

Agricultural Land Equity Task Force Work Plan

Last updated by staff for the November 13 & 14, 2024 Task Force meeting.

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Consolidated Summary of Task Force Discussions

The section below offers a consolidated list of guiding principles and commitments, priority topics and issues, and potential solutions that Task Force members have elevated during previous conversations. The purpose of this section is to structure and organize these ideas. If Task Force members find this organization useful, Staff will continue updating this list and using it to guide the final report of recommendations.

Guiding Principles & Commitments

Task Force members have communicated that the following approaches, acknowledgements, and commitments should be kept in mind while developing recommendations.

Definitions and approaches

- Land equity is about more than access to a piece of land; it is about land in relation to water, soil health, infrastructure, and the wellbeing of individuals, communities, and cultures. It requires stability, support, and sovereignty on the land, especially for land stewards who have been excluded.
- Land equity requires secure relationships with land. Secure tenure is critical to support farmer and community wellbeing and requires building capacities of all kinds—community, individual, ecological, organizational, and governmental.
- Agricultural land access should be approached as part of a broader suite of concerns and goals regarding well-being and equity.
- Words like “land access” and “land use” should be defined broadly to entail diverse relations with and practices on the land.

Acknowledgements

- Acknowledge historical patterns of discrimination and exclusion that continue to impact land access.
- Acknowledge California Native American Tribal sovereignty and that all land is stolen Native land. Work to address the continued barriers faced by California Tribal Nations in implementing sovereignty and cultivating healthy communities on ancestral lands.

- Acknowledge that rematriation restores land and soil health and native plant biodiversity, supports water retention, and revitalizes and restores cultural lifeways.
- Be mindful of the wide range of experiences with land access and tenure that make it difficult to generalize across groups or find a singular solution.

Commitments

- Prioritize access and acquisition for land stewards who have been excluded.
- Prioritize sovereignty for land stewards who identify as Black, Native American, and people of color.
- Understand and account for immigrant experiences and needs, especially those of undocumented farmers and farmworkers.
- Ensure the Task Force’s work reflects and is anchored in the communities that Task Force members intend to serve.
- Respect California Tribal Nations’ lands, sacred sites, and land management practices.
- Design recommendations for the Governor and Legislature that are actionable and balance bigger goals with feasible outcomes.
- Consider solutions across diverse contexts, including urban and rural, public and private lands, CA Tribal Nations’ ancestral lands, and geographic contexts
- “Close the loop” so that the Task Force’s recommendations reach those involved in the process.

Three Dimensions of Land Equity

The following list of topics, issues, and potential recommendations is organized around three dimensions of land equity.

1. **Land access, acquisition, and ancestral land return:** How an individual, entity, organization, or government gains access to land in the first place. “Access” is interpreted broadly to entail a range of experiences and relationships with land.
2. **Land use governance and sovereignty:** Once an individual has access, this dimension captures what is allowable and possible on the land, who makes decisions and how they are made, and which goals and outcomes are prioritized with those decisions. “Land use” is defined broadly to include a range of values and stewardship and cultural practices.
3. **Secure land tenure:** How an individual, entity, organization, or government maintains relationships with land once they have access, and what is required to do so.

The sections below are divided by dimension and capture different topics, issues to address, and potential solutions that Task Force members have discussed, each defined as follows:

1. **Topic:** high-level themes that impact agricultural land access and that may be addressed through a variety of strategies and approaches;
2. **Issues to address:** Specific challenges, ideas, and details that should be considered when thinking about the main topic; and

3. **Potential solutions:** Concrete directives or requests intended to produce more equitable access to agricultural land in California. Note that not all identified topics and issues will have an associated recommendation in the final report.

