture and resource conservation.

(8) These technical service providers can work with farmers and ranchers on climate change and agriculture issues to identify appropriate projects, determine project feasibility, design projects, and assist in project application and implementation.

(9) The Natural Resources Conservation Service of the United States Department of Agriculture is an important partner in the state's efforts to promote climate smart agriculture. By coordinating efforts with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the state can more effectively and efficiently reach California's diverse farm and ranch communities.

(10) To ensure state funds expended to further California's greenhouse gas reduction goals are used as effectively as possible and for projects that are properly designed and implemented, it is vital that adequate technical assistance be provided to farmers and ranchers through climate smart agriculture programs and that qualified technical assistance be available for the design and implementation of those projects.

(11) It is in the interest of the state to improve the effectiveness of multiyear climate smart agriculture projects by ensuring that consistent and stable technical assistance is available throughout the life of those projects.

(b) It is the intent of the Legislature to enhance the long-term viability of California agriculture by making technical assistance an integral component of California's climate smart agriculture programs, which will increase participation by the state's farmers and ranchers and improve project implementation, thereby increasing the climate change mitigation and adaptation benefits of climate smart agriculture programs.

SEC. 2. Section 570 is added to the Food and Agricultural Code, to read:

570. (a) For purposes of this section, the following definitions shall apply:

(1) "Grant program" means the technical assistance grant program established pursuant to subdivision (c).

(2) "Programs" means the Healthy Soils Program established pursuant to Section 569, alternative manure management practices programs, and the State Water Efficiency and Enhancement Program established by the department from moneys made available pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Statutes of 2014.

(3) "Technical assistance" means outreach, education, project planning, project design, grant application assistance, project implementation, or project reporting assistance provided to a farmer or rancher to improve his or her successful participation in the programs.

(4) "Technical assistance providers" means resource conservation districts, the University of California Cooperative Extension, and nonprofit organizations, with demonstrated technical expertise in designing and implementing agricultural management practices to achieve the purposes identified in subdivision (b).

(b) The secretary shall make available not less than 5 percent of the funds appropriated to the department for the programs, but not more than five million dollars (\$5,000,000), to the grant program established pursuant to subdivision (c) for both of the following purposes:

(1) Providing technical assistance, pursuant to subdivision (c), to farmers and ranchers who apply for grants from the programs, prioritizing that technical assistance to farms and ranches that are 500 acres or less.

(2) Supporting annual information sharing among technical assistance providers, the department, and other relevant stakeholders for the continuous improvement of programmatic guidelines, application processes, and relevant climate change and agricultural research.

(c) The department shall establish a technical assistance grant program to provide funds to technical assistance providers to provide assistance to program applicants, including, but not limited to, conducting initial program outreach to farmers and ranchers, and assisting farmers and ranchers to submit grant applications under the programs to the department and with project design, development, and implementation. The grant program shall do all of the following:

(1) Establish criteria and guidelines for technical assistance providers to qualify to receive grants to provide technical assistance. The criteria and guidelines shall require technical assistance providers to demonstrate expertise in working with California farmers and ranchers on projects relevant to one or more of the purposes identified in subdivision (b). The department shall coordinate grant program guideline development and outreach with the Natural Resources Conservation Service of the United States Department of Agriculture.

(2) Establish a process for technical assistance providers to apply to the department to receive grants to provide technical assistance. Grant applications shall include, at minimum, a work plan that identifies which of the purposes identified in subdivision (b) will be targeted by the technical assistance provider, specific activities that will be undertaken to maximize farmer and rancher program participation and project success, an estimate of the number of farmers and ranchers to be served by the technical assistance provider, and a statement of qualifications of its relevant staff and project partners.

(3) Ensure at least 25 percent of the grant program funds are used to provide technical assistance to socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers, as defined in Section 512.

(4) Review grant program applications from technical assistance providers and recommend grant awardees to the secretary.

(5) Allow direct project costs and a percentage of overhead expenses, to be determined by the secretary, to be funded as part of the grant awards.

(6) Consult with the Scientific Advisory Panel on Environmental Farming on grant program design, guidelines, and outreach for the technical assistance to improve coordination and information sharing on technical assistance strategies and activities for the department's programs.

(d) The department shall provide an update to the Scientific Advisory Panel on Environmental Farming on or before January 31, 2021, on the grant program, including grant program outcomes, ongoing technical assistance needs for the programs, and future plans for the grant program.

(e) The secretary shall award grants to technical assistance providers of no less than ten thousand dollars (\$10,000) and up to one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000) annually for no more than three years, for a total grant of not more than three hundred thousand dollars (\$300,000) per technical assistance provider. A technical assistance provider that demonstrates on its application that the majority of the persons it provides technical assistance to are socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers shall receive priority consideration for additional grant program funding to cover translation services, the production of outreach materials, and additional outreach-related expenses.