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Strategies for creating a more resilient Bay Area food and farm sector outlined in new report

CONTACTS: Sibella Kraus, President, Sustainable Agriculture Education (SAGE)
510-526-1793; sibella@sagecenter.org

Serena Unger, Senior Policy Associate, American Farmland Trust (AFT)
(415) 336-2981; sunger@farmland.org

SAN FRANCISCO, CA, November 16, 2017—Today, Sustainable Agriculture Education and American Farmland Trust announced the publication of a new analysis, “[The Bay Area Food Economy: Existing Conditions and Strategies for Resilience](#).” Recognizing the integral role farms and food businesses play in the Bay Area, SAGE and AFT outline strategies for strengthening the region’s agriculture and food cluster as a critical pillar of the region’s economic prosperity, environmental sustainability and vibrant cultural life. The Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) commissioned the report as a part of the region’s Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy.

Agriculture and food sectors in the Bay Area have impressive assets and growth opportunities but face considerable challenges. The Bay Area has an extraordinarily rich and diverse food system--its 38,500 agriculture and food businesses, ranging from micro-enterprises to global corporations, have an annual value of around \$113 billion. The food economy employs close to half a million people, around 13 percent of the region’s workforce. However, the region continues to lose its best and most resilient farmland to development and food processors, distributors and incubators struggle to find affordable space in high-value real estate markets. In addition, a shortage of qualified food sector workers persists, in part because average wages in the sector fall well short of the average regional wage.

With these challenges and opportunities in mind, the report from SAGE and AFT outlines the following recommendations for increasing investments in the food and agriculture sector:

- 1) Establish a regional agricultural and food economic development program.
- 2) Support value chain climate and natural disaster resilience to help regional agricultural and food industries manage climate and natural disaster impacts, adopt best practices, innovate, and manage business risks and opportunities associated with climate change and natural disasters.

- 3) Facilitate development and enhancement of food goods movement and food processing and distribution infrastructure, being mindful of pending innovations, and help stimulate investments that address the growing strains on transportation, water, energy and communications.
- 4) Upskill the workforce and provide pathways to better jobs by improving the alignment between workforce skills and business needs, and evaluate ways to improve low wage occupations.
- 5) Enhance Plan Bay Area to ensure a land use pattern with space for all activities, while encouraging the protection of the region's most productive agricultural lands to support their economic viability.

"The Bay Area Food Economy White Paper adds a significant dimension to the CEDS," said Cynthia Kroll, ABAG's Chief Economist. "It shows that the agriculture and food economic cluster is a critical and integral sector for our region, and identifies the investments needed to strengthen this important element of our regional resilience."

To read the report in its entirety, visit: <https://abag.ca.gov/planning/economic.html>

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SAGE revitalizes agricultural places near cities and fosters vital food systems that connect urban and rural communities. Known for its visionary ideas and on-the-ground know-how, SAGE develops food systems projects and action plans integrated with local and regional sustainability initiatives. Learn more at: www.sagecenter.org

American Farmland Trust is the only national conservation organization dedicated to protecting farmland, promoting sound farming practices and keeping farmers on the land. Since 1980 American Farmland Trust has helped to permanently protect more than five million acres of farm and ranch land. Learn more at: www.farmland.org