Land access, acquisition, and ancestral land return

Land Back, repatriation

Issues to address

- All land in California is stolen Native land
- Difficult to enforce legal requirements regarding ancestral lands, sacred sites, human remains, and cultural artifacts, especially on private land
- Lack of respect for ancestral lands, sacred sites, human remains, and cultural artifacts, especially on private land
- Accessing and acquiring ancestral land can be difficult for CA Tribal Nations, e.g., transferring land from fee to trust can be expensive and difficult
- Differences between ancestral land return (Land Back) and acquisition

Potential solutions

- Return public lands to CA Tribal Nations
- Support fee-to-trust acquisitions
- Provide right of first refusal/first offer to CA Tribal Nations
- Increase government-to-government consultation and provide meaningful outreach to develop needed partnerships
- Increase public awareness of and support for California Native American Tribal Nations
- Support Land Back as a path to repatriate environments and cultures
- Prioritize Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) in agriculture practices and land management, provide opportunities to implement TEK

Land markets

Issues to address

- Land consolidation (large-scale landowners increasing the size of their landholdings) and financialization (institutional investing) make agricultural land prohibitively expensive
- Well-resourced, connected entities often have earlier knowledge of and access to land sales
- Consolidated land ownership can lead to consolidated water access
- Urban development pressure on farmland
- Racism in land sales and leasing

Potential solutions

- Lot size adjustments

- Prioritize alternative land arrangement possibilities, e.g., cooperatives, public land
- Option to purchase agreements
- Rights of first offer or first refusal
- Platform to connect land seekers with landholders
- Platform to notify of land availability
- Multi-benefit land repurposing (MBLR) program

Access to and acquisition of public lands

Issue to address

- Public land suitable for agriculture is not put toward public good
- Need to develop different kinds of recommendations for public and private landholders

Potential solutions

- Return public lands to CA Tribal Nations
- Long-term ag leases on public lands and opportunities for purchase
- Lease-holding entities buffer and protect public access for individual farmers
- Reduce barriers to accessing public land for leasing opportunities, e.g., convoluted contracts, requiring a third party to hold lease, short-term, insecure licenses

Access to finance

Issues to address

- Grant and loan programs exclude or disadvantage certain communities, e.g., eligibility requirements and loan financing
- Incentives and disincentives can impede equitable land access, e.g., tax incentives for owners

Potential solutions

- Create new pathways for land acquisition, including:
 - subsidies for land purchases
 - land grants
 - forgivable loans
 - reverse loan amortization
- Develop mechanisms for timely response to acquisition opportunities
- Enhance capacity for community-based organizations to coordinate with other organizations/agencies and assist land seekers with the multi-step process of land acquisition, including capital stacking and other creative financing options
- Provide public funding to directly support land stewards
- Provide multi-year start-up loans like those provided to beginning farmers through the Beginning Farmer Opportunity Act
- Increase number and impact of grant programs, especially those in which individuals are eligible applicants

Land succession

Issue to address

- Farmers aging out, no clear pathway to ensure an equitable transition

Potential solutions

- Develop statewide strategy vs. one-off transfers
- Create public resource that connects land sellers with land seekers
- Provide support, funding, and technical assistance (TA) for equity-focused successions strategies
- Develop mechanisms to bridge the gap of time and money

Land use governance and sovereignty

Governance structures

Issues to address

- The legal language of existing policies and programs are barriers to collaborative governance and equitable decision-making

Potential solutions

- Incentivize, promote, and/or facilitate the creation of community land trusts

Land use planning and restrictions

Issues to address

- Single-use zoning can prohibit diverse agricultural land uses, including grazing, housing, and cultural land management
- One-size-fits-all regulations and requirements can impede equity
- Easements and covenants can restrict certain cultural and agricultural practices and uses
- Local land use planning and state legislation and regulations can be contradictory and present challenges for small scale, diversified agriculture

Potential solutions

- Multiuse zoning
- Build respect for agriculture among neighbors, the wider public
- Create limits to public nuisance complaints about farmers
- Utilize existing lists/maps of affordable housing locations to find agriculture appropriate lands (what isn't good for housing might be perfect for farms and vice versa)

