

ALEX PADILLA  
CALIFORNIA

**United States Senate**  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 08, 2021

The Honorable Gina M. Raimondo  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
1401 Constitution Ave, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20230

**RE: Fresno – Merced Future Innovation Initiative proposal for the Build Back Regional Challenge Grant**

Dear Secretary Raimondo:

I write to you in support of the Central Valley Community Foundation’s proposal, Fresno – Merced Future of Food Innovation initiative, for the Build Back Better Regional Challenge grant to support research and the development of new technology, protect livelihood, and introduce new economic opportunities by partnering with community stakeholders in the Central Valley. The Community Valley Foundation is requesting \$100 million to fund the Fresno –Merced Future of Food Innovation initiative and redefine the region’s economy as both a source of innovation and inclusive growth, and secure the nation’s produce supply.

The Central Valley is the workhorse of the nation’s food system with over 5 million acres of production agriculture consisting of 4,500 farms that produce more than 400 hundred commodities annually. Despite an enormous concentration of industry assets and notable university presence, the region has a slow-growing, commodity-based economy that struggles to spur, adopt and commercialize innovations that can help the region move up the value chain. The Build Back Better Regional Challenge (BBBRC) is in complete alignment with the Fresno DRIVE Initiative, a 10-year plan to invest \$4 billion in the Central San Joaquin Valley to create an inclusive, vibrant, and sustainable economy and to reverse the course of the chronic economic, environmental, and inequitable conditions the region currently experiences. One of its signature economic development initiatives, the Fresno-Merced Future of Food (F3) Innovation Initiative, is the focus of DRIVE’s BBBRC proposal.

The requested funds will be used to change this dynamic by leveraging the region’s existing concentration and expertise in sustainable food production and engineering to develop a “Climate- Smart Food and Agriculture Industry Cluster” that drives economic development for the region. The Climate Smart Food and Ag Cluster will focus on developing food-ag-tech that decarbonizes and strengthens the resiliency of the nation’s food supply while providing an opportunity for the Central Valley to export technological innovations rather than only commodities. The cluster has also embedded a commitment to

micro- and small-business development, enhancing local food systems, championing healthy foods, and “just transition” workforce development for climate-impacted food and Ag workers.

Once the project is completed, it will provide dynamic change by redefining the region’s economy as both a source of innovation and inclusive growth, and secure the nation’s produce supply. For all the aforementioned reasons, I urge your full and fair consideration of the Central Valley Community Foundation’s application consistent with all applicable laws, rules, and regulations.

Please keep my office informed of the status of this proposal, and if I can be of further assistance, do not hesitate to contact my Senior Field Representative, Margaret Arechiga, at (559) 509-0222. Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alex Padilla". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Alex" and last name "Padilla" clearly distinguishable.

ALEX PADILLA  
United States Senator