

April 29, 2026

Subject: Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation (SALC) Program Round 11, Cycle A Award Recommendations

Reporting Period: February 2026 – April 2026

Staff Lead: Karin Roux, Program Manager, Department of Conservation (DOC)

Recommended Action

Approve the staff recommendation to award \$45,546,467 to support the 23 agricultural conservation acquisition projects (19 conservation easement and four fee title acquisitions) identified in this report through Round 11, Cycle A of the SALC Program.

Summary

The SALC Program provides grant funds in three categories:

- **Land Use Planning Grants** – to support the development of local and regional land use policies and economic development strategies to protect critical agricultural lands.
- **Capacity and Project Development Grants** - to expand organizational capacity to develop agricultural conservation acquisition projects.
- **Conservation Acquisition Grants** - to fund agricultural conservation easement and fee title acquisitions that protect agricultural lands from conversion to more greenhouse gas (GHG) intensive uses.

For SALC Rounds one through ten, grants were awarded on an annual basis. For Conservation Acquisition grants only, starting in 2026, the SALC Program has a rolling, two-phased preproposal process and is making awards twice per year; Cycles A and B. This recommended action is for Round 11, Cycle A of the program. Recommendations for Planning grants and Round 11, Cycle B Acquisition grants, will be provided at the October 2026 California Strategic Growth Council (SGC) meeting. Capacity grants are on pause for Round 11.

With multiple opportunities to resolve eligibility concerns in the pre-proposal stages, Acquisition projects are now only permitted to move forward as applications once issues impacting eligibility have been resolved. At the Jan. 15, 2026, deadline for Round 11A, SALC staff received 27 acquisition applications for a total request of \$60,151,790 in funding. One proposed conservation easement project withdrew in April 2026. Of the \$49,377,472 available, consisting of \$29,108,991 from Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund auction proceeds (half the GGRF proceeds for Round 11) and \$20,268,481 carried over from prior rounds, staff recommend funding 23 acquisition projects for an award total of \$45,546,467. The remaining \$3,831,005 would be rolled into Round 11, Cycle B.

The recommended 23 acquisition projects aim to protect approximately 17,381 acres spanning 16 counties as far north as Siskiyou and Tehama Counties, and as far south as San Luis Obispo and Tulare Counties. When completed, this suite of conservation acquisition projects will avoid an estimated 1,305,268 metric tons of CO₂ equivalent to 304,461 gasoline-powered passenger vehicles driven for one year.

Background

About SALC

Senate Bill 862, Chapter 36, Statutes of 2014, established the Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities program (AHSC) to be administered by SGC, “to reduce GHG emissions through projects that implement land use, housing, transportation and agricultural land preservation practices to support infill and compact development...” (Pub, Resources Code § 75210).

In July 2014, the Council approved the California Department of Housing and Community Development to help implement the housing, transportation and infrastructure components of AHSC, and designated the DOC and the California Natural Resources Agency to assist implementation of the agricultural lands protection component of AHSC, known as the SALC Program.

The SALC Program facilitates the reduction of GHG emissions by protecting agricultural lands—such as cropland, rangeland and lands used by Tribes for cultivating traditional foods, herbal medicine, fibers and dyes—that are at risk of conversion to urban and rural residential development. The program accomplishes this by investing in three project types: agricultural conservation acquisitions (including easements and fee-title purchases), capacity and project development grants, and local government planning grants.

Acquisition projects extinguish development rights, thereby reducing opportunities for expansive, vehicle-dependent forms of development and avoiding increases in GHG emissions; in the future, however, development rights may be banked for transfers to urban areas under a “transfer of development rights” program. Capacity and project development grants fund the development of agricultural conservation easement and fee acquisition projects and/or cover associated costs to help close acquisition projects where the acquisition cost is covered by an alternative source of funding. Planning grants support the implementation of Sustainable Communities Strategies or other local plans that reduce GHG emissions.

Conservation Acquisition Grants

Round 11 opened Oct. 15, 2025, accepting funding requests for conservation acquisition and Planning grants. Staff received 27 acquisition applications by the Jan. 15, 2026 deadline for consideration in Round 11, Cycle A, Acquisition grants. Out of the 27 acquisition applications, five were for fee title projects and 22 were for easement acquisitions. Staff reviewed the 27

applications for readiness, then awarded points based on SALC guidelines' selection criteria. The selection criteria reflect a project's agricultural use, support for infill, other program goals, how the project advances equity, and other co-benefits.

Of the 27 Round 11, Cycle A applications, eight were developed using SALC capacity and project development funding, and seven of those are recommended for award (29% of acquisition applications recommended for award were developed under SALC Capacity grants). One conservation easement project withdrew in April 2026.

SALC staff recommend awarding \$45,546,467 in funding for conservation acquisitions: \$12,331,687 for four fee title acquisition projects encompassing 1,864 acres; and \$33,214,780 for 19 conservation easement projects encompassing 15,517 acres.

Of the 23 projects recommended for funding, 10 projects aim to protect 1,606 acres of irrigated farmland (including one led by a California Native American Tribe), seven projects aim to protect 8,976 acres of rangeland (including one in partnership with a California Native American Tribe), five projects aim to protect 6,454 acres of mixed-use agriculture, and one project led by a California Native American Tribe aims to protect 345 acres of land to be used for cultivating food, herbal medicines, fibers and dyes.

These recommendations are based on total available funding, project scores, program priorities, and the amount of funding available for fee acquisition projects (per Guidelines: up to 25% of funds available in a given round).

Of the three applications not recommended for funding, one was a fee title acquisition and two were conservation easement acquisitions. These are not recommended for funding based on a combination of their scores, and limitations on the available funding for fee title projects as well as overall funding for this Cycle.