State and federal legislation and regulations

Issues to address

- The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), related bills, and other legislation and regulations have disproportionate impacts on small and tenant farmers
- Regulations fail to provide different considerations and approaches for small scale, diversified farmers and for urban, peri-urban, and rural lands
- Regulatory barriers prevent CA Tribal Nations' ability to implement sovereignty, including the right to engage in practices like cultural fire and access ancestral lands
- Finding land with appropriate housing is a challenge for underserved farmers
- Stipulations on land use do not align with CA Native American practices of stewardship

Potential solutions

- Examine and address how the regulatory context impacts equity
- Acknowledge and address ways that California Tribal Nations are prevented from practicing sovereignty on ancestral lands
- Legal framework that supports California Native American land management practices
- Advocate for the removal of policies that are barriers to implementing sovereignty
- Remove barriers that prevent agriculture and urban farm projects moving forward, e.g. fair prices for agricultural uses
- Ensure that diverse production systems and small-scale farmers are considered when designing regulations

Secure Land Tenure

Leasing

Issue to address

- Short-term leases prevent investment in land and business, in turn preventing tenant farmers from becoming landowners

Potential solutions

- Ensure fair leasing terms and respect for tenants' rights, including decision-making powers
- Develop a tenant farmer bill of rights
- Create incentives for long-term ag leases
- Increase access to legal support and fund TA providers who act as neutral mediators to assist with contract and relationship development

Ownership

Issues to address

- Development pressures impact owner decisions and ability to hold onto land
- Agriculture easements and other restrictions on land use and sale can reduce farmers' ability to build wealth and retire

Potential solutions

- Reduce financial burdens for first time landowners to acquire and maintain land

Infrastructure and land improvements

Issues to address

- Insecure access (e.g., short-term leasing) reduces ability to invest in improvements to the land
- Insecure access reduces ability to invest in infrastructure, e.g. irrigation infrastructure, which has impact on land tenure
- Challenges with housing for both farm owners and farmworkers
- Insecure land tenure complicates efforts for climate adaptation—without long-term stability, difficult to invest in building soil health, etc.

Potential solutions

- Develop mechanisms to support investment on lands after acquisition
- Outline list of potential post-acquisition infrastructure that could be included in new grant programs
- Improve equity in groundwater allocation models to preserve land value
- Avoid disproportionate landowner fees for groundwater use, implement tiered fees
- Evaluate land fallowing and land repurposing impacts on small farmers
- Improve land access and ownership, particularly for tenant farmers
- Have neutral third-party administrators and anonymous users of groundwater markets
- Restrict groundwater trading to special management areas and only allow trading from ag to ag
- Define exceptions for vulnerable communities and structure allocations to protect their use
- Fund third-party organizers to facilitate groundwater market access with technical assistance, outreach, and education
- Manage groundwater trades for groups of small farmers
- Ensure the protection of groundwater and drinking water for disadvantaged communities

Technical assistance, education, and information sharing

Issues to address

- Language barriers reduce access to public resources and technical assistance

- Overly complex applications and qualifications reduce access

Potential solutions

- Establish training and outreach programs to farmers that account for diverse languages, cultural norms, and accessibility needs
- Improve capacity for community-based organizations to assist farmers with accessing programs

Financial access and wellbeing

Issues to address

- Lack of insurance options and high insurance costs
- Different expenses for urban, peri-urban, and rural producers, e.g., with costs of housing and water

Potential solutions

- Provide guaranteed basic income for land stewards
- Forgive past and present loans, e.g., student loans
- Provide public funds directly to land stewards

Access to technology

Issue to address

- Unequal access has impacts on financial and physical well-being and land tenure

Potential solutions

- Advance access, education, and support
- Increase high-speed internet access throughout the state
- Develop a technology sharing program

Subcommittees and Working Groups

The Task Force has six subcommittees that meet virtually on an as-needed basis. Some subcommittees have established working groups of one or two subcommittee members who will advance tasks in between meetings and report back to subcommittees and the Task Force as relevant. Subcommittees, working groups, and members are listed alphabetically below.

