

# California Agricultural Land Equity Task Force Meeting Summary: August 14-15, 2024

September 17, 2024

## Meeting Called to Order

Chair Nelson Hawkins called day 1 of the meeting to order around 2:15 p.m., with special thanks to the public and invited guest speakers for joining the meeting. Member Franco provided welcoming remarks, acknowledging the meeting was taking place on land home to the Choinumni people. She honored the troubles and sacrifices that have been made and welcomed all to the homelands of the Choinumni people. She expressed gratitude for the current stewards of the land.

## Roll Call

Roll call was conducted by Meagan Wylie, Facilitator. Members present:

- Nelson Hawkins\*, Chair
- Emily Burgueno, Vice Chair
- Nathaniel Brown\*
- Ruth Dahlquist-Willard
- Darlene Franco
- Lawrence Harlan
- James Nakahara\*
- Dorian Payán
- Thea Rittenhouse
- Liya Schwartzman
- Qi Zhou

\*Asterisk indicates virtual attendance.

Members absent:

- Irene de Barraicua
- Doria Robinson

Quorum was established.

## Welcome and Housekeeping

Meagan Wylie provided housekeeping information for all meeting participants. Slides and

materials presented during the meeting are available on the Strategic Growth Council [\(SGC\) website](#).

## **Action: Approval of Summary**

Approval of May 9, 2024 Meeting Summary.

### **Task Force Discussion:**

No discussion.

### **Public Comment:**

No public comment.

**Motion passes (11-0-2\*).** \*Marks abstention or absence from vote

## **Staff Report**

SGC staff presented the Staff Report, highlighting staff and budget updates, the briefing packet and work plan, and relaying new guidelines for public comment and written communication. The guidelines are available on the [Agricultural Land Equity Initiative website](#).

### **Task Force Discussion:**

Task Force Members discussed the new process for written communication directed at the Task Force via the email [landequity@sgc.ca.gov](mailto:landequity@sgc.ca.gov). Staff clarified this communication avenue is solely for public comments and should not be used by Task Force Members to communicate with staff. Staff noted a public repository of written comments will be accessible from the program website. Members asked for a summary of comments to be developed and shared for each meeting.

### **Public Comment:**

No public comment.

## **Site Visit Reports**

Groups of one or two Task Force Members toured six different farm sites in the Fresno region to learn from local farmers, ranchers, and tribes about agricultural land access challenges they have experienced, the resources and support the farms have utilized related to agricultural land access, and solutions they would like to see implemented. Participating Members shared photos and key takeaways from their visits. Farm owners present were invited to sit with the Task Force as invited guests to assist with reports.

### **Dream Farms**

Member Harlan attended. Highlights shared include:

- In 2010, farmers June You Moua and Jaran Sakrungleung relocated to a new piece of land due to a collapsed well and lack of water on their original property.
- The couple found new land shared with others in the Fresno Southeast Asian community,

but faced challenges due to the land being split between multiple locations and scarce water access.

- In 2023, the couple purchased five acres of land. Concerns remain about water supply and farm succession.

Post-report discussion:

- Staff noted the farmers appreciate owning the land and that year-to-year leases can be difficult for farmers, particularly when tenants must finance water infrastructure repairs but can lose land access without notice.
- Members asked about the acquisition of land. It was noted that the California Underserved and Small Producers (CUSP) Program through the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) was particularly helpful for these farmers.
- A member familiar with the Fresno context shared that problems arise because land is scarce and competitively sought after. United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) loans can take a long time to acquire and loan paperwork is often not accessible in appropriate languages or easily understandable.
- Members suggested that a pre-qualification process be established for USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) loans.
- The micro lending program Kiva can assist in expediting the loan process.
- California FarmLink works with FSA to expedite loan processes. This partnership could be expanded.

## **Jose Rojas Cruz Farm**

Member Franco attended. Highlights shared include:

- This is a five-acre farm with many different crops on a one-year lease. The farmers are looking for additional acreage to farm.
- Issues have arisen with interpretation.
- The water bill is not provided to the farmers. The farmers do not ask for it to maintain amenable relationships with the landowner. They work with UC Cooperative Extension staff to bookkeep and maintain records.
- Farmers expressed a need for technical assistance related to contracts review, business training, translation services, and for challenges related to water, pest safety, and safety controls assistance.

Post-report discussion:

- A Member suggested the Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA) farmer training in Santa Cruz.
- Members proposed to develop resources to assist in land access, negotiations, contracts, water access, sharing of farming equipment, resources to connect producers with purchasers, and a Central Valley advice and resources sharing center.
- A Member stated that the process of finding additional land once a lease has concluded is often an informal process in the Central Valley. Members reinforced the difficulty of one-year leases.

