California Agricultural Land Equity Task Force Meeting Summary: Aug. 13-14, 2025

DRAFT until approved at subsequent meeting

Aug. 13, 2025

Meeting Called to Order

Chair Nelson Hawkins called the meeting to order at 8:42 a.m. Facilitator Meagan Wylie welcomed attendees, provided housekeeping remarks, reviewed participation guidelines, and previewed the day's agenda.

Roll Call

Roll call was conducted by the facilitator. Members present:

- Nelson Hawkins, Chair
- Emily Burgueno, Vice Chair (joined at 9:01 a.m.)
- Irene de Barraicua
- Nathaniel Brown
- Ruth Dahlquist-Willard*
- Darlene Franco
- Lawrence Harlan
- James Nakahara*
- Dorian Payán
- Thea Rittenhouse
- Doria Robinson
- Qi Zhou

Members absent:

- Liya Schwartzman

Quorum was established.

Staff Attendance:

Staff members present:

- Erin Curtis, California Strategic Growth Council
- Camille Frazier, California Strategic Growth Council
- Sean Kennedy*, California Strategic Growth Council

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

* *Denotes virtual attendance*

Action: Approval of Summary

Approval of May 14-15, 2025, Meeting Summary.

Task Force Discussion:

None.

Public Comment:

None.

Action:

Member Franco moved to approve the meeting summary. Chair Hawkins seconded. Motion passed. (11-0-2*). (*Two absent.)

Staff Report

Staff shared recent announcements and updates, including the release of the California Natural Resource Agency's (CNRA) Draft Tribal Stewardship Policy; updates to the public-facing repository of relevant reports and recommendations about agricultural land access and equity; highlights from recent subcommittee meetings including Community Outreach, Assembly Bill (AB) 524, and Grants and Resources; and updates regarding the Draft Report development process.

Discussion highlights:

- The AB 524 Subcommittee modified their letter of support and submitted it to the Senate Agriculture and Senate Appropriations Committees on July 8 and July 29, respectively.
- Staff shared the August 2025 Draft Report with interagency reviewers on August 1 and hosted an optional kick-off call on August 4. Reviewers are currently providing feedback via a collaborative document. Feedback is due August 28, after which point staff will anonymize and consolidate reviewers' feedback and share with the Task Force.

- Development of case studies for inclusion in the Draft Report is underway, including one on Golden Eagle Farm. Members emphasized the importance of consulting communities profiled in these cases.

Staff next reviewed the local assistance funds, emphasizing the priority to direct funds to priority producers and land stewards per direction received from the Task Force during the May 2025 meeting. While there is no mandatory timeline, staff aim to distribute funds by June 30, 2026. Staff are exploring models from existing state programs (e.g., down payment assistance) to inform design.

Members discussed the Task Force's role in guiding funding decisions, including conflict of interest (COI) rules. Several members stressed the importance of alignment with Task Force recommendations, and ensuring funds reach disadvantaged communities without undue barriers. A member observed that SGC has had limited engagement with Tribal Nations to date and emphasized the need for Task Force input to help staff better understand Tribal priorities. Staff will provide additional details on COI and next steps for program development at the upcoming October Task Force meeting.

Public Comment:

None.

Discussion: Engagement Reports

Staff reported on extensive engagement efforts conducted in 2025 through two tracks: The SGC and University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources (UCANR). Collectively, more than 190 priority producers, land stewards, and Technical Assistance (TA) providers participated in various engagement efforts across five languages, with SGC engagement reaching 90+ participants and UCANR facilitating eight focus groups and nine interviews involving approximately 100 additional participants.

Key themes that emerged from community feedback on the Draft Report include:

- Stronger historical context on land inequities is needed.
- Calls for cost-free, restriction-free land return (Goal 1) with funding for remediation.
- A strong desire for accountability in addressing soil and water contamination, with resources directed to small growers (Goal 2).
- Concerns about competition with corporate agriculture and support for cooperatives (Goal 3).
- Updating zoning and conservation tools to enable housing and land stewardship (Goal 4).

- Broader issues of affordability, water access, regulatory overreach, and the need for culturally competent technical assistance.

UCANR findings emphasized that access to land alone is insufficient without infrastructure such as housing, water, and market proximity, and cautioned against regulatory systems designed for large-scale agriculture. Community participants stressed the importance of safeguards to ensure new programs benefit intended communities rather than well-resourced farmers, and called for clearer, more specific report language on this issue.