Community Outreach Subcommittee (Outreach)

Members: Burgueno, Franco, Hawkins, Zhou

Grants & Resources Subcommittee (G&R)

Members: Barraicua, Nakahara, Rittenhouse, Robinson, Schwartzman

Working groups and members:

- Financing: Nakahara, Robinson
- Grant program outcomes: Rittenhouse, Robinson
- Tax law and incentives: Nakahara, Schwartzman

Land Tenure Subcommittee (LT)

Members: Burgueno, Schwartzman

Working group and members: Land Tenure (Burgueno, Schwartzman)

Land Use Governance & Sovereignty Subcommittee (LUGS)

Members: Burgueno, Payán

Working group and members: Land Use Governance & Sovereignty (Burgueno, Payán)

Sustaining Natural & Cultural Resources Subcommittee (SNCR)

Members: Burgueno, Franco, Harlan, Rittenhouse

Land Access, Acquisition, & Ancestral Land Return Subcommittee (LA3)

Members: Brown, Burgueno, Dahlquist-Willard, Franco, Harlan, Hawkins, Nakahara, Robinson, Schwartzman

Working groups and members:

- Land Back: Burgueno
- Public lands: Harlan, Schwartzman
- Land markets: Brown
- Land succession strategies: Hawkins

Work Processes and Timelines

This section outlines a proposed roadmap and timeline for the Task Force to explore their priorities, develop recommendations, and gather and incorporate community feedback, leading to the submission of the final report of recommendations by January 1, 2026.

The Work Phase Table appears on the following page.

