

California Environmental Health Initiative and MOMS Advocating Sustainability
c/o 5926 Masterson Road, Gazelle CA 96034

March 20, 2012

Secretary Tom Vilsack
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Via e-mail: agsec@usda.gov

Re: 1) Opposition to Use of Federal Funds for California Department of Food and Agriculture Programmatic Environmental Impact Report for a Statewide Plant Pest Prevention Program (Pest PEIR) and 2) Support for a 21st-Century Approach to Invasive Species Management Instead

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We were pleased to read in your January 9, 2012 press release that “The USDA must be built to meet the evolving needs of a 21st-century agricultural economy,” and your call to “innovate, modernize, and be better stewards of the taxpayers’ dollars.” In view of these goals, we request that the USDA cease funding the preparation of the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) Statewide Plant Pest Prevention Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (Pest PEIR), and we request that, instead of preparing the Pest PEIR, the USDA work closely with the University of California (UC), Davis entomology department to explore a 21st-century approach to invasive pest management.

If adopted, the Pest PEIR would lock in, for the foreseeable future, pest management protocols and tactics that were developed 50-80 years ago, virtually guaranteeing that your stated goals to “innovate, modernize, and be better stewards of the taxpayers’ dollars” will not be realized in California.

As an alternative that is aligned with your stated goals we ask that USDA formally endorse and fully participate in the independent research currently being carried out at UC Davis, to develop a 21st-century approach to invasive species management in California. This effort could lay the basis for a nationwide shift to agricultural pest management that is safer, more effective at preventing physical damage from pests, and more cost effective. This would benefit not just agriculture, by providing better and more cost effective protection that has fewer negative impacts on farmers, but the country as a whole, by reducing the use of toxic chemicals and the cost of food production.

USDA Should Withdraw Funding for the Pest PEIR

If adopted, the CDFA’s Pest PEIR would effectively guarantee that a more economically and environmentally sustainable, 21st-century vision for invasive species management would not be implemented in California because the Pest PEIR is designed to codify into the foreseeable future the policies of the past. The results of these outdated policies include:

- Nearly half of California’s land area was under quarantine in 2010 for one or more pests;
- CDFA has carried out 274 emergency “eradication” programs since 1982, most of them repeating annually, for the same 9 pests;
- Farmers and taxpayers bear the costs of federal and state quarantines and treatments; e.g., since the 1980s, taxpayers have spent a billion dollars for fruit fly eradication programs alone.

The economic cost of these treatments is unsupportable, often running into the millions of dollars per year for a single pest, not including the externalized costs to human and environmental health. The CDFA should not be

funding the codification of these failed policies of the past but should instead be supporting a transition to a modern, more effective and less costly approach.

Moreover, the Pest PEIR, if approved, would enable CDFA to take action for pests without any public input. (Attached for your review is a Fact Sheet concerning CDFA's statements and our California Environmental Quality Act [CEQA] attorneys' advice regarding the Pest PEIR's exclusion of public input.) The CDFA states that, in the early phases of the PEIR preparation process, the agency has already gone "above and beyond" CEQA's public participation requirements by holding five public "scoping" sessions instead of one. However, the sessions were scheduled around the July 4th holiday with only two weeks' advance notice, key stakeholders were not notified, and CDFA did not follow our recommendation to schedule sessions in the Counties of Santa Cruz or Monterey that were affected by CDFA's most recent major eradication effort, aerial spraying for the light brown apple moth (LBAM). Only 21 members of the public spoke at the five sessions – an indication of how ineffective the CDFA's public outreach efforts were.

During the past year we have met with CDFA Secretary Karen Ross and other CDFA officials, Governor Jerry Brown's staff, the California Board of Food & Agriculture, the California Department of Public Health, the California Invasive Species Advisory Committee (CISAC) (which is managed by CDFA), and our state legislators to express our concerns about the Pest PEIR and the need for an environmentally and economically rational alternative. Despite a letter from our coalition to Governor Brown and Secretary Ross explaining our position (see attached), CDFA has decided to move ahead with the Pest PEIR, at a projected cost of \$3 million in federal funding.