Members reflected on the shared findings:

- A member suggested including regional histories regarding how southern agriculture was brought to California (e.g., plantation agriculture in Bakersfield).
- A member noted the significance of Tribal participation in recent sessions.
- Several members encouraged broader education on why land equity is necessary.

Staff confirmed that engagement summaries and interview data were shared with Members and are available on the project website, and that all participants were compensated for their participation.

Engagement will conclude on Aug. 31, 2025, following a virtual Town Hall scheduled for August 20 with interpretation in Spanish and Chinese.

Next steps include incorporating engagement insights into the October Draft Report, establishing 1–2 working groups to support this integration, and preparing fact sheets (January–June 2026) to communicate findings.

Public Comment:

None.

Working Session

Members referenced the August 2025 version of the updated Draft Report. Staff provided an overview of the working session and its associated goals, then reviewed the Report development timeline, emphasizing the August – October window as a critical period for advancing revisions.

Staff next reviewed a summary of key revisions made from May – July 2025, as outlined in the meeting's Briefing Packet, including the reorganization and consolidation of recommendations under four primary goals:

1. Tribal Stewardship and Land Return
2. Protected and Thriving Agricultural Lands
3. Equitable Land Transition and Acquisition

4. Secure Land Tenure

In advance of the meeting, members were invited to participate in an optional, informal poll to indicate their level of support for the draft recommendations. Nine Task Force members completed the poll. Results were shared to help identify recommendations requiring further discussion and to frame the day's dialogue.

Members engaged in detailed discussion on each goal and its subgoals. Staff used a spreadsheet to capture feedback in real time, which will be forwarded to subcommittees for continued refinement and advancement of the goals and subgoals for the October Draft Report.

Discussion highlights:

General Feedback

- Members raised concerns about consistency in terminology (e.g., reserving "sovereignty" for Tribal Sovereignty), historical framing of land inequities, and accurate representation of California's farm labor force, including Indigenous and Latino communities.
- Suggestions made to reorder subgoals for greater impact, add context to land ownership graphics, and integrate pull quotes or case studies to strengthen approachability of the Report.
- A few members asked to clarify glossary definitions to ensure explicit reference to federally recognized and non-federally recognized Tribal Nations.

Goal 1: Tribal Stewardship and Land Return

- Members expressed broad support for Goal 1. Some questions were raised about the scope and mechanisms of specific recommendations.
- Members discussed questions and concerns regarding the role of a proposed Tribal-State Land Return Commission, the scope of public land return (state vs. federal vs. local), interaction with the Surplus Land Act, and balancing land return for Tribal Nations with access for socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.
- Members recommended clarifying processes for "first right of refusal," prioritizing return to traditional territories, and incorporating examples of successful land return and Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) practices.
- Members deliberated how agricultural definitions should accommodate TEK, cultural fire, and non-commercial land stewardship.

Goal 2: Protected and Thriving Agricultural Lands

- Members noted confusion with the term "mitigation" and suggested clearer language such as "protection."
- Members discussed whether mitigation requirements should apply locally or more broadly, and how they align with existing programs (e.g., Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program).

- The following was recommended: reorganize subgoals to highlight the most impactful first; ensure Tribal co-development of conservation goals; explicitly include cultural benefits; and review alignment of subgoals with state and local conservation programs.

Goal 3: Equitable Land Transition and Acquisition

- Members discussed the proposed "Land Observatory," viewing it as a potential tool to track land tenure trends, support first-opportunity-to-purchase ordinances, and standardize evaluation of land access programs.
- Further consideration is needed to determine whether the Observatory should be a new entity, a coalition of regional partners, or embedded within existing agencies.
- Members emphasized the need to distinguish between pre-sale and post-sale monitoring, to avoid overburdening community-based organizations, and to include Tribal Nations in any review processes.
- Additional recommendations included expanding access to legal assistance on deeds, water rights, and trusts, and exploring new financing tools such as Aggie Bonds.

Goal 4: Secure Land Tenure

- Members highlighted the importance of embedding TA within all agricultural regulations to address compliance barriers, language access, and over-regulation. Examples included translation of pesticide certification materials, culturally appropriate training, and expanded TA for water quality compliance.
- Members also discussed potential amnesty programs for fees and fines, while cautioning against misuse.
- Suggestions included requiring state agencies to fund TA providers, consolidating related recommendations for clarity, and considering an ombuds program to monitor regulatory equity.

