

October 27, 2022

Subject: Funding to support the California Agricultural Land Equity Task Force
Reporting Period: October 2022
Staff Lead: Sean Kennedy, SGC Special Projects Analyst

Recommended Action

Strategic Growth Council (SGC) Staff recommend supplementing the General Fund \$1 million one-time investment in the California Agricultural Land Equity Task Force announced in the 2022 California Budget with an additional \$2.25 million from SGC's Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund allocation.

Summary

Established in the California Budget Act of 2022 (AB-179), the California Agricultural Land Equity Task Force (Task Force) will convene over three years to develop recommendations to equitably increase access to agricultural land for food production and traditional tribal agricultural uses. The Task Force will meet at least quarterly, subject to the provisions of the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act (2004).

The 2022 California Budget includes a \$1 million one-time investment in the Task Force. Allocated funds will cover stipends and travel reimbursement to Task Force members, language access services, and agency staff time required to administer the body over the three years.

The Task Force holds great potential to better understand and address historical inequities of land access across the state of California while providing opportunities for sustained greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reductions in the agricultural sector and food systems more generally. Fulfilling this potential requires the Task Force to move beyond issue identification and critically examine the viability and efficacy of potential policy solutions to California's land equity crisis. Unfortunately, the types of action-oriented research and engagement required to meet this objective fall beyond the current budget allocation.

In light of the potential benefits to historically marginalized groups across the state and statewide GHG reduction efforts, SGC Staff recommends supplementing the \$1 million one-time investment with an additional \$2.25 million from SGC's Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund allocation. Additional funds will be used to trial existing recommendations, such as those proposed in the California Department of Food and Agriculture's 2020 Report to the California Legislature on the Farmer Equity Act, and preliminary recommendations developed by the Task Force. Additional funds will also cover agency support to explore opportunities to implement recommendations through program guidelines and provide additional support to prepare and communicate Task Force updates and recommendations.

Background

Agriculture and Equity in California

Land ownership characteristics are a significant predictor of economic decision-making, conservation practices, and recreational uses. Stable and secure land tenure is vital in achieving

long-term prosperity for California's farmers, a robust food system, and healthy natural and working lands.

Historically, farmers of color in California have not had equitable access to land and other resources necessary to farm in the state successfully, and that legacy of prejudice persists. Female farmers represent less than a quarter of all farmers in the state, and only 2 percent of California farmers are women of color. Socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers (SDFRs) – defined by the USDA as those belonging to groups that have been subject to racial or ethnic prejudice – tend to farm fewer acres but have a greater diversity of crops in California. On average, socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers in California receive less in federal payments than their White counterparts and also earn less.

The Farmer Equity Act of 2017 (AB 1348) formally recognized that California's farmers and ranchers are a diverse group of people, and not all have historically had access to resources and information to run their businesses successfully. The Act directed the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) to better provide resources, outreach, technical assistance, and decision-making power to these growers. AB 1348 also required CDFA to submit a report to the Governor and the Legislature outlining CDFA's efforts to serve socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers in California and established the position of Farm Equity Advisor to support this work. The report identifies four key challenges facing socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers – land tenure, language, engagement with the agricultural industry and boards/commissions, and access to available resources and programs – and a set of recommendations for CDFA to address each of these challenges.

While this work has brought much-needed attention to issues of agricultural land equity in California, those adversely affected by the history of land inequity continue to call for new approaches to consultation in stakeholder engagement that go beyond the dissemination of information and asking for input to allow SDFRs to influence decision-making. Furthermore, no mechanism currently exists to trial or implement new and existing recommendations to address California's land equity crisis.

Task Force Objectives

The California Agricultural Land Equity Task Force – initially proposed by a coalition of agricultural non-profit organizations representing SDFRs and women and announced in the 2022-23 California Budget Act – is intended to serve as a forum to engage in collaborative conversation and visioning required to facilitate a more equitable shift of power and greater equity in the food system.

Per the Budget, the Task Force shall consist of a regionally diverse group of up to 13 members, including native and tribal liaisons, a land trust representative, individuals with expertise in issues affecting SDFRs, an individual with expertise in agricultural land acquisition and finance, a State Board of Food and Agriculture member, a farmworker representative, a beginning farmer, the CDFA Farm Equity Advisor, and an individual from the CDFA BIPOC Farmer Advisory Committee that is currently being established. Nominations will be accepted via a public process commencing November 1, 2022 (Appendix A). On or before January 1, 2026, the Task

Force shall submit a report to the Legislature and Governor that includes policy recommendations on addressing the agricultural land equity crisis.

Proposed Task Force Budget

Task Force Operations

The estimates below are based on previous SGC experience with task force support and administration of Bagley-Keene bodies, including the Council.

Category	Budget Year	Budget Year +1	Budget Year +2	TOTAL
Task Force Operations: travel, stipends, listening sessions, and meeting spaces	\$80,000	\$80,000	\$46,000	\$206,000
Consulting & Professional Services: language access, external engagement, technical assistance, and SGC personnel (0.8 FTE)	\$271,333	\$261,333	\$261,333	\$794,000
TOTAL	\$351,333	\$341,333	\$307,333	\$1,000,000

Action-oriented research to support the development, implementation, and scaling of Task Force recommendations

As noted above, meeting the full potential of the Task Force requires moving beyond issue identification to critically examine the viability and efficacy of proposed policy solutions to California's land equity crisis. Executing this agenda will require consulting and professional services, including research, language access, facilitation expertise with BIPOC communities, and technical assistance. Legal, communications, and analyst positions will be necessary to support and oversee the research and outreach agenda and coordinate Task Force meetings.

Additional funds will be used to trial existing recommendations, such as those proposed in the California Department of Food and Agriculture's 2020 Report to the California Legislature on the Farmer Equity Act, and preliminary recommendations developed by the Task Force. Recommendations will be trialed through small-scale pilot projects and community-engaged research modeled off SGC's Climate Change Research program. Additional funds will also cover agency support to explore opportunities to implement recommendations through program guidelines and provide additional support to prepare and communicate Task Force updates and recommendations.

Category	Budget Year	Budget Year +1	Budget Year +2	TOTAL
Action-oriented research: pilot projects, technical assistance, and SGC personnel (2.2 FTE)	\$953,167	\$677,167	\$594,667	\$2,225,000

Council Recommendation

Strategic Growth Council (SGC) Staff recommend supplementing the General Fund \$1 million one-time investment in the California Agricultural Land Equity Task Force with an additional \$2.25 million from SGC's Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund allocation.

Attachment

Appendix A: Agricultural Land Equity Task Force Nomination Criteria