

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 11, 2022

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 re-affirm my support of the Central Valley Community Foundation's proposal, the Fresno - Merced Future of Food (F3) 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 F3 Innovation Initiative and redefine the region's economy as both a source of innovation and inclusive growth, as well as secure the nation's produce supply.

The Central Valley is the workhorse of the nation's food system with over five million acres of production agriculture consisting of 7,100 farming enterprises that produce over 350 commodities annually including 60 percent of fruits and 30 percent of vegetables. Despite \$22 billion in annual revenue and enormous concentration of industry assets, the region experiences a slow-growing economy that struggles to spur, adopt, and commercialize innovation. F3 aims to change that 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." Out of sixty finalists, it is my understanding that F3 is the only application that addresses the sustainability of the nation's supply of fresh fruits and vegetables.

In addition, with over 22 percent of Central Valley residents living below the federal poverty line, F3 is the only application in California located in a persistent poverty community. The cluster will create economic mobility opportunities for residents of the Central Valley, including workers, BIPOC farmers, and small food vendors, diversify the economy and build export opportunities. As the industry grows to meet food supply demands, F3 integrates equity across project components to ensure growth does not come at the expense of the environment and the people who live here. Securing a significant investment from the U.S. Economic Development Administration through the Build Back Better Regional Challenge grant will create 10,000 high-paying jobs with a 68 percent average wage increase.

Once the project is completed, it will support research and the development of new techniques that will protect livelihoods, introduce new economic opportunities, secure the future of the nation's food supply, and create sustainable jobs for future generations. 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 a prominent "A" and "P".

ALEX PADILLA
United States Senator