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To: Friends of BAREC

I am a native Californian, a fifth generation Californian on my mother's side. I can still recall my grandmother's lament about the loss of farmland in Santa Clara County. Later, while learning about planning and land use, I was struck by the European decision to allow building on hilltops to save the farmland. The opportunity to save the Bay Area Research Extension Center (BAREC) as a working farm and a place to teach children about organic food and good nutrition seems like an extraordinarily good idea.

As the California Superintendent of Public Instruction, I asked for a garden in every school. We managed to reach over 3000 schools, but often with very modest gardens. It did teach our children where food came from and made academic subjects come alive, even as it improved school nutrition by giving the children the satisfaction of fresh produce to eat. Nonetheless, students too often do not get to see a working farm. There is an opportunity to see working farms in Napa county, Yolo County, Santa Cruz county and towns like Goleta, to name a few, but not in the once premier agricultural county that is Santa Clara.

Children need to understand that food does not come from "the store" and that the rich agricultural heritage of America is alive and well today. Lecturing to them is wimpy when compared with the hands-on, experiential power of seeing and working on a farm. Here is how to help our students learn science, math, language and history in a much more powerful way. BAREC could be a living laboratory. Would that we had set more acreage aside decades ago, but saving BAREC for agricultural education represents a last chance in this neck of the woods.

There is a lot of talk of obesity. Focusing on obesity is focusing on a negative behavior. Focusing on healthy enjoyment of food and nutrition is a much more powerful way to change behavior than harping on what is bad. Local governments may get a few more tax dollars today, but once the last farm is gone we will not get it back, and a priceless resource would be lost forever. I wish you the very best in this noble endeavor to save BAREC for our children.

Yours most sincerely,

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