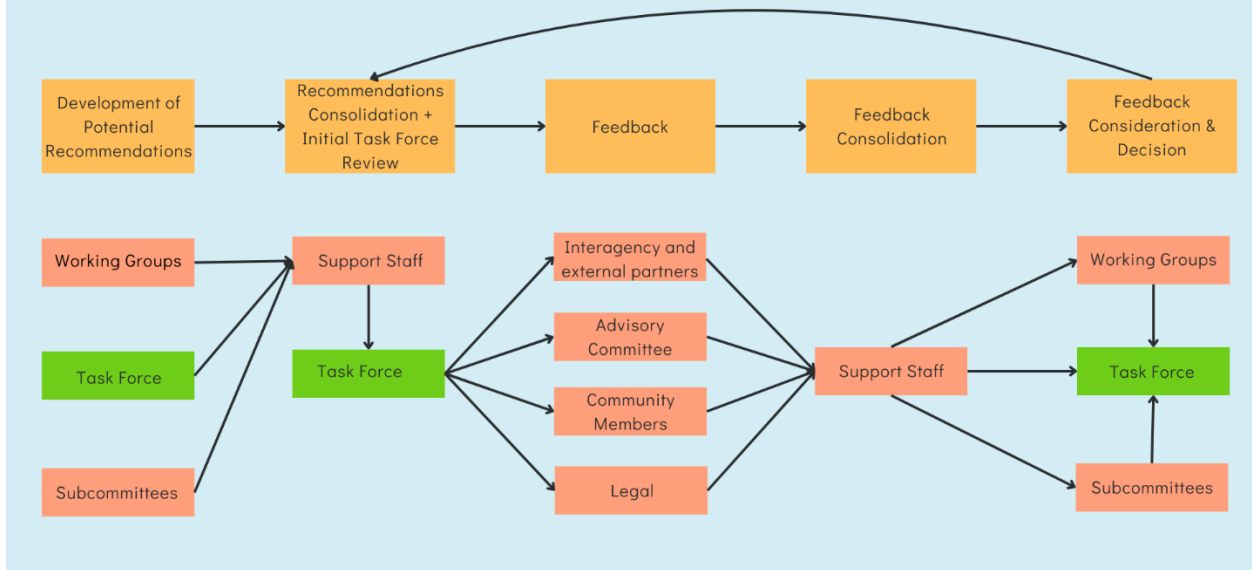
Work Phase Overview

<i>Work Phase Description</i>	<i>Associated Resources</i>	<i>Associated Outreach</i>	<i>Period</i>
Identify and learn about priority topics and begin drafting recommendations	Briefing materials; guest speakers; site visits; contracts for research and outreach support as needed	Site visits; conference attendance; survey distribution	November 2024 – February 2025 Quarterly meetings: Nov '24, Feb '25
Drafting, reviewing, revising, and gathering feedback on draft recommendations	Advisory Committee (AC); contracts for research and outreach support as needed; iterative drafts of recommendations; survey results	Listening sessions; interviews; conference attendance; presentations to relevant bodies (e.g., CA Board of Food and Ag, BIPOC Producers Advisory Committee)	March 2025 – November 2025 Quarterly meetings: May '25, Aug '25, Oct '25(?), Nov '25
Approval and delivery of final report	Final report of recommendations	Invite past participants and engaged partners to final Task Force meeting	December 2025
Closing-the-loop through further outreach and information sharing	Summaries of recommendations for different audiences; Contracts for outreach and engagement support as needed	Follow-up with past participants; distribute recommendations and summaries to partners; find opportunities to share and discuss final report	January – June 2026

Final Report Drafting Process

The graphic below visualizes the report drafting process. The goal is to denote the different actors and phases in drafting, reviewing, and finalizing the report, highlighting the primary role of the Task Force in advising and decision-making. Staff will discuss this process with Task Force members during the November 2024 meeting.

ALETF Final Report Drafting Process



Quarterly Meeting Topics, Materials, and Locations: November 2024 – December 2025

In advance of each meeting outlined below, staff will seek Task Force member input on the following:

- **Materials**, including additional information and research required to better understand specific topics;
- **Site visits**, including people and projects the Task Force should visit and learn from to inform the final recommendations;
- **Speakers**, including guidance on perspectives and individuals who may provide additional insights on specific topic areas; and
- **Outreach opportunities**, including listening sessions and other forms of community engagement to hear directly from those most impacted by land inequities.

Meeting details tables begin on the following page.

November 14, 2024

Location	Salinas
Topics of Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Land governance and cooperative ownership structures• Interactive working session to review land equity dimensions and associated topics, issues, and potential solutions
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Briefing packet with the following:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Overview of parallel state efforts related to land equity○ Overview and examples of different approaches to designing policy recommendations• Updated work plan with recommendations process overview and timeline
Site Visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Yuanming Chen and Qingfeng Li• Allan Renz, Renz Livestock• Esperanza Community Farms
Invited Speakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Neil Thapar, Minnow• Carmen and Hugo, Tierras Milperas• Task Force member Dorian Payán

February 13, 2025

Location	Southern California
Topics of Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Agricultural land markets and models to address barriers for under-resourced farmers and ranchers• Public lands for equitable land access• Reviewing and discussing first draft of recommendations
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Preliminary draft of recommendations
Site Visits	
Invited Speakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Agricultural real estate specialist

May 15, 2025

Location	Northern California
Topics of Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reviewing and discussing draft recommendations• Collecting and incorporating feedback
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Second draft of recommendations
Site visits	
Invited Speakers	

Continued onto following page.

August 14, 2025

Location	TBD
Topics of Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reviewing and discussing draft recommendations• Collecting and incorporating feedback
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Third draft of recommendations

October TBD

Location	TBD
Topics of Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reviewing and discussing draft recommendations• Collecting and incorporating feedback
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Penultimate draft of recommendations

November 13, 2025

Location	TBD
Topics of Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Final review of recommendations before formal approval at Dec. meeting
Materials	Final draft of recommendations

December TBD

Location	Sacramento
Topics of Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Approve final recommendations
Materials	Finalized report of recommendations