



Advancing Agricultural Land Equity in California

**Recommendations of the California
Agricultural Land Equity Task Force**

Report Summary



The full report in English and report summaries in multiple languages can be found online at: bit.ly/ALETF-about

Site visit hosts and Task Force member Thea Rittenhouse at Tijuana River Valley incubator plots in San Diego



Task Force Chair Nelson Hawkins with owner of TAC Farm in Allensworth



Hukama Farm owner and Task Force members Ruth Dahlquist and Irene de Barraicua at Hukama Farm in Ramona



Task Force members and the site visit host at the Blue Lake Rancheria Daluviwi' Community Garden in Blue Lake



Farm owner, Task Force members Qi Zhou and Nathaniel Brown, and support staff in a greenhouse in Gilroy





Overview

California faces an agricultural land equity crisis that must be promptly addressed.

For decades, many producers and Tribal land stewards have been systemically excluded from owning and holding onto agricultural land due to race, ethnicity, gender, class, and citizenship status, among other factors. Today, the resulting inequities in ownership and secure access are worsened by climate change, burdensome regulations, and land consolidation and financialization. California's agricultural land is highly concentrated among a small number of landowners and increasingly being used by private investment firms to make profit rather than as a source for food, cultural resources, and community benefits. Together, these conditions produce negative outcomes for agricultural communities and the state's ecological and economic resilience.

The California Agricultural Land Equity Task Force was established as an independent body in the California Budget Act of 2022 (**AB 179**) to submit policy recommendations to the Governor and Legislature on how to address the agricultural land equity crisis. From October 2023 through December 2025, the Task Force developed recommendations through a collaborative public process, including 12 public meetings and extensive community engagement across California. Over 400 producers, California Native American Tribal leaders and members, and others participated in multilingual activities including engagement sessions, site visits, a survey, and guest presentations.

The Task Force’s final report, submitted in December 2025, includes a discussion of historical and contemporary disparities in land access in California, and contains policy recommendations to address the state’s agricultural land equity crisis. The recommendations outline pathways to ensure priority producers and Tribal land stewards have access to secure, affordable, and viable land for the stewardship and cultivation of food, fiber, medicine, and cultural resources without systemic barriers, disparities, or exploitation.

Recommendations are divided into six sections:



Prioritize Tribal stewardship and land return.



Fund and incentivize land acquisition for priority producers and Tribal land stewards.



Halt, mitigate, and reverse agricultural land consolidation.



Preserve California’s agricultural land while prioritizing equitable land access and stewardship.




Prioritize and protect secure land tenure.



Support urban agriculture.

Implementing these recommendations can benefit all Californians by fostering a more resilient and just food system, strengthening local and diverse food economies, and sustaining healthy natural and working lands.



Applai Tribe Farm &
Garden in San Diego

Key terms

Agricultural land equity

Agricultural land equity is when priority producers and Tribal land stewards have access to secure, affordable, and viable land for the stewardship and cultivation of food, fiber, medicine, and cultural resources without systemic barriers, disparities, or exploitation.

Priority producers and Tribal land stewards

Those who have been historically and systematically excluded from landownership and secure tenure for agriculture and traditional Tribal uses. This group is inclusive of individuals identified as socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers (**AB 1348**) and as underserved producers (**H.R. 2**). It is also inclusive of farmworkers and those aspiring to start their own agricultural operations.

The full list of key terms is available in the [Glossary \(Appendix A\)](#) of the report.



1. Prioritize Tribal stewardship and land return

Federally and non-federally recognized California Native American Tribes have specific histories and relationships with the State of California, resulting in unique challenges and opportunities for advancing agricultural land equity. California was founded on the violent removal, coercion, intimidation, and genocide of Indigenous Peoples from their lands and watersheds. Unratified treaties, militia campaigns, and discriminatory laws left Tribes landless and excluded from legal rights.¹ Today, Tribes hold a fraction of the land they historically stewarded, limiting Tribal Sovereignty, cultural practices, and ecological stewardship.

Persistent barriers to land access and ownership for California Native American Tribes require a cohesive, long-term commitment and response from the state. Ancestral land return restores access to cultural resources such as medicines, plants, and animals, and enables Tribes to restore native ecosystems and ceremonial grounds, boost soil health, and increase biodiversity.

To respect Tribal Sovereignty, ancestral land return should occur without restrictions or encumbrances and involve meaningful, consistent consultation and communication with California Native American Tribes.

Recommendations

- 1.1 Establish an Ancestral Land Return Fund.
- 1.2 Embed ancestral land return for California Native American Tribes in the state's policies and programs.
- 1.3 Return publicly held land to California Native American Tribes.
- 1.4 Enable and promote the implementation of Traditional Ecological Knowledge and cultural practices.