- Sharing land can be difficult, particularly regarding cleanliness and maintenance and access to water at different times of day.
- Water pump cleaning, audits, and water testing can be significant barriers.

## **Oliver Farms and Scott Family Farms**

Member Schwartzman attended. Highlights shared include:

- These farms are owned and managed by two experienced members of the African American Farmers of California. Site visit hosts spoke about the legacy of discrimination in farming in California and the country writ large.
- Other members of the African American Farmers of California also attended the site visit and shared that they maintain an incubator to train the next generation of farmers in the community.
- Farmers expressed concerns regarding insecure tenure of affordable land in the state and concerns regarding succession. They noted that land sale is necessary for retirement but that the price of land at sale can be unattainable for new farmers.
- Another challenge discussed was the conversion of parcels surrounding small farms to urban development or large farmers which drain the available groundwater.
- Site visit participants indicated a need for the consolidation of business-related documents and information to make it more accessible for farmers, assistance with equipment maintenance, and the conversion of equipment from gas to electric or to new technologies.

Post-report discussion:

- Members discussed succession and that it can be used as a tool to promote equity. Community land trusts and conservation easements may be important regarding succession.
- Members discussed the importance of “agriservices,” with incorporation of modern technology key to retaining and recruiting younger generations.
- Members discussed a database concept that allows buyers and sellers to work together to ensure that parties can sell/buy to/from whom they want. This may help address a temporal barrier between sellers urgently trying to sell their land and buyers who need more time.
- California FarmLink provides a service for matching buyers and sellers to help ensure reasonable timelines and costs. Nondigital communication is important for this work.
- Member Franco discussed her personal experience to help establish Wukchumni Tribal Farms which supports young people on the land.
- Members indicated a desire to talk more about public lands and mandates on public land.
- Members requested staff to conduct research on the issue of state discrimination and to provide resources for further information.

## **Public Comment:**

- Angela Islas

7-minute break began at 4:03 p.m.

## **Wukchumni Farms**

Members Burgueno and Payán attended. Highlights shared include:

- This 25-acre certified organic farm was acquired by the Wukchumni Tribe through a verbal agreement with the private landowner. The land access agreement is within the deed and was initially granted for tribal ceremonial use.
- The work happening on this farm serves as a means of combatting culture loss.
- The farm faces issues with water access. Water that flows through the property is controlled by the local water district.
- The farm has engaged in cultural burning practices. However, the vegetation on the land has been affected by restrictions to water access from the water district, thereby impacting the burning practices.
- Zoning regulations are also a challenge.

Post-report discussion:

- A Member reflected on how historical wrongdoings still affects people and land today and noted that it is important to recognize the impact on both federally and non-federally recognized tribal members.
- Member Franco, member of the Wukchumni Tribe, noted that the farm supports stewardship of the land, while also providing food for families. The farm is a ceremonial place for the Wukchumni Tribe which does not have a reservation.

## **Yo'Ville Community Garden and Farm**

Member Zhou attended. Highlights shared include:

- This organization runs five community gardens in the Fresno Area. The visited site was 7.5 acres. The land is leased until 2025 and is next to a community garden. There is competition with housing demands for the land.
- Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) gardeners are prioritized for community garden plots. Costs are approximately \$9/month to rent a parcel.
- There are efforts to establish a pick-your-own fruit area.
- The organization also has an incubator farm program which supports farmers with small plots for two to three years. One farmer has spent over three years in the program because of the challenges associated with finding accessible farmland to grow in to.
- Permitting and water were identified as primary issues for this farm.
- Additionally, it is a challenge to access appropriately sized farmland as most parcels are much larger than what is needed or can be afforded by the organization.

Post-report discussion:

- A Member commented that water concerns are a common theme throughout site visit reports.
- Staff noted farm descriptions can be found on the website.

## **Public Comment:**

- Luis Cruz
- Jennifer Nunes

## **Follow-up Discussion:**

Task Force Members raised concerns about permission to share photos from site visits publicly. Staff committed that the hosts would be contacted for permission and a clearer process would be established moving forward. Questions were asked about stipends for invited speakers and site visit hosts. Staff clarified that speaker fees are provided to site visit hosts and invited speakers.

Facilitator Wylie previewed the next day's meeting. It was asked if water rights would be discussed in the guest speakers' presentations. Staff indicated that the focus would be on groundwater versus surface water but that questions about water rights could be raised during discussion.

Day 1 meeting adjourned at 4:55 p.m.

