January 17, 2017

Honorable Mary Nichols, Chair

California Air Resources Board

1001 I Street

Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Chairwoman Nichols:

Sustainable Conservation appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the November 28, 2016 draft of the Short Lived Climate Pollutant (SLCP) Strategy. As has been the case with our comments on the previous drafts of the SLCP Strategy, our current comments focus specifically on the sections addressing the methane emissions from the management of dairy manure.

In our comments on the earlier drafts of the SLCP Strategy, we expressed serious concerns about the potential consequences of implementing a dairy methane strategy with highly ambitious targets, significant data gaps, a short time frame, and no real road map for how compliance could be achieved. Thankfully, many of our concerns have been significantly lessened by the passage of SB 1383 (Lara) and the subsequent revisions to the SLCP Strategy. As a result, the dairy manure sections of the Strategy have become a de facto road map for the implementation of the relevant sections of SB 1383 and other legislative directives. As such, it is important that the Strategy gives appropriate weight and attention to all the methane emission reduction project types specified in legislation.

Anaerobic digesters will play an important part in achieving the dairy manure methane reductions called for in SB 1383 and the SLCP Strategy. The technology has improved greatly, and the emission reductions they achieve can be calculated with sufficient accuracy. Given their relatively high level of development, it makes sense for CARB to look to dairy digester projects as a way to get significant short- and medium-term emission reductions. However, while we recognize that digesters have a very substantial role to play in achieving emission reductions, we also know, based on our 2015 report Greenhouse Gas Mitigation Strategies for California Dairies and other studies, that dairy digesters alone cannot achieve all of the reductions called for in SB 1383 in a feasible and affordable way. Alternative emission reduction strategies will be needed for the many dairies for which digesters are impractical, uneconomical, or undesirable.

We appreciate the recognition of the importance of non-digester alternatives in the current draft Strategy, particularly in the statement of intent to “Research the Reduction Potential of Manure Management Practices.” However, research alone is not enough. We would like to see the language of this section revised to call not only for research but also for deployment of and support for the use of these strategies as the research provides the needed data. All the available strategies for manure emission reduction – digesters, scrape systems, composting, solids separation, pasture – need to be recognized, developed, and deployed in order to achieve the highest level of emission reductions from the widest range of dairies. We hope that advocates for, and experts in, non-digester alternative manure management systems will have full representation in the SB 1383 stakeholder work group.

Before these beneficial alternative manure management systems are put in place, it will be essential that their potential impacts on air and water quality, and the challenges they may face from the agencies regulating those impacts, be not only included in the economic analysis of the

systems but addressed in policy by CARB. Without this, permitting restrictions and costs could turn out to be a potentially crippling bottleneck to their implementation. For example, the application of existing regulatory and permitting requirements to a dairy switching from a flush to a scrape system by the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control Board could lead to substantial additional mitigation and offset costs. This is only one example of the extensive potential for roadblocks to implementation of an effective manure management strategy. CARB must give serious consideration not only to the potential air and water quality impacts of alternative manure systems themselves, but also to the regulatory and permitting restrictions and costs dairies will face due to these impacts.

One of the stakeholder groups required to be included in the work group called for by SB 1383 are “composters with experience composting dairy manure,” which clearly indicates that compost from dairy manure is expected to play a significant role in CARB’s creation of the manure management strategy called for by the legislation. Despite this clear expression of legislative intent, the Dairy Manure section of the Strategy’s chapter on Reducing Methane Emissions only mentions compost in reference to work being done by other agencies (CalRecycle and CDFA). The economic assessment of dairy manure emission reductions in the Evaluations chapter of the Strategy expressly declines to consider the potential costs and benefits of dairy manure compost, though the chapter goes on to create a scenario for new compost facilities in its assessment of emission reductions from diverting organic waste. Dairy compost is becoming an integral part of the larger conversation about organics and the implementation of AB 1045. Our forthcoming report on dairy compost examines how it can provide both GHG reduction and water quality benefits. The report also identifies data gaps and regulatory barriers standing in the way of more composting of dairy manure, particularly in on-farm facilities. We ask that the next iteration of the SLCP Strategy incorporate dairy manure compost more fully into the action items on incentives and market development and research on reduction potential of manure management actions, contain an economic assessment of dairy compost’s potential benefits and costs, and incorporate on-farm dairy composting into the new compost facilities scenario in the assessment of organic waste.

Once again, we thank you for the opportunity to comment on the November 28, 2016 version of the proposed SLCP Strategy. As an environmental organization, Sustainable Conservation has been focused on achieving real reductions in dairy GHG emissions instead of merely driving dairies and their emissions out of state. We are gratified to see the degree to which the SLCP Strategy has come to incorporate that end, and we look forward to continuing to work with CARB on the issue.

Sincerely,

 

 J Stacey Sullivan

Policy Director