Public Comment:

- Adam X, Richmond Manufacturing Inc., recommended that the Task Force consider embedding restorative land access for Black Americans and descendants of enslaved people into Goal 3, with dedicated funding pools, explicit acknowledgment of historic harms (e.g., United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) loan exclusion), and focus on communities like Allensworth.
- Jamiah Hargins, Crop Swap LA, called for a restorative land access pilot for Black Americans in both rural and urban contexts, linking historic land loss to current inequities, and recommending cooperative lease-to-own models and community land trusts.
- Winna Mulker, North Coast Growers Association, noted that the lack of housing has been a primary barrier in his organization's land matching work.
- Sheyna Burns, Square One Foundation/California Earthworkers Summit, Founder/CEO, discussed the importance of urban agriculture in advancing equitable land access and noted that the report does not address Black-centered urban agriculture. She requested that the Task Force recommend cropland repurposing be tied to community food

production and announced that the first California Earthworkers Summit will take place at UC Santa Cruz in September.

- Sandra Lowry, Yurok Tribe, suggested that Land Back be viewed expansively and as more than just the physical return of land. She encouraged the Task Force to think about Land Back as an all-encompassing effort focused on returning men, women, and children to traditional and healthy nutrients, medicine, skills, and wellbeing. She asked "What if Landback meant that our unborn babies have the opportunity to ingest the healthy and traditional nutrients earth offers?" "What if Landback meant our pregnant women didn't have to take those vitamins presented and prescribed by a doctor at a clinic with western connotations?" "What if Landback meant we valued men for providing in a cultural way that honors their skill?"

General Public Comment

- Rasheed Hislop, Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF), requested the Task Force include restorative land access programs for Black farmers, with dedicated funding pools, compliance audits, and cultural easements to protect historically Black agricultural communities, while explicitly naming descendants of enslaved Americans in the report.
- Temu Asyr Martin Bey, ASYRS BRIDGE LLC, asked for explicit remedies for Black Americans and descendants of enslaved people, including land return programs, urban agriculture incentives, dedicated funding set-asides at Department of Conservation(DOC)/California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA), and permanent funding from Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund or the Climate Bond to support Black farmers and land stewards.

Meeting Adjourned

Chair Hawkins provided closing comments and adjourned day one of the meeting at 3:05 p.m.

Aug. 14, 2025

Meeting Called to Order

Chair Nelson Hawkins called the meeting to order at 8:19 a.m. Facilitator Meagan Wylie welcomed attendees, provided housekeeping remarks, reviewed participation guidelines, and previewed the day's agenda.

Roll Call

Roll call was conducted by the facilitator. Members present:

- Nelson Hawkins, Chair
- Emily Burgueno, Vice Chair
- Irene de Barraicua
- Nathaniel Brown
- Ruth Dahlquist-Willard*
- Darlene Franco
- Lawrence Harlan
- James Nakahara*
- Dorian Payán
- Thea Rittenhouse*
- Doria Robinson
- Qi Zhou

Members absent:

- Liya Schwartzman

Quorum was established.

Staff Attendance:

Staff members present:

- Erin Curtis, California Strategic Growth Council
- Camille Frazier, California Strategic Growth Council
- Sean Kennedy*, California Strategic Growth Council
- Tessa Salzman, California Strategic Growth Council
- Caleb Swanson, California Strategic Growth Council
- Meagan Wylie, California State University Sacramento

* *Denotes virtual attendance*

Discussion: Engagement Reports

Task Force members shared reflections from the prior afternoon's site visits to Blue Lake Rancheria Daluviwi' Community Garden and Leavey Ranch, and Woody Ryno and DeepSeeded Farms.

Blue Lake Rancheria Daluviwi' Community Garden and Leavy Ranch Site Visit, Aug. 13, 2025

Task Force attendance:

- Emily Burgueno

- Darlene Franco
- Lawrence Harlan
- Dorian Payán
- Thea Rittenhouse

Staff Attendance:

- Erin Curtis
- Tessa Salzman

Task Force members provided the following overview and key takeaways from the site visit.

