

February 19, 2002

United States Senator Barbara Boxer  
112 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

United States Senator Dianne Feinstein  
331 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein:

Santa Barbara County is among the top agricultural counties in the nation. Agriculture is the county's leading production industry, worth over \$1.5 billion through the economic multiplier effect, and continues to grow. In 2000, Santa Barbara was the 14<sup>th</sup> ranked county in California in gross value of agricultural production, at \$735 million. According to the 1997 Census of Agriculture, between 1992 and 1997 Santa Barbara County rose from 32<sup>nd</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> in the country in terms of the market value of agricultural products sold. Approximately 850,000 acres, almost 90% of the county's privately owned land, are zoned for agriculture. The importance of agriculture to the community, economy, landscape and heritage of Santa Barbara County cannot be overstated.

We have been closely following the progress of the 2002 Farm Bill due to its potential impact on our farmers and county as a whole. The County is very interested in maintaining the success and viability of local agriculture in the face of increasing pressures for development and urbanization of agricultural lands. We have adopted policies to this end and our staff has been working in collaboration with the agricultural community to protect natural resources on private land, provide incentives to continue farming, and develop a positive, comprehensive approach to the future of our rural lands.

We wish to express support for several elements of the 2002 Farm Bill because of the benefits they could provide to agriculture in Santa Barbara County.

- Most of the agricultural industry in this county is focused on specialty crops, including fruits, vegetables, flowers and vineyards. The Commodity Title of the Senate Bill (1731) provides for a large percentage of funds for commodity purchases to be reserved for specialty crops, up to \$170 million in 2006. We support the inclusion of a greater share of commodity purchases dedicated to specialty crops than the existing percentage.

- Our current work with the local industry has demonstrated the importance of providing incentives to farmers and ranchers to conserve natural resources. The demand for incentives far outstrips the current supply. The Conservation Title should provide for substantial increases in spending and acreage caps for conservation programs including, among others, the Conservation Reserve Program, Wetland Reserve Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program, and Environmental Quality Incentives Program. We support efforts to better address the needs of California farmers, who face high land prices and work more often with irrigated agriculture, through these conservation programs. We support Natural Resource Conservation Service administration of these programs due to the excellent working relationship it has with farmers and the technical expertise that the Service has developed locally and throughout California.
- Santa Barbara has a very active farmer's market program. We support aspects of the Nutrition Title that propose to expand farmer's markets and other community supported agriculture programs, increase the participation of farmer's markets in the federal food stamp program, and increase purchases of domestic specialty crops to supply elementary and secondary school children with fruits and vegetables.
- Santa Barbara County supports any assistance in making the latest technology and advances in sustainable and biologically-integrated farming available to local farmers wishing to explore these options. We therefore support inclusion of programs in the Research Title that provide increased funding for organic and sustainable agricultural research programs; provide grants for research on the human health and environmental effects of genetically modified agricultural products; and assist beginning farmers and ranchers with technical assistance and conservation training to ensure the long-term sustainability of agriculture in this country.

We strongly encourage your support of these components of the 2002 Farm Bill that help family farms and ranches, and specialty crop producers, while also encouraging sustainability and conservation in all agricultural sectors. Santa Barbara County, as well as the entire country, will benefit from a progressive Farm Bill that focuses on the long-term viability of agriculture and the ecosystems on which it depends.

Sincerely,

Gail Marshall, Chair  
Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors  
Third District Supervisor

cc: U.S. Representative Lois Capps  
U.S. Representative Elton Gallegly