August 15, 2024

## **Meeting Called to Order**

Chair Nelson Hawkins called day 2 of the meeting to order around 8:47 AM, with special thanks to the public and invited guest speakers for joining. Member Franco provided welcoming remarks and a prayer.

## **Roll Call**

Roll call was conducted by Meagan Wylie, Facilitator. Members present:

- Nelson Hawkins\*, Chair
- Emily Burgueno, Vice Chair
- Nathaniel Brown\*
- Ruth Dahlquist-Willard
- Darlene Franco
- Lawrence Harlan
- James Nakahara\*
- Dorian Payán
- Thea Rittenhouse
- Liya Schwartzman
- Qi Zhou
- Doria Robinson

\*Asterisk indicates virtual attendance.

Members absent:

- Irene de Barraicua

Quorum was established.

## **Welcome and Housekeeping**

Meagan Wylie, Facilitator, provided housekeeping information for all meeting participants. Slides and materials presented during the meeting are available on the Strategic Growth Council ([SGC website](#)).

Member Franco walked the Task Force through photos from the Jose Rojas Cruz Farm.

## **Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) Discussion**

Facilitator Wylie introduced presenters Janaki Anagha, Ngodoo Atume, and Ruth Dahlquist-Willard. Slides shared by presenters are available on the project website.

### **Janaki Anagha, 11th Hour Project, Program Manager, Food & Agriculture**

Presenter Anagha provided a historical overview of land and water equity in the San Joaquin Valley, highlighting California's unratified treaties and the lack of safe drinking water for over a million people. She discussed the impact of the Dust Bowl, the Bracero Program, and the development of irrigation districts, noting the challenges faced by disadvantaged communities in the San Joaquin Valley, such as unsafe drinking water and pesticide exposure. She also mentioned the need for landowner status to vote in certain elections and discussed her work with the People Food and Land Foundation to support agricultural land transition in the region.

### **Ngodoo Atume, SGMA Small Farms Technical Assistance Coordinator, University of California Agriculture and Natural Resource**

Presenter Atume gave an overview of SGMA, California's first law regulating groundwater, highlighting its requirement for long-term sustainability by 2040-42. Ngodoo detailed SGMA's six key "undesirable results" to avoid: chronic lowering of groundwater levels, reduction of groundwater shortage, seawater intrusion, degraded water quality, land subsidence, and surface water depletion. She noted that 94 groundwater basins are regulated, with 21 critically over drafted basins, mostly in the San Joaquin Valley. She explained the roles of groundwater sustainability agencies (GSAs), the State Water Resources Control Board, and the Department of Water Resources. She discussed challenges like drought impacts and groundwater pumping fees and emphasized the need for technical assistance for underrepresented farmers. She shared her recommendations for the Task Force, which include improving equity in groundwater allocation models, avoiding disproportionate landowner fees for groundwater use, evaluating land fallowing and repurposing impacts on small farmers, and improving land access and ownership particularly for tenant farmers.

### **Ruth Dahlquist-Willard, UC Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (SAREP) Interim Director, Task Force Member**

Presenter Dahlquist-Willard outlined two approaches to sustainability: increase supply through recharge and reduce demand by cutting groundwater pumping. She noted that land sales now

often include groundwater access and discussed the limited and unregulated nature of groundwater markets compared to surface water trading. Member Dahlquist-Willard highlighted the potential benefits and risks of groundwater markets, including the possibility of larger farms manipulating trades, and stressed the importance of equity, particularly for smaller farms. She also pointed out that institutional investors in the San Joaquin Valley are drilling much deeper wells than individually owned smaller farms, raising concerns about the equitable distribution of resources.

### **Public Comment:**

No public comment.

Break commenced at 10:01 a.m. and the meeting began again at 10:17 a.m.

## **Open Discussion on SGMA**

A Member asked why Member Dahlquist-Willard opposed groundwater markets, as stated during her presentation. Dahlquist-Willard clarified that groundwater markets do not physically move groundwater and argued for well-developed markets rather than dismissing them entirely. Presenter Atume emphasized treating water as a common resource, not a commodity.

A Member raised concerns about accountability in the Task Force's recommendations to minimize inadvertent impacts on farmers. Presenter Atume suggested that local agencies should consider impacts on small-scale farmers, address broader equity issues related to land access, and implement pre-allocation measures, including a notification process. Member Dahlquist-Willard supported the idea and proposed rejecting groundwater protection plans that fail to protect small farmers, while also suggesting incentives for best practices in groundwater markets. Presenter Anagha emphasized the need to protect drinking water sources and proposed mechanisms to acquire more land to ensure continued water access.

