

California Agricultural Land Equity Task Force Meeting Summary: March 27, 2025

Meeting Called to Order

Chair Nelson Hawkins called the meeting to order at 9:39 a.m. Facilitator Meagan Wylie welcomed attendees, reviewed participation guidelines, and previewed the day's agenda.

Roll Call

Roll call was conducted by the facilitator. Members present:

- Nelson Hawkins, Chair
- Irene de Barraicua
- Nathaniel Brown
- Ruth Dahlquist-Willard
- Lawrence Harlan
- James Nakahara
- Dorian Payán
- Thea Rittenhouse
- Doria Robinson
- Liya Schwartzman
- Qi Zhou

Members absent:

- Emily Burgueno, Vice Chair
- Darlene Franco

Quorum was established.

Staff Attendance:

Staff members present:

- Camille Frazier, California Strategic Growth Council
- Tessa Salzman, California Strategic Growth Council
- Caleb Swanson, California Strategic Growth Council
- Meagan Wylie, California State University Sacramento

Action: Approval of Summary

Approval of February 12-13, 2025, Meeting Summary.

Task Force Discussion:

No discussion.

Public Comment:

No public comment.

Action:

Member Rittenhouse moved to approve the meeting summary. Member Robinson seconded.

Motion passes (10-0-3*). (*One abstention, two absent.)

Staff Report

SGC Staff presented the Staff Report, which included:

- The Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation (SALC) Program Round 10 Draft Easement Template is open for public comment through May 30. The associated public comment workshop is on April 23.
- The California Climate Bond grant programs is open for public feedback through April 18.
- Revisions to Task Force bylaws to reflect statutory changes regarding per diem allowances. No vote of the Task Force is required for this revision.
- Legislative updates on:

- **Senate Bill (SB) 462:** Would provide \$20M annually to fund conservation easement acquisition through the California Farmland Conservancy Program.
- **Assembly Bill (AB) 1485:** Proposes tax exemptions for Tribal Nations (federally and non-federally recognized) to support ancestral land return.
- **AB 524:** Would establish the "Farmland Access and Conservation for Thriving Communities Program" in collaboration with the California Agricultural Land Equity Task Force.

Task Force Discussion:

Members expressed interest in reviewing the proposed bills more thoroughly and discussing them at the May meeting, prioritizing AB 524 and Proposition 4. Members formed a short-term "AB 524 Subcommittee" to engage with the legislation. Subcommittee composition includes members de Barraicua, Brown, Harlan, Nakahara, Robinson, Schwartzman, and Zhou. The Subcommittee will invite bill sponsors to future meetings and track relevant hearings.

Staff will follow up on requests for hearing links and bill analysis resources. A member shared that California FarmLink is hiring for a land access position in San Diego County.

Public Comment:

None.

Working Session

Members referenced the March 2025 version of the updated Draft Report. Staff provided an overview of the working session and its associated goals. They then led members through structured discussions to refine the draft report's goals and strategies.

Recommendation Goals:

Task Force members provided feedback on the nine draft goals and their associated strategies as outlined in the draft report. *Note: The numbering of*

goals in the meeting's PowerPoint slides was intended to facilitate discussion and does not reflect any order of priority.

Discussion highlights included:

Land Tenure:

- Members emphasized the need to center land tenure more clearly as a goal.
- Members suggested incorporating leasing terms as a strategy under a broader land tenure goal and adding a recommendation to increase the maximum allowable lease term length in California to 100 years.
- Members also suggested expanding the definition of land tenure to include economic viability and different forms of land tenure, like leasing and ownership.

Inequitable Impacts of Policies and Regulations (Goal 5):

- Members called for focus on specific regulations impacting land tenure, such as: Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), the Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program, Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA), and labor regulations.
- Emphasis was placed on targeting the most impactful policies and streamlining them.
- Members Dahlquist-Willard and Nakahara formed a working group focused on laws and regulations.

Tribal Sovereignty and Ancestral Land Return (Goal 1):

- Discussion centered on whether and how to distinguish between federally recognized and non-federally recognized Tribal Nations in the Task Force's report.
- Members suggested changing heading language to indicate recognition of Tribal sovereignty, as opposed to advancement of Tribal sovereignty.
- There was interest in consulting the Sustaining Natural and Cultural Resources Subcommittee and referencing the Native American Heritage Commission list.