USDA Should Endorse and Participate in Developing a 21st-century Approach to Invasive Species Management

The intent of current research at UC Davis on transforming the pest management paradigm is to develop cutting edge, science-based policy and protocol recommendations for California to meet the needs of a 21st-century agricultural economy that can no longer rely on wide-area quarantines and chemically intensive treatments. The need for a new paradigm is particularly urgent in light of the alterations in species' ranges and patterns that will likely result from climate change. The UC Davis research will also consider and address international trade agreements and phytosanitary issues related to invasive species. The UC Davis process will begin in May of this year and has engaged a focused group of experts and public-interest representatives committed to transforming the approach to pest management to make it both more effective and less costly rather than simply making adjustments in the current approach.

We note that, last fall, after we met with CDFA asking them to postpone the Pest PEIR and instead participate in the UC Davis process, which is designed to eliminate or minimize the need for an environmental analysis such as the Pest PEIR, CDFA rapidly put together the first of what is proposed to be a series of symposia on "21st-century pest management." While we appreciate CDFA's interest in the issue, we believe that undertaking a parallel 21st-century visioning process for invasive species policy while simultaneously pushing ahead with the Pest PEIR is contradictory given that the Pest PEIR would codify today's outdated policies. In addition, we believe that ***a visioning process for future invasive species policy should be led by an independent body and not by the same agency whose historical practices are being re-evaluated.***

The Public are Critical Stakeholders

We appreciate USDA's current initiatives to solicit stakeholder and public input regarding invasive species, including stakeholder surveys and meetings, as well as the research study *Community Perceptions of Emergency Responses to Invasive Species in California*, currently being conducted in conjunction with UC Davis. (Our Boards and membership played a pivotal role in halting the LBAM spray program, and three of our Board members have been interviewed for this study.) This research study arose directly from the LBAM controversy in California; that controversy is another example of why it is essential that we begin to rethink our approach to invasive species management. The LBAM program has cost U.S. and California taxpayers approximately \$100 million for an unnecessary effort to "eradicate" a pest that has done no damage to any crop in California.

At the same time, we are concerned about USDA spending on public relations efforts such as the “hungry pests” campaign in California, a \$3-million television, radio, and print campaign designed to create an impression of impending threat from invasive species. We believe that the public will no longer tolerate widespread chemical intervention for invasive species in light of the failed spray programs such as for the medfly in the 1970s and 80s and LBAM in 2007, and the solution to public opposition is not PR but substantive, meaningful change in USDA and CDFA policy.

The concerns of citizens about invasive species and agricultural pest treatments are reinforced by an ever-expanding body of medical literature and research illustrating the direct consequences of agricultural chemicals on human growth and development and implicating these chemicals in diseases spanning the human life cycle.

The California Environmental Health Initiative (CEHI) and MOMS Advocating Sustainability share a similar mission: to bring citizen advocacy and scientific research to bear on policy decisions that impact the health of Californians. We are not advocating zero tolerance of pesticides but rather a transition to a system of agriculture that is less chemically dependent, less burdensome to farmers, more effective against pests, and more cost effective for taxpayers. To that end, we have formed a growing coalition, now numbering 54 organizations and cities who believe that the CDFA’s Pest PEIR is premature and an unwise expenditure of taxpayer money, and that we should first pursue independent work to devise a 21st-century invasive species paradigm, including the efforts being undertaken at UC Davis.

Our coalition believes that USDA, CDFA, sister agencies (such as California Department of Public Health, Department of Pesticide Regulation, and Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment) and the public have a historic opportunity now to engage in the development of a new paradigm for invasive species management. We also believe that this effort must include the public from the outset.

Thank you for your consideration of our requests. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

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Craig McNamara, President, California State Board of Food and Agriculture (farming@sbcglobal.net)

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The Board Members of the State Water Resources Control Board (916/341-5620)

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Congresswoman Barbara Lee (fax 202/225-9817)

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Subcommittee on Invasive Species (fax 916/327-8290)
Subcommittee on Urban Rivers (c/o Senator Pavely, Chair)
Subcommittee on Emerging Technologies and Economic Competitiveness (via mail)
Subcommittee on Sustainable School Facilities (via mail)

cc: Assembly Committees:
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cc: CISAC Chair, Andrea Fox, for Distribution to the Members of CISAC (afox@CFBF.com)

Attachments:

1. Letter to Governor Brown and CDFA Secretary Ross – Updated March 2012 with 54 Signatories
2. Fact Sheet re CDFA's Pest PEIR and Exclusion of Public Input