



## PLANNING COMMISSION

**DATE: APRIL 9, 2015**

**TO: BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

**FROM: KEN TOPPING, PLANNING COMMISSION CHAIRMAN**

**SUBJECT: SEQUESTRATION IN THE AGRICULTURE SECTOR**

The Planning Commission recently held multiple public hearings on the Renewable Energy Streamlined Program (RESP). The Commission was very supportive of the RESP and worked to recommend a Program that will help to implement important public policies regarding renewable energy and greenhouse gas reductions. These policies and programs are found in the Conservation and Open Space Element and the County EnergyWise Plan.

On the basis of public comments received, the Commission at the conclusion of its final, February 26, 2015 hearing on RESP held an extended discussion of public policy issues, including carbon sequestration. As a result, the Commission unanimously voted to recommend that your Board direct Department staff to research opportunities for carbon sequestration on agricultural and related lands.

This Commission recommendation is founded on existing, straight forward county policies and programs. The County EnergyWise Plan Program 39 states:

**39. Identify opportunities for terrestrial and aquatic sequestration in the county, including but not limited to County lands, reclaimed mining lands, agricultural lands, and other areas as appropriate.**

*Supporting Actions:*

- *Support preparation of a countywide sequestration assessment of agricultural and open space lands, forests, and aquatic resources.*
- *Support research and implementation through the development of a working group to convene agriculturalists, researchers, and other experts to explore local opportunities and best practices to capture and store carbon.*
- *Explore opportunities for carbon sequestration to be integrated with existing open space acquisition for conservation programs.*
- *Explore opportunities for carbon sequestration to be integrated with natural resource or conservation-based mitigation banking and offset programs.*

*Program Description:*

*Carbon sequestration is the net removal of CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere. This may occur through the enhancement of natural processes (i.e., terrestrial sequestration—the uptake of carbon by trees, vegetation, and soils) or through technological processes, such as the placement of CO<sub>2</sub> into a geologic repository (geologic sequestration) in such a way that it will remain permanently sequestered. The term —carbon sinks is also used to describe agricultural and forestry lands that absorb CO<sub>2</sub>. This measure directs the County to explore opportunities to sequester carbon from the atmosphere.*

A carbon sequestration program is also supported by existing County policy in the Conservation and Open Space Element:

**Policy AQ 4.5 Carbon Sequestration**

Reduce net carbon emissions through the preservation, protection, and enhancement, as appropriate, of the county's terrestrial and aquatic carbon sequestration resources, including the county's lakes, soils, and native forests, trees, and plants.

□ **Implementation Strategy AQ 4.5.1 Identify carbon sequestration resources**

Identify existing and potential opportunities for terrestrial and aquatic sequestration in the county, including but not limited to County lands, reclaimed mining lands, agricultural lands, and other areas or activities as appropriate.

At the state level, the Budget Act of 2014 appropriates grant funds from the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF) to develop and implement plans with the goal "to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through projects that implement land use, housing, transportation, and agricultural land preservation practices to support infill and compact development..." The Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program (SALCP) component supports the protection and management of California's agricultural lands as such lands have been identified as sequestering many times more carbon than any form of urban development. The SALCP program will prevent increases in GHG emissions through planning and permanent protection of farm and ranch lands via agricultural easements. The principal goal of this grant program is to fund plans and conservation acquisitions in order to avoid increases in greenhouse gas emissions. Agriculture Element AGP16 – Agricultural Land Conservation Programs supports such measures and includes an implementation strategy indicating the County should pursue grant funds similar to the SALCP.

The Commission asks your Board to provide direction to County staff to implement these important programs of the County General and EnergyWise Plans as well as additional actions such as:

1. Engage the agricultural community as stakeholders/partners in the development of sequestration programs.
2. Direct staff to apply for SALCP grant funding opportunities with the support of the agricultural community.
3. Use a technical committee format to develop sequestration programs.
4. Design implementation of these programs to be on a voluntary basis.
5. Direct staff to work with the technical committee for all program development activities and have the Planning Commission represented on the committee.

In sum, there is great carbon sequestration potential in the agricultural sector. The agricultural community also has demonstrated substantial interest and expertise in this important policy area. Your Planning Commission looks forward to working on further articulation and implementation of these important policies.