A Member asked about enforcement and compensation for over-pumping affecting smaller farms. Presenter Atume explained that a drinking water mitigation program exists but does not apply to agriculture. She stressed the importance of addressing over-pumping at the forefront.

Presenter Anagha mentioned that the community of Allensworth may be helpful to consider and that she hopes the discussion promotes land access and acquisition that ensures safe water access for communities.

A Member asked whether well depth restrictions may be a useful strategy. Member Dahlquist-Willard believes the focus should be on water demand, not well depth/width.

Members requested staff compile policy recommendations from guest speakers for subcommittee review and suggested previous speakers share their recommendations with the Task Force.

The Task Force inquired about how GSAs measure groundwater availability. Member Dahlquist-Willard explained the use of monitoring wells, flow meters, satellite measurements, and measurement frequency.

Members asked about critically overdrafted basins and inter- or intra-state partnerships.



Presenter Atume explained SGMA's prioritization of critically overdrafted basins and some unregulated groundwater resources. She further clarified that GSAs often align with irrigation districts but do not trade among themselves.

Members discussed landowner voter restrictions and proposed expanding voting rights to tenants and non-landowners. A Member noted efforts to change landowner-only board service requirements for Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs). Presenter Atume suggested to register wells and consider land use impacts on tenant farmers. It was noted that while SGMA does not mandate socio-economic considerations, GSAs should consider this for all groundwater users.

### **Public Comment:**

- Alexandria Miranda
- Angela Islas

## **Subcommittee Updates**

Facilitator Wylie provided a general summary of subcommittee history. Staff noted some research questions may be answered by staff and others may require contracts with relevant partners.

### **Community Outreach Subcommittee**

Member Zhou reported that the Community Outreach subcommittee emphasized the need to incorporate community input, particularly from underserved communities, into recommendations. They plan to engage through conferences, a project website, surveys, listening sessions, and winter outreach efforts. The subcommittee will collaborate with staff on an outreach plan and compensation strategies. The subcommittee seeks input from the Task Force on which communities to engage with.

Members recommended the subcommittee consider in-person outreach and webinars to engage with diverse communities, and that the Task Force has a presence at the Pacific California Regional Summit of the Intertribal Agriculture Council, the annual Black Farmers Conference, and the California Latino Farmer Conference. Task Force members expressed that they wanted outreach to be defined and operationalized. Staff mentioned that this would be clarified in the outreach plan and that a short fact sheet could be developed to assist with upcoming events.

Member Zhou will attend the upcoming Black Farmers Conference and requests staff participation at the Conference to assist with public engagement and collection of public comment. Members Dahlquist-Willard and Rittenhouse may also attend the Conference. Task Force members expressed their desire for a process to be developed for capturing information at upcoming Conferences and events.

Chair Hawkins expressed a desire for outreach feedback to be included in the Task Force's recommendations. Members asked if a listserv could be developed for draft recommendations. Staff indicated the current listserv can be used for this purpose.

Member Robinson asked if a survey could be developed regarding grant application processes. Staff noted surveys are undergoing design per subcommittee guidance. The subcommittee will be asked to review draft and final survey tools.

Vice-Chair Burgueno requested outreach materials be developed before the Intertribal Agricultural Council California Regional Summit. Staff committed to finding a way to represent the Task Force at the Summit.

The Task Force discussed Bagley-Keene as it pertains to outreach efforts.

Members expressed their hope that the work to produce outreach materials can be expedited. Staff noted Bagley-Keene requirements and how offline work could occur.

### **Sustaining Natural and Cultural Resources Subcommittee**

Vice Chair Burgueno shared the subcommittee discussed the need to highlight historical land displacement and treaty rights in the Task Force's recommendations, along with Native peoples' relationships and experiences with land. The subcommittee desires to highlight that Native communities were the first disadvantaged communities and that many historical forces of oppression continue today. The subcommittee will explore ideas to prioritize preservation of cultural sites, ancestral remains, tribal sovereignty, and traditional land management and stewardship practices in the recommendations. Recommendations will also seek to address stipulations with land access and land use for tribal nations.

The subcommittee requested staff to: develop a map of tribal ancestral lands and current land ownership; catalog ratified and respected treaties within the state (with the note that none have been respected); research the implementation of the effect of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) on private and public land; research regulations on cultural fire within agencies; and outline tribal consultation in the context of land transfer.

Subcommittee members requested additional participation from other Task Force Members.

Staff addressed questions about Bagley-Keene in the context of Members joining, attending, or giving feedback at other subcommittee meeting.

