



The Honorable Nancy Skinner
Chair, Senate Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review
State Capitol

The Honorable Phil Ting
Chair, Assembly Committee on Budget
State Capitol

Subject: Letter of Support for \$5 Million One-Time State Budget Request for the Center for Food & Agriculture

May 13, 2022

Dear Chairs Skinner and Ting,

The undersigned farmers, ranchers, fishers, small food businesses, and agricultural and community organizations write to support the **\$5 million one-time state budget request** from Senate Majority Leader Mike McGuire (D-2) and Assembly member Marc Levine (D-10) for the Agricultural Institute of Marin's new [Center for Food and Agriculture \(CFA\)](#), a zero-waste farmers market and educational center. The CFA will become a replicable model that can foster healthier, resilient communities by fighting for better food, climate justice, and economic equity. We envision the CFA as the world's first closed-loop, zero-waste farmers market targeting no on-site greenhouse gas emissions. In Marin County, we have access to a 4.63-acre site for the future home of the CFA at the historic Frank Lloyd-Wright Designed Marin County Civic Center campus.

The Center for Food and Agriculture will address inequities and dysfunctions in our food and farming systems, many of which have worsened during the Covid-19 crisis. Today, our small family farmers, ranchers, and food businesses continue to struggle due to retirements, labor shortages, the high cost of land, bankruptcies, and the growing pressures of the climate crisis.

The time has come to build a permanent space with a vibrant public common that preserves the livelihood of small and mid-size farmers, ranchers, fishers, small food businesses and artisans, while honoring resilient and thriving local and regional food systems. While the Center is physically located in Marin County, AIM currently serves over 390 small to mid-size farmers, ranchers, dairy producers, and small food businesses from 44 counties in California,

Essential Project Elements

The CFA will serve as an essential connection point between those who need quality, nutrient-dense foods and those who make their livelihoods in a way that protects soils, pastures, and seas. AIM will serve a diverse demographic base, drawing from over 600,000 households and local area chefs in Marin, Sonoma, and San Francisco counties, and area visitors.

Project at a Glance:

- An open-air year-round farmers market three days per week with daily programming within the CFA
- ADA accessible restrooms, hydration stations, tie-downs for market tents



- Overhead cantilever canopies coverage to protect farmers and shoppers from inclement weather
- Indoor and outdoor dynamic learning spaces, including a teaching kitchen, classrooms and meeting spaces, and edible garden
- 900 square foot visitor center with market information, educational exhibitions, merchandise, and coffee kiosk.
- 3,010 square foot building with an all-electric teaching kitchen, classrooms, and meeting spaces
- Solar panels to harvest energy from the sun, powering the Center and our programs.
- Gathering places for people to enjoy food, art, music, and community together.
- Educational gardens demonstrating how food grows seasonally in this bioregion.
- A pollinator corridor dedicated to supporting essential life-giving insects and birds
- A zero-waste market that re-defines how producers package food.
- A visitor center with digital kiosks to welcome and assist guests.
- A hub for innovative solutions to ensure community members and schools can access a safe, culturally acceptable diet
- A transportation hub with ample bicycle parking, EV stations, and transfer link to the local SMART Train Station

Connections to Careers and Small Business Advising

The Center's programming will include technical assistance and workshops led by a network of experts in the fields of small business advising, marketing, and sales for beginning farmers and food makers. Beginning farms that sell direct to consumer have higher odds of survival.¹ Direct-market farms create 32 local jobs per \$1M in revenue.² Producers receive over 90 cents on the dollar at farmers markets (after fees) versus 15-17.4 cents for products sold through wholesale channels.³

Support for Historically Disadvantaged Producers

Following *AIM's Path to Racial Equity*, our marketplace will offer space for Black, Indigenous, and people of color producers, who have historically been denied access to capital, wealth, and markets, along with other socially disadvantaged producers including women, LGBTQ folks, immigrants, and veterans. As part of an incubator model, AIM has established a "Racial Equity Fund" to invest in a selected group of BIPOC producers to position them for success at AIM's markets and beyond.

