

Date of Hearing: April 21, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

Isaac G. Bryan, Chair

AB 1486 (Soria) – As Amended April 3, 2025

**SUBJECT:** Climate resiliency: research farms: grant program

**SUMMARY:** Requires the State Department of Education (DOE), in consultation with the Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA), on or before January 1, 2026, to establish a grant program to provide grants to public postsecondary educational institutions that are designated as Agricultural Experiment Stations or Agricultural Research Institutes to develop or expand research farms to improve climate resiliency, as specified.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) The Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024, approved by the voters as Proposition 4 at the November 5, 2024, statewide general election, authorizes \$10 billion in general obligation bonds to finance projects for safe drinking water, drought, flood, and water resilience, wildfire and forest resilience, coastal resilience, extreme heat mitigation, biodiversity and nature-based climate solutions, climate-smart, sustainable, and resilient farms, ranches, and working lands, park creation and outdoor access, and clean air programs: (Public Resources Code (PRC) 90000 – 95015)
- 2) Proposition 4 includes \$300 million for improving climate resilience and sustainability of agricultural lands, of which \$15 million is available, upon appropriation, for DOE, in consultation with CDFA, to provide grants to public postsecondary educational institutions that are designated as Agricultural Experiment Stations or Agricultural Research Institutes, to develop research farms to improve climate resiliency. Specifies that funding for each institution is limited to no more than \$1 million. (PRC 93570)

**THIS BILL:**

- 1) States the intent of the Legislature to ensure that the \$15 million made available for grants to educational institutions for research farms is used for this purpose.
- 2) Requires, on or before July 1, 2026, the DOE, in consultation with CDFA, to establish a grant program to provide grants to public postsecondary educational institutions that are designated as Agricultural Experiment Stations or Agricultural Research Institutes to develop or expand research farms to improve climate resiliency, in accordance with PRC 93570.

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Unknown

**COMMENTS:**

- 1) **Proposition 4.** Proposition 4 authorized the issuance of bonds in the amount of \$10 billion to fund projects for safe drinking water, drought, flood, and water resilience, wildfire and forest resilience, coastal resilience, extreme heat mitigation, biodiversity and nature-based climate solutions, climate-smart, sustainable, and resilient farms, ranches, and working lands, park creation and outdoor access, and clean air programs.

Of these funds, Proposition 4 allocated \$300 million to fund improvements in climate resilience and sustainability of agricultural lands. As part of this allocation, \$15 million was made available, upon appropriation by the Legislature, to DOE, in consultation with CDFA, to provide grants to public postsecondary educational institutions that are designated as Agricultural Experiment Stations or Agricultural Research Institutes, to develop research farms to improve climate resiliency, as specified. The proposed 2025-26 State budget does not appropriate these funds for research farm grants.

- 2) **Climate resilience.** California's agricultural operations generated nearly \$60 billion in 2023; its top exports included almonds, dairy and dairy products, pistachios, wine, and walnuts. Climate change poses direct threats to California's agricultural productivity, the livelihoods of farmers and ranchers, and food security. As the climate continues to warm, experts predict that some areas of the state will no longer be able to support the production of certain crops, including wine grapes, walnuts, and some stone fruits. Increasing droughts, unpredictable precipitation, extreme heat, diseases and pests, and wildfires have the potential to significantly impact the state's critical agricultural productivity.
- 3) **Research farms.** The California State University (CSU) system has ten campus centers and institutes (CCIs) that are devoted to agricultural research. These research organizations are affiliated with CSU campuses but also offer noncredit instruction, information, or other services to groups beyond the campus community. They are designed to serve public organizations and agencies, private companies, and individuals throughout California. The CCIs include the Agribusiness Institute at Chico State University, which offers general agricultural business expertise, and the Irrigation Training and Resource Center at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, which provides training and technical assistance for industry members, farmers, and state and local government agencies. The four CSU campuses with colleges of agriculture (CSU Chico, Fresno State, Cal Poly Pomona, and Cal Poly San Luis Obispo) operate working farms and ranches to support education and research in agriculture.

In addition to those operated by the CSU system, California has numerous research farms and programs. The University of California (UC) Davis plays a key role through the UC Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) and the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences.

- 4) **This bill.** The funding in Proposition 4 to support research farm grants is intended to improve agricultural resilience to the challenges posed by climate change. However, funding for this purpose has not been appropriated by the Legislature. This bill is intended to ensure the appropriation of those funds by establishing a clear timeline for DOE to implement the grant program.
- 5) **Author's statement:**

Proposition 4's research farm grants will help California's public colleges improve existing, or help start up, research farms with a focus on improving climate resiliency.

- 6) **Double referral.** This bill was passed by the Assembly Agriculture Committee on March 26<sup>th</sup> with a vote of 8-0.

**REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

**Support**

Sustainable Conservation

**Opposition**

None on file

**Analysis Prepared by:** Elizabeth MacMillan / NAT. RES. /