- **Blue Lake Rancheria Daluviwi' Community Garden** has been in operation for ~15 years. The farm now produces food for approximately 150 families, supported by one full-time staff, part-time staff, AmeriCorps volunteers, and CalRecycle interns. Activities include vegetable production, composting (supported by grants), seed saving, and food distribution. The Tribe has partnerships with Cal Poly Humboldt and CalFire and ongoing food sovereignty initiatives. Recent land acquisition has expanded their land holding from 100 to 1000 acres. Additional projects include a native plant nursery, orchard management, and cultural uses such as traditional burning and basketry.
- **Leavey Ranch** was recently acquired by Blue Lake Rancheria through a transfer from the Humboldt Area Foundation. The property, once part of Wiyot ancestral homelands, is being transitioned into Tribal stewardship with conservation and cultural education goals. The Tribe receives annual endowment support contingent on land management. Current uses include livestock grazing, cultural burning, basketry materials, and office space. Plans are underway to pursue fee-to-trust status and expand land use for education and TEK.

Woody Ryno and DeepSeeded Farms, Aug. 13, 2025

Task Force attendance:

- Irene de Barraicua
- Nathaniel Brown
- Nelson Hawkins
- Qi Zhou

Staff Attendance:

- Kenna Davis
- Camille Frazier
- Caleb Swanson
- Meagan Wylie

Task Force members provided the following overview and key takeaways from the site visits.

- **Woody Ryno Farms**, a small (<1 acre) family-run operation in Humboldt County's Dow's Prairie. They accessed their land by writing a letter, and it took them two years to hear back.

- **DeepSeeded Farm** offers Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) memberships, providing Humboldt Bay area households with a weekly bounty of seasonal produce & flowers. This farm is approximately 10 acres, growing a variety of fruits and vegetables to primarily support around 450 CSA subscribers. The farm operates on leased school district land.
- Farmers highlighted key challenges including insecure tenure (short-term leases, handshake agreements), high land and water costs, regulatory hurdles, and lack of affordable housing.
- Farmers expressed that land ownership feels unattainable, underscoring the need for stronger lease protections and public land access models. They described how public land leasing in this region offers opportunities, but stability is needed for farmers to invest long-term in the land and operations.
- Despite challenges described by farmers, members observed strong local organizing (e.g., through North Coast Growers Association), innovative approaches such as dry farming, and commitment to building resilient local food systems.

Working Session

Members reviewed draft text written by working group members, in collaboration with SGC staff and advisory committee members, in response to the four discussion items assigned at the May 2025 meeting (as referenced in the Briefing Packet). Members were asked to consider these ideas and decide whether and how to incorporate them into the Draft Report.

Discussion items include:

1. New government entities
2. Cropland repurposing
3. Urban and rural infrastructure
4. Land consolidation

In addition, a section for "additional proposals" includes new recommendations or requests that emerged through working group conversations about the draft report that require additional discussion and direction from the Task Force.

Members engaged in detailed discussion on each item. Staff used a spreadsheet to capture feedback in real time, which will be forwarded to subcommittees for continued refinement and advancement of the recommendations for the October Draft Report.

Item 1: New Government Entities
Members reviewed suggested options for new or expanded entities to support agricultural land equity. Key points included:

- General agreement that building capacity within existing programs and offices (e.g., CDFA Farmer Equity Office, agricultural ombuds programs, community-based

organizations, and Resource Conservation Districts) is preferable to creating entirely new agencies.
    - However, some suggested the need for a dedicated Department of Agricultural Equity with strong Tribal and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) representation.
- Ombuds or public navigator roles are valuable when located outside regulatory agencies to maintain confidentiality and trust.
- Expansion could occur through grant programs and coordinated networks, with annual reporting to ensure accountability.
- Differing views emerged on whether systemic inequities necessitate a new, stand-alone department versus strengthening existing structures.

Idea 2: Cropland Repurposing

Members reviewed proposals on repurposing agricultural land to conserve water and support ecological stewardship. Key points included:

- Support for using Indigenous stewardship and TEK in land transition strategies.
- Agreement that larger acreages, not small farms, should be prioritized for fallowing.
- Recognition of opportunities to link repurposing efforts to aquifer recharge, Land Back initiatives, and equitable land transition models.
- Concerns raised about land fragmentation. Members encouraged models that build equity for producers while maintaining viable farm sizes.
- Suggestions to involve nonprofits or community land trusts as stewards of repurposed land.

