April 14, 2016

Senator Bill Monning
State Capitol, Room 313
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SB 313 (Monning)—Zoning ordinances and school districts--SUPPORT

Dear Senator Monning:

The Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) is a statewide organization that represents both farmers and non-farm urban residents who support sustainable food and farming policies. CAFF is pleased to support your SB 313, which seeks to require school district boards to exhaust all alternatives and provide written justification 30 days before voting to place a school on land zoned for agriculture.

We have repeatedly seen how the siting of schools on agricultural land outside of cities has led to urban sprawl as utilities are extended to the school site. We have also seen how schools placed in the midst of farms create serious dilemmas for farmers, as normal agricultural practices, such as the use of chemicals, are suddenly deemed unacceptable because they are occurring near a school. Since school districts usually have alternatives available within existing urban areas, we support this effort to require them to explain why those alternatives are not feasible. We deplore the siting of schools on agricultural land simply because it is less expensive or some developer has donated the land.

CAFF was involved in the siting of the Pajaro Valley High School in Watsonville. The extension of utility lines across Highway 1 threatened to open the whole west side of the Pajaro Valley to development and the proximity of the school to commercial agriculture posed potential health concerns with pesticides. These concerns were ultimately resolved with the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County acquiring neighboring property that might have been developed and installing an organic farming operation there. Such negotiation and planning should be required in all such cases.

We thank you and Sen. Galgiani for co-authoring this legislation and we support its passage.

Sincerely,

David Runsten
Policy Director