



SPUR URBAN CENTER
654 Mission Street
San Francisco, California
94105

415.781.8726
www.spur.org

SPUR SAN JOSE
38 West Santa Clara Street
San Jose, California
95113

408.510.5688
www.spur.org/sanjose

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Gabriel Metcalf

San Jose Director
Leah Toeniskoetter

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June 24, 2013

Senator Jim Beall
State Capitol, Room 2068
Sacramento, CA 95814
Via Facsimile: (916) 323-4529

Dear Senator Beall:

On behalf of SPUR, we are writing in support of Assembly Bill 551, the Urban Agriculture Incentive Zone Act. This legislation will help address one of the biggest obstacles facing urban farmers – affordable access to land.

As SPUR detailed in its 2012 report, *Public Harvest*, urban agriculture provides many benefits to city residents including: education about fresh, healthy food and the effort it takes to produce it; environmental benefits for the city; community-building; vibrant green spaces and recreation; and a modest source of economic development. One of the biggest obstacles to expanding the number of Californians who enjoy these benefits of urban agriculture is access to land.

AB551 would enable a property owner to apply for a temporary property tax adjustment while the property is under a five-year contract with an agricultural enterprise. This type of incentive would assist urban agriculture projects in Santa Clara County by reducing property costs for urban farmers and gardeners and by providing long-term land security.

While providing benefits to urban agriculture projects, the legislation importantly includes language that would limit its potential for abuse. A recent amendment offered by Assembly Member Ting, for example, explicitly allows counties to devise regulations implementing the legislation as they deem necessary. Additionally, the legislation is narrowly tailored to target land that is unlikely to otherwise be developed in the near-term.

Because it is an opt-in measure for counties, Assembly Bill 551 offers a conservative approach to a widespread impediment to the emergence of viable urban agriculture projects across the State. We believe that the legislation provides a balanced and protective approach by being a voluntary program for property-owners, requiring a five-year commitment.

SPUR respectfully requests your AYE vote for Assembly Bill 551.

Sincerely,

Leah Toeniskoetter
San Jose Director

Eli Zigas
Food Systems and Urban
Agriculture Program Manager