Once complete, the suite of acquisitions recommended for funding will protect 17,381 acres of agricultural land and avoid an estimated 1,305,268 metric tons of CO₂ equivalent to 304,461 gasoline-powered passenger vehicles driven for one year. These projects are disbursed across 16 counties, ranging from Siskiyou and Tehama in the north to San Luis Obispo and Tulare in the south.

Acquisition Projects Recommended for Funding

Applicant	Application Number	County	Total Acres	Recommended Award Amount
California Rangeland Trust	SALC25_PP01_PLA	Placer	143	\$510,000
California Rangeland Trust	SALC25_PP03_TEH	Tehama	1,535	\$1,441,500
California Rangeland Trust	SALC25_PP05_MNT	Monterey	2,750	\$2,287,500
Coyote Valley Band of Pomo Indians	SALC25_PP08_MEN	Mendocino	63	\$1,550,687
Siskiyou Land Trust	SALC25_PP09_SIS	Siskiyou	4,315	\$4,063,700
California Rangeland Trust	SALC25_PP11_CAL	Calaveras, Stanislaus	1,758	\$1,832,100
Marin Agricultural Land Trust	SALC25_PP14_MAR	Marin	127	\$525,700
Northern California Regional Land Trust	SALC25_PP15_BUT	Butte	326	\$1,500,000
American Farmland Trust	SALC25_PP17_STA	Stanislaus	172	\$2,301,550
Sequoia Riverlands Trust	SALC25_PP18_TUL	Tulare	40	\$770,860
The Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo County	SALC25_PP19_SLO	San Luis Obispo	849	\$1,941,000
Shasta Land Trust	SALC25_PP20_TEH	Tehama	1,657	\$1,420,000
California Farmland Trust	SALC25_PP21_MER	Merced	51	\$750,390
California Farmland Trust	SALC25_PP22_SAC	Sacramento	196	\$2,739,480
Ag Land Trust	SALC25_PP24_MNT	Monterey	481	\$4,830,000
Ag Land Trust	SALC25_PP25_MNT	Monterey	39	\$510,000
Ag Land Trust	SALC25_PP26_MNT	Monterey	201	\$2,040,000
Bear Yuba Land Trust	SALC25_PP27_NEV	Nevada	284	\$1,033,000
Sequoia Riverlands Trust	SALC25_PP31_FRE	Fresno	37	\$467,000
Big Sur Land Trust	SALC25_PP33_MNT	Monterey	869	\$2,560,000
ytt Northern Chumash Non-profit	SALC25_PP34_SLO	San Luis Obispo	345	\$7,060,000
San Benito Agricultural Land Trust	SALC25_PP35_SBT	San Benito	586	\$1,161,000
San Benito Agricultural Land Trust	SALC25_PP36_SBT	San Benito	557	\$2,251,000
		Totals	17,381	\$45,546,467



Investment Targets

The SALC Guidelines establish a 20% investment target for projects that:

- provide secure land tenure for a period of no less than 10 years to a beginning or Veteran farmer or rancher, a California Native American Tribe, a farmer or rancher who is a member of a Federally recognized or non-Federally recognized California Native American Tribe on the contact list maintained by the Native American Heritage Commission.
- provide meaningful benefits to a priority population, as defined in the SALC Guidelines.

The Guidelines also establish a 5% investment target for projects where a federally recognized or non-federally recognized California Native American Tribe on the contact list maintained by the Native American Heritage Commission, or a Tribal non-profit with 501(c)3 status is either the applicant or a co-applicant on the project.

Acquisitions

Two of the four fee title acquisition projects recommended for award are led by a California Native American Tribe, which will result in the return of 408 acres of land to California Native American Tribes or ownership of land by a Tribal non-profit. A third fee title acquisition of 586 acres would provide a California Native American Tribe a cultural easement for access and stewardship. In total, these three recommended projects reflect an investment of \$9.78 million (or 20.76% of total available funding) in projects that will result in secure land tenure for Tribes and their members.

Two conservation easement projects recommended for award provide secure land tenure to military Veterans, and twelve projects that secure land tenure to landowners/lessees who self-identified as living in a low-income household or a disadvantaged/low-income community. These 14 projects represent \$23,223,700 in investments or approximately 47.03% of the total available funding.

Combined, recommended acquisition projects that meet one or more investment targets represent 64.47% of total funds available this round.

Program Achievements to Date

In prior rounds, SGC has awarded \$619.9 million in SALC grants to:

- 245 easement projects
- 15 fee acquisition projects
- 42 planning projects
- 53 capacity projects

The amount awarded includes the total funds appropriated in Rounds 1-10 as well as any funds that became available as projects withdrew or closed under budget. To date, SALC has conserved 176,204 acres of agricultural land and is working to conserve approximately 90,457 additional acres. If the Council approves staff's recommendations for Round 11, Cycle A (17,381 acres), the total acres in the process of being protected through SALC grants would be approximately 107,838 acres, and the total protected or in process would be approximately 284,042 acres.

Next Steps

- Staff will work with Round 11, Cycle A Acquisition awardees on entering into grant agreement by July 2026;
- Planning applications and Acquisition applications for Round 11, Cycle B will be due June 2026.
- Staff recommendations for Planning grants and Acquisition grants for Round 11, Cycle B will be provided for Council award at the October 2026 meeting

Council Recommendation

Approve the staff recommendation to award \$45,546,467 in GHG Reduction Funds to support the identified 19 agricultural conservation easement acquisitions and four fee title acquisitions. Should the Council agree with Staff's recommendation, the following motion language is suggested:

"I move that the Council approve the recommended awards for Round 11, Cycle A of the Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program."

Attachments

Attachment A: Acquisition Presentation Summaries

Attachment B: Statewide Project Map

Attachment C: List of all Project Applications Received