

Date of Hearing: May 7, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

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

Policy Committee:	Agriculture	Vote:	8 - 0
	Natural Resources		14 - 0

Urgency: No State Mandated Local Program: No Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill (1) requires the California Department of Education (CDE), in consultation with the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA), on or before January 1, 2026, and upon appropriation, to establish a grant program to provide grants to specified public postsecondary educational institutions to develop or expand research farms to improve climate resiliency, and (2) states it is the intent of the Legislature to ensure that the \$15 million made available in the Proposition 4 climate bond for grants to educational institutions for research farms is used for this purpose.

FISCAL EFFECT:

- 1) CDE will incur ongoing costs of an unknown amount, likely in the hundreds of thousands to low millions of dollars, to establish and administer the required grant program. CDE estimates ongoing costs of approximately \$1.1 million for 5.5 new staff as well as IT, contracting, and travel costs (bond funds, possibly General Fund).
- 2) Cost pressure of an unknown but significant amount, likely in the millions of dollars, to provide grants to specified public postsecondary educational institutions to develop or expand research farms (bond funds).

As noted below, the Proposition 4 climate bond provides \$15 million for this purpose. The bond provides that 7% of the funds allocated for a grant program may be used to pay for the administrative costs of that program. If this 7% set-aside is a one-time allowance, bond funds may cover CDE’s administrative costs for approximately one year. The department may need to seek funding from a different fund source (like the General Fund) to cover its administrative costs in subsequent years.

- 3) CDFA reports minor and absorbable costs for its consultative role.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose.** According to the author, “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.”
- 2) **Background.**

Proposition 4. The \$10 billion Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024, approved by voters in 2024 as Proposition 4, allocated \$300 million to fund improvements in climate resilience and sustainability of agricultural lands. As part of this allocation, the bond makes \$15 million available, upon appropriation, to CDE, in consultation with CDFA, to provide grants to public postsecondary educational institutions designated as agricultural experiment stations or agricultural research institutes to develop or expand research farms to improve climate resiliency. The bond language provides that this funding shall not exceed \$1 million per institution and “shall be constructed and maintained with environmentally sustainable infrastructure practices.”

The Governor’s Proposition 4 expenditure plan, proposed as part of the administration’s January budget for the 2025-26 fiscal year, places this \$15 million in a “pending allocation” category. The Legislative Analyst’s Office noted in a February report that the administration is requesting that the Legislature provide more guidance around its intentions for three bond activities – including the \$15 million for research farms at postsecondary education institutions – for which the Governor’s expenditure plan does not yet include an appropriation timeline.

Research Farms. The California State University (CSU) system has ten campus centers and institutes (CCIs) 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. 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, the state has numerous research farms and programs. 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.

- 3) **Support.** Writing in support of the bill, Sustainable Conservation notes its organization partners with researchers across the state, including UC ANR and its associated cooperative extensions, as well as growers and other stakeholders, to develop “new and sustainable practices to help meet the state’s climate resilience and water conservation goals.” These practices that are aimed at managing the impact of greenhouse gases from dairy manure management include reducing nitrate loading through subsurface drip irrigation technology, cover cropping for both soil health and water supply benefits, and other innovations. Sustainable Conservation contends this bill, by expanding the network of research farms to continue this kind of groundbreaking work, will provide additional investment in the kind of innovation that is needed to respond to the ongoing climate crisis.