Equitable Nutrition Access

The CFA will be a hub for equitable food access with a convenient location for the County to enroll large numbers of newly eligible families for CalFresh and offer them access to farm-fresh nutrition programs like WIC and the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition program. AIM anticipates a 400% increase in CalFresh (EBT) redemptions, making healthy fresh produce affordable to more children and families in need. In 2021, AIM redeemed \$572,154 in EBT benefits and distributed \$388,150 in Market Match incentives for free fruits and vegetables from the farmers' market. It will provide refrigeration for AIM to store locally grown fresh produce and dairy products delivered by the Rollin' Root mobile market to older adults and



others with limited mobility across the Bay Area. Through community partnerships with ExtraFood.org, Respecting our Elder, and Marin Community Fridges, we will redistribute excess produce and baked goods from the farmers market to feed the hungry and reduce food waste.

Zero Waste Model to Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions

MarinCAN, a community-driven campaign to dramatically reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions endorsed the CFA as one of seven solutions for reducing greenhouse gasses. The new Center will be fully electric with on-site solar panels, allow us to store enough energy to power the center and have reserve during emergencies and planned power outages. Other features include permeable paving and habitat restoration to sequester pollutants and filter water, on-site composting and carbon sequestration gardens, pollinator corridor for essential

life-giving insects and birds, and rainwater cistern for on-site irrigation. Our climate analysis shows that the Project will achieve net-positive energy in two years; our design choices will remove more carbon than it will have emitted. Ordinary construction projects would take up to between 21 – 30 years to be net-positive.

Thank you for your time and support of our direct-to-market platform to preserve the livelihood of small to midsize farmers and small businesses.

Sincerely,

Andy Naja-Riese
Chief Executive Officer
Agricultural Institute of Marin

Katia Berberi & Steve Drapeau
Owners
Anne's Toum

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Chief Administrative Officer
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Stefan Parnay
Agricultural Commissioner, Director of Weights
and Measures
County of Marin

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CREO

Leslie Alden
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Drawdown Bay Area

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Owner/Chef
Dooryard Provisions

Andy Fisher
Executive Director
Ecological Farming Association

Will Dittmar
Executive Director
ExtraFood

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Felice Foods: Marin County , CA

Ben Feldman
Executive Director
Farmers Market Coalition

Christine E. Farren
Executive Director
Foodwise

Laura deTar
Executive Director
Fresh Approach

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Owners
Front Porch Farm



Andrew Brait
Co-Owner
Full Belly Farm

Austin Clark & Joy Taylor
Farmers & Owners
Glass Onion Farm

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Happy Quail Farm

Cecilia Zamora
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Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Marin

John Campbell
Manager
Indian Valley Organic Farm and Garden

Reba Meigs
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Sheila Hilliard
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Boss Seasoning

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Kandarian Organic Farm

Lara Rajninger
Executive Director
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Paige Phinney
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Kitchen Table Advisors

Paul Glowaski
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Knuckleball Agricultural Services

Yeyen Gunawan
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La Vie Wellness Inc

Cecilia Zamora
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Molly and Kenneth Baker
Owners/ operators
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Curtis and Priscilla Lucero
Owners
Lucero Organic Farms

Scott Zalkind
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Lucky Dog Hot Sauce
Food's Best Friend!™

Marc-Henri Jean-Baptiste
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Maison Porcella

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Min-Hee Hill Gardens

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Executive Director
Numi Foundation

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Cofounder & CEO
Otherwise Brewing

Carole Sartenaer
Owner

Phoenix Pastificio

Gustavo Mutul
Owner / chef
Pibil authentic Yucatán food

Elena Fabbri
Owner /Chef
Porchetta toscana

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Sea to Sky Farm

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Agricultural Commissioner/Sealer of Weights & Measures
Sonoma County Department of Agriculture/Weights & Measures

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Straus Family Creamery

Vivien Straus
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Daily Driver

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Tomatero Organic Farm

Paul Glowaski
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Knuckleball Agricultural Sevces/Dinner Bell Farm

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Rebecca Wachsberg, Office of Senator McGuire
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