### **Grants and Resources Subcommittee**

Member Rittenhouse reported the subcommittee evaluated a list of existing grants and resources compiled by staff. Only three of the staff-identified resources include individual farmers, and their criteria to qualify can often be limiting. Few resources addressed land security post-acquisition. The subcommittee will focus further analysis on California-specific resources, rather than federal resources. The members seek to develop a set of metrics to evaluate program outcomes with a focus on programs directed toward individual farmers and those who applied but were not served.

Additionally, the subcommittee desires to understand the efficacy of technical assistance and aims to provide an overview of best practices to include in the Task Force's recommendations.

The subcommittee discussed tax mechanisms and what can be used to facilitate land transfer.

They will invite financial experts to future meetings to discuss grants, resources, and loans, both from the perspective of those who have accessed resources and those who have not.

A member asked if philanthropy has been looked into. The subcommittee responded affirmatively, but additional research and analysis is needed.

A member noted that a potential recommendation could be to increase the number and availability of grant programs, particularly for individuals. It was requested that essential post-land acquisition infrastructure be considered as part of grant funding.

### **Public Comment:**

- Adam X

The Task Force took a 30-minute break for lunch and resumed at 12:47 p.m.

## **Work Plan Discussion**

Facilitator Wylie provided a general foundation for the work planning discussion and gave an overview of the proposed timeline. Time was given for Members to review the work plan. Members asked about the Northern California meeting location and how locations are selected. Staff responded that these are preliminary suggestions, and Task Force members suggested that they meet in Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, or Monterey County in November. Staff noted that listening sessions can occur in other locations as well. A member noted that EcoFarm may be a good place for the Task Force to engage.

Members asked for clarity about the outreach component of the timeline and requested that specific events and types of outreach be included in the work plan, including listening sessions.

Members asked about the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). Staff noted that establishment of the TAC is a mechanism to bring in technical experts to review draft recommendations and provide expertise and feedback. Staff will seek suggestions from Members and others. Criteria for selecting TAC members will be developed in consultation with the Task Force.

Members expressed interest in creating a SGMA liaison position which could serve as a technical advisor to the Task Force on topics related to groundwater and SGMA implementation. Member Dahlquist-Willard said she could provide recommendations and suggested this happen quickly.

Members mentioned that the timeline should be reviewed to ensure the Task Force has time to conduct outreach events and requested that subcommittee meetings be added to the document. Staff indicated that this could be done.

Members requested the inclusion of a progress tracker in the document and that the document be reviewed at each meeting.

A Member suggested the need for a lexicon, noting that land is “more than just dirt,” but is rather “land and.” Others supported this idea for inclusion in the recommendations report. It was requested that tribal perspectives be included with this concept.

A Member noted that not all Native people identify with the term “indigenous” and asked for

additional changes to the work plan.

Members asked about the process for editing the work plan document. Staff will collect any additional feedback from Members and prepare a revised version. This revised version will be reviewed with Chair and Vice Chair and shared during the next Task Force meeting. The work plan should be considered a living document.

Members support moving the November meeting to the Salinas area. Staff asked which topics the Task Force would like to learn about in this meeting. Members shared key issues to the region: natural disaster response, land back, housing, and coastal water quality.

Members requested that a clearinghouse of resources for land access regarding succession be developed and made publicly available.

Three subcommittees were proposed: Land Use, Governance, and Sovereignty; Land Tenure; and Land Access and Acquisition.

Member Payán moved that the three subcommittees above be created. Member Nakahara seconded the motion.

**Motion passes (12-0-1\*).** \*Marks abstention or absence from vote

Subcommittee composition is as follows:

**Land Use, Governance, and Sovereignty:**

- Emily Burgueno
- Dorian Payán

**Land Tenure:**

- Emily Burgueno
- Liya Schwartzman

**Land Access and Acquisition:**

- Nathaniel Brown
- Emily Burgueno
- Ruth Dahlquist-Willard
- Darlene Franco
- Lawrence Harlan
- Nelson Hawkins
- James Nakahara
- Doria Robinson
- Liya Schwartzman

Member Rittenhouse joined the **Sustaining Natural and Cultural Resources** Subcommittee.

Member Rittenhouse asked about creating a separate subcommittee on the final report outline. No action was taken.

**Public Comment:**

- Adam X

**General Public Comment**

None.

**Meeting Adjournment**

The next meeting is scheduled for November 14, 2024, in the Salinas region, with an option to join remotely. Staff will poll the Task Force regarding an extension of the meeting to span two days to include site visits.

Chair Hawkins and Vice Chair Burgueno provided closing comments. Chair Hawkins adjourned the meeting at 2:12 p.m.