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Dear Councilwoman Soria and esteemed colleagues of the Fresno City Council,

Thank you for taking leadership in this very important issue of community resilience, health, economic prosperity and environmental conservation for our city. Fresno Metro Ministry supports the City of Fresno's Emergency Ordinance amending Section 6-520 of the Fresno Municipal Code to provide water conservation exemption for food gardens. Fresno Metro Ministry (Metro) is a multicultural, multi-faith community benefit organization that 'Builds Partnerships for Community Well-being.' Our 45 year old organization adopted a new mission/vision of 'Learning, Connecting, and Engaging to Achieve Healthy People and Healthy Places' in 2014.

We believe it is good public policy for our city to encourage individuals and institutions to grow food within our city limits with requirements of proper use of current water conservation technology such as drip irrigation and timers. The amount of water needed to sustain a productive vegetable garden is significantly less than the amount needed to keep a grass lawn green. In addition, local food production eliminates the air pollution and greenhouse gases created from transporting food from other regions and our air basin needs as many reductions in vehicle miles travelled as possible. Mobile sources such as diesel trucks used to transport food still comprise over 85% of the Valley's emissions that contribute to Ozone (and particulate matter) pollution.

Fresno Metro Ministry has been working for decades to create local food systems that meet the nutrition needs of low-income residents. Metro has approached this challenge by focusing on three main strategies: 1) maximizing current resources for residents by creating networks and coalitions to coordinate programs and services, 2) improving education and outreach to targeted communities for these programs and services, and 3) creating food security through new models of urban food production and alternative distribution for local farm products— food grown by the community for the community.

These projects have been very successful, creating 208 family gardening plots on City of Fresno PARCS lands all of which are subscribed and have waiting lists. Our 2012 Community Garden Status Report, a survey of Community Garden participants in Fresno, found that in addition to increasing food access, participating gardeners modified their eating choices (less fast food); felt more connected to their neighborhoods, and experienced significant mental health benefits. We are extremely concerned about the drought and have chosen to invest in the resilience of our community, we believe this policy is the best way to build healthy, strong, resilient communities in Fresno.

Sincerely,

  
Sarah Sharpe  
Resilient Communities Program Director  
Fresno Metro Ministry