Idea 3: Urban and Rural Infrastructure

- Discussion highlighted distinct challenges between urban and rural contexts. It may be beneficial to dedicate specific attention to urban agriculture.
- Urban farmers face barriers such as water access (e.g., high meter installation costs), restrictive zoning codes, and lack of workforce development support.
- Members recommended funds to subsidize water access, model zoning ordinances (for composting, direct sales, fruit tree planting, etc.), and workforce training opportunities.
- Some members urged integrating urban agriculture recommendations throughout all goals. Others advocated for a stand-alone goal on urban agriculture given its unique challenges and cultural value.
- Ensure Tribal communities in metro areas are included in urban agriculture initiatives.

Idea 4: Land Consolidation

Members considered strategies to address the impacts of institutional investment and consolidation of farmland:

- Proposals included banning or taxing institutional farmland acquisitions, disincentivizing non-operating landlords, and empowering organizations to purchase land in transition for equitable redistribution.

- Some members cautioned that bans may create loopholes, suggesting financial disincentives and retirement security programs (e.g., CalSavers expansion for farmers) as more feasible solutions.
- Broader discussion emphasized the need to de-commodify land, balance generational transfer challenges, and prioritize Indigenous stewardship and restorative access for descendants of enslaved Africans.

Additional Proposals

- Members discussed incorporating restorative land access for descendants of enslaved Africans, recommending a dedicated restorative fund, explicit acknowledgement of enslavement in California, and alignment with the Reparations Task Force.
- Education was identified as a critical backbone for the Report, to contextualize land return and reparations within California's history of stolen land and forced labor.
- Members expressed differing views on California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) compliance. Some favored streamlining to ease burdens on small farmers, and others opposed exemptions, emphasizing that CEQA protects cultural and natural resources and serves as a valuable legal mechanism for Tribal Nations. Suggestions included tiered compliance processes and financial assistance for small producers rather than regulatory streamlining or rollbacks.
- Members proposed including a comprehensive list or map of Tribal Nations and traditional territories within the Report for educational purposes, while acknowledging the sensitivities around recognizing non-federally recognized Tribes.
- Additional topics included coastal watershed stewardship, aquaculture, and fisheries.

Work Planning and Next Steps

Report Mock-up: Staff shared a graphically designed mock-up of the Report and invited member feedback. Members suggested the following:

- Ensure images connect directly to Report content, with captions, descriptive context, and input from Task Force members on both image choice and captions.
- Consider California-based icons that are culturally relevant (e.g., acorn, abalone, seaweed) and avoid icons that distract from content.
- Use color coordination to help orient readers and distinguish sections.
- Include quotes and pull quotes in original languages with translations where applicable, to enhance readability and interest.
- Incorporate historical photos and action-oriented images to ground recommendations in lived experience and history.

Timeline and milestones: Staff reviewed the path to finalizing the Report:

- **Aug. 22**: Deadline for Task Force member comments on August Draft
- **Early September**: Subcommittees meet (week of Sept. 1)
- **Sept. 8–26**: Working groups meet
- **Oct. 6**: Staff circulate October Draft Report

- **Oct. 15-16** Task Force meeting: Review October Draft Report and work toward consensus
- **Nov. 13** Task Force meeting: Approve near-final draft
- **Dec. 11** Task Force meeting: Finalize report, celebrate

Staff noted that Interagency (IA) feedback may not be fully available before subcommittee meetings. A summary of IA feedback will be shared with the full Task Force, and a working group will be convened to recommend how to incorporate IA feedback.

Members requested staff share a similar, optional informal poll to test for level of support regarding the October Draft Report prior to the October meeting.

Subcommittees and Working Groups: The following subcommittees and working groups were established:

- Working Groups:
    - IA Feedback + Coastal Indigenous Aquaculture: Emily, Thea
    - Tone & Consistency + Engagement Insights: Nelson, James
    - Urban Agriculture: Doria, Nathaniel
- Subcommittees:
    - Goal 1: Lawrence, Emily
    - Goal 2: Dorian, Nathaniel, Thea
    - Goal 3: Doria, Qi, James, Thea, Irene
    - Goal 4: James, Ruth, Irene
    - Restorative Land: Doria, Thea, Irene, Lawrence.

Public comment:

None.

General Public Comment

- Adam X commented that restorative land access and land back are parallel priorities that should be explicitly recognized. He urged acknowledgement of the enslavement of Indigenous peoples and using the Report as an opportunity to educate Californians about the history of slavery.

Meeting Adjourned

Vice Chair Burgueno provided closing comments and adjourned day two of the meeting at 1:05 p.m.