

# **California Agricultural Land Equity Task Force Virtual Goal 2: *Protected and Thriving Agricultural Lands* Subcommittee Meeting Summary: Sept. 2, 2025**

## **Meeting Called to Order**

Facilitator Wylie opened the meeting at 9 a.m.

## **Welcome and Housekeeping**

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

## **Roll Call**

Roll call was conducted by the facilitator. Members present:

- Thea Rittenhouse
- Nathaniel Brown
- Dorian Payán

Members absent:

- None

Quorum was established.

Staff present:

- Camille Frazier, SGC
- Caleb Swanson, SGC
- Meagan Wylie, Sacramento State

## **Working Session**

Staff first summarized edits to *Goal 2: Protected and Thriving Agricultural Lands* since the August Task Force meeting before inviting Subcommittee discussion. Edits include:

- Elevating statewide conservation plan to subgoal 2.1.
- Updating language in 2.2g to “agricultural offset program” and specifying integration with the state conservation program.
- Adjusting 2.2e and 2.2f for stronger Tribal Nation inclusion.
- Clarifying mitigation language to ensure consistency with other programs.

### **Recommendation 2.2g – Agricultural Offset Program**

At the August Task Force meeting, a concern was raised that offset programs could lead to speculative development and concentrated hyper-development.

The Subcommittee discussed using the Davis, California Agricultural Mitigation Requirements as a case study, which applies different mitigation ratios based on proximity to development. Members requested additional time to review the case study and consider whether watershed boundaries or similar geographic criteria could be incorporated. Staff will re-share the case study and explore possible scenarios to illustrate its application.

Members also discussed including cultural resources within the recommendation. They noted that protections should align with Assembly Bill (AB) 52, recognizing that natural resources such as oak woodlands are also cultural resources.

Members suggested exploring how this recommendation could be integrated into local planning tools, such as general plans and zoning ordinances, to create a more comprehensive framework.

### **Recommendation 2.4 – Public Landholding and Leases**

Subcommittee members discussed opportunities and challenges in encouraging local governments to hold and lease agricultural land.

- Some members expressed distrust that local governments would always act in the best interest of the land. Safeguards may be needed to prevent conflicts of interest and ensure equitable outcomes.
- Members emphasized that mitigation funds and leasing programs should be designed to benefit disadvantaged farmers, ranchers, and tenants, not just landowners. Programs should not require land ownership to participate.
- State-owned parcels are often large and inaccessible to smaller producers, while local jurisdictions may be better positioned to support farmers in urban and peri-urban areas.
- Members discussed models such as the Santa Cruz Land Trust as an example for public landholding, governance, and technical assistance.

- They highlighted the potential role of land trusts, Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs), and community organizations in holding/administering land to support small farmers, while noting challenges with state versus local capacity.

Members agreed that while the Task Force may not be able to design comprehensive safeguards, it is important to:

- Recognize concerns about governance, capacity, and equity.
- Highlight tenant and leaseholder vulnerabilities.
- Explore ways to strengthen models that expand access, provide technical assistance, and keep land in productive use without fragmentation.

Staff will review the discussion for alignment with report recommendations and consider the inclusion of relevant case studies

### **Cropland Repurposing**

Subcommittee members revisited feedback from August that cropland repurposing should be connected to land regeneration and land back, while avoiding permanent fragmentation of parcels. Members raised concerns about draft language suggesting prioritization of large commercial acreages for fallowing, noting that groundwater sustainability plans (GSPs) already require such actions and that the issue is complex across different regions and water basins. Members questioned whether focusing on farm size alone would advance equity. Discussion highlighted that:

- Transitioning land to lower-water crops presents significant economic and technical challenges for priority producers and land stewards.
- Existing farmland repurposing programs could be strengthened to better support equitable access, infrastructure needs, and small- to medium-scale operations.
- Large farms may more easily benefit from incentives to stop farming, while smaller farms face higher costs to transition.
- Future recommendations could emphasize designing cropland repurposing programs to reduce barriers and advance equity, rather than prescribing acreage thresholds.

The Subcommittee expressed interest in framing cropland repurposing as an opportunity to build equity into state programs and agreed that further development and discussion with the full Task Force is needed.

### **Order, Scope, and Structure**

Subcommittee members considered how to organize and frame the Goal 2 recommendations. Key points included:

- Statewide Conservation Plan (2.1): Members questioned whether the Task Force has capacity to develop a statewide plan itself, or whether the recommendation should call on the Department of Conservation (DOC) or another entity to lead, drawing parallels to the 30x30 initiative.

- Integration of Public Landholdings: Members discussed consolidating elements of Recommendations 2.3 and 2.4 under 2.1 to emphasize criteria for land prioritized for public ownership, alongside conservation of privately held lands.
- Dual Pathways: Members agreed that Goal 2 should distinguish between two complementary approaches:
  - Conserving privately held land (e.g., through easements).
  - Conserving publicly held land to expand access for socially disadvantaged farmers, beginning farmers, and Tribal Nations.
- Equity Focus: Members underscored that equity requires ensuring prime farmland is made accessible, not just conserved, and that easements alone do not guarantee equitable outcomes.

Staff will rework Goal 2 language to reflect these dual conservation pathways, ensuring clarity about roles, responsibilities, and alignment with broader state efforts such as 30x30.

### **Public Comment:**

- Lora O'Connor raised the importance of enabling Tribal entities to acquire and steward both public and private land, noting lessons from the Lipay Nation of San Ysabel.

### **General Public Comment:**

None.

Facilitator Wylie summarized action items and next steps and highlighted upcoming meetings.

This Goal 2 Subcommittee will meet on Sept. 19, 2025 from 9–11 a.m. to continue refining recommendations.

The meeting adjourned at 11 a.m.