Public Lands and Fallowed Land (Goals 2, 3, and 8):

- Members discussed leveraging underutilized and fallowed lands while clarifying that strategies should aim to ensure access to viable agricultural lands and avoid relegating marginalized producers to degraded lands.

- Members suggested incorporating language around public health concerns and ecological implications of fallowed lands.

Land Trusts and Land Acquisition Mechanisms:

- Members explored the role of land trusts and the potential for a public fund or "land bank" to acquire and preserve prime agricultural land.
- Some advocated for a state role in land acquisition; others emphasized empowering local or community-based entities.
- Members suggested leveraging existing structures (e.g., California's 30x30 conservation framework) and define "land banking" in context.
- Members requested that a portion of the report be dedicated to expressing the value of prime agricultural soil.

Implementation and Interagency Coordination (Goal 9):

- It was recommended to weave Goal 9 throughout the report, rather than include it as a separate goal, and to explicitly call out interagency collaboration and accountability.
- Members discussed how implementation should be resourced and coordinated with ongoing state efforts.

Staff will incorporate input from the discussion into the next draft of the report. Members approved staff to share the revised draft with Advisory Committee (AC) members for their initial review and feedback.

Work Planning:

Staff outlined plans to engage both advisory committee (AC) members and interagency partners in the review process. Members requested that AC members with relevant subject matter expertise be invited to participate in future subcommittee meetings. Additionally, they recommended that AC members be provided with guiding questions to support their review of draft recommendations—such as identifying strengths, challenges, opportunities, and key considerations related to the goals and strategies under development.

The review process will begin with the Advisory Committee, followed by interagency review later in the year, likely after the August Task Force meeting.

Members also requested the following agencies be invited to participate in the interagency review process: California Department of Water Resources,

State Water Resources Control Board, California Department of Pesticide Regulation, California Employment Development Department, and the Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development.

In discussing future meeting locations, members expressed interest in traveling to new regions to connect with additional communities. The following tentative locations were proposed:

- August: Mendocino or Arcata
- October: Ventura or Oxnard
- November: Berkeley
- December: Sacramento

Engagement Update:

Staff provided a comprehensive outreach update:

- Collaboration with University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources (UCANR) will include five community engagement sessions with details to be confirmed, and six to eight interviews with Technical Assistance (TA) providers.
 - All sessions will occur between April and August.
 - Task Force members can share suggestions for TA interviewees with staff.
 - UCANR will provide a synthesis of insights and findings at the August Task Force meeting.
- A Tribal Gathering Session is planned for May 13, 2025, at Susanville Rancheria. Two to three additional sessions (virtual and in person) are being planned for mid-year. Staff are also looking into consulting with Tribal Nations on the draft Report. Further updates will be provided at the May Task Force Meeting.
- The survey closes on April 6, and staff hope to share findings from responses analysis in May.
- Staff described how they will support Task Force members to organize and participate in structured site visits through July.

Members discussed the importance of reconnecting with prior site visit hosts and guest speakers to provide updates on the process and invite additional engagement. Staff will consider how to best support this request.

Public Comment:

None.

Action: Meeting Scheduling

Staff provided an overview of the current process for scheduling Task Force meetings, which prioritizes dates that allow the greatest number of members to attend while ensuring compliance with the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act. For in-person meetings, at least seven members must be physically present to establish quorum.

Staff introduced the possibility of developing a resolution to better align scheduling practices with Task Force priorities. Any revised process must remain Bagley-Keene compliant.

Task Force Discussion:

Members discussed the potential to incorporate additional considerations into future scheduling decisions, such as ensuring the presence of Task Force leadership (Chair or Vice Chair) and Tribal member representation. They acknowledged the limitations of the current process, particularly when key individuals are unable to attend. Staff clarified that according to the bylaws, if both the Chair and Vice Chair are unavailable, the Chair may designate another member to facilitate the meeting.

Questions were raised about whether these considerations should also apply to subcommittees or emergency meetings. Several members voiced support for prioritizing leadership and Tribal members' availability, specifically for full Task Force meetings.

The Task Force developed a draft resolution and agreed to revisit the topic at the May meeting and add it to the agenda for further discussion or potential action. As drafted, the resolution will only to future full Task Force meetings and all currently scheduled meetings will remain unchanged.

Public Comment:

None.

General Public Comment

None.

Meeting Adjourned

Chair Hawkins provided closing comments and adjourned the meeting at 4:15 p.m.