2. Fund and incentivize land acquisition for priority producers and Tribal land stewards

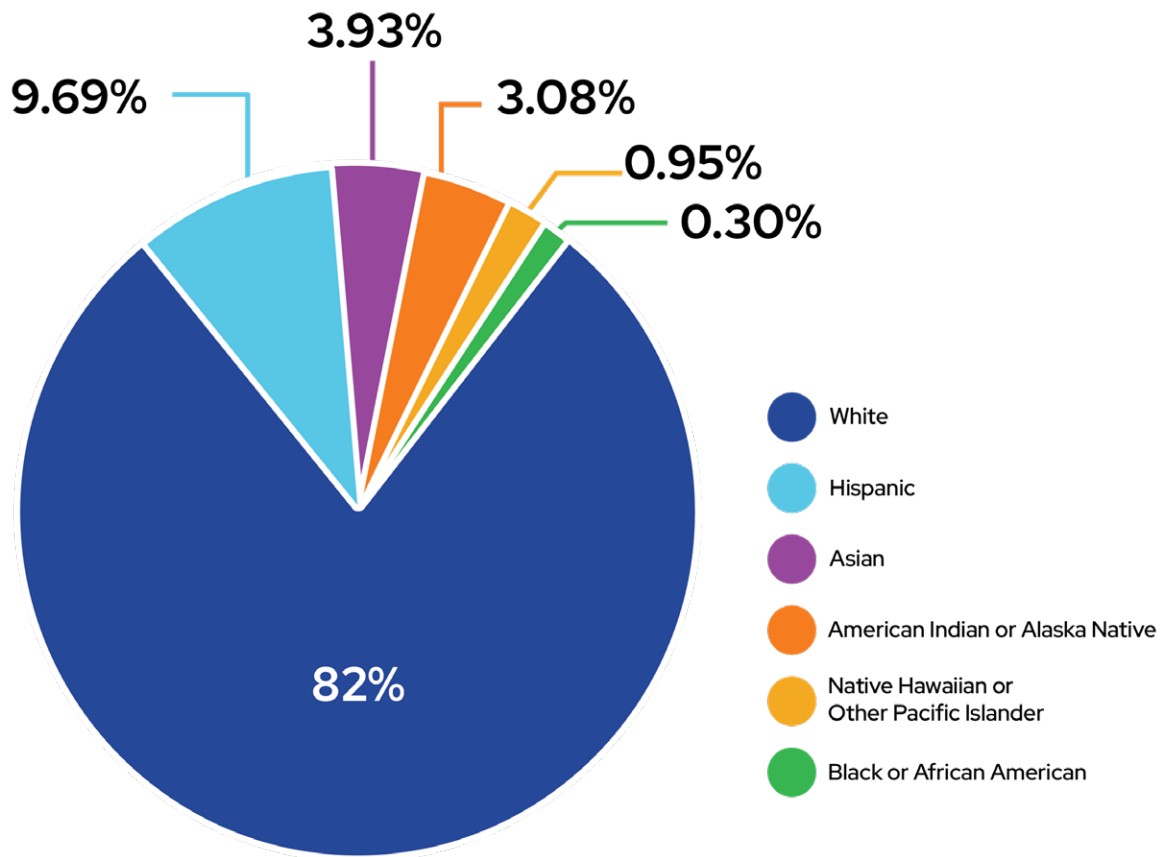
By 2035, 40% of privately held agricultural land is expected to change hands as landowners retire.² Without a clear vision and plan, this transition could worsen current disparities in land access. Eighty-two percent of farmland in California is owned by white producers, while all other racial and ethnic categories combined own the remaining 18%.³

Historical injustices—including but not limited to the violent removal and forced labor of Tribes, racially motivated land takings from African Americans, forced incarceration of Japanese Americans, and exploitative labor conditions—continue to impact priority producers and Tribal land stewards today, who are more likely to face barriers to financing, technical assistance, and access to land. Farmland prices, which have increased 28.3% since 2018, are one of the biggest barriers to ownership for priority producers and Tribal land stewards.⁴ Addressing these barriers requires tailored support that not only acknowledges past and ongoing disparities but begins to implement solutions.

Recommendations

- 2.1 Establish a Restorative Land Fund.
- 2.2 Develop and implement a public education campaign to document past and ongoing harm.
- 2.3 Provide funding for the purchase of agricultural land to be leased or transferred to priority producers and Tribal land stewards.
- 2.4 Establish loan and debt forgiveness programs.
- 2.5 Adopt new tax programs and benefits designed to serve priority producers and Tribal land stewards.
- 2.6 Continually evaluate and improve funding and incentive programs.
- 2.7 Expand tailored technical assistance for land access and acquisition.

Percent of total acres of owned land in farms in California (2022)⁵



Note: Racial categories are "alone or in combination with other races."

Harvesting strawberries in Santa Maria





3. Halt, mitigate, and reverse agricultural land consolidation

The consolidation and financialization of agricultural land and critical natural resources is a significant driver of inequitable access to agricultural land. While the majority (63.5% in 2017) of California's producers operate on 50 acres or less, just 4.6% of landowners collectively own almost half of total cropland.⁶

Recent decades have seen an increase in consolidated ownership of agricultural land. The number of small farms decreased by 13% between 2017 and 2022, while the number of large farms increased.⁷ When small- and mid-sized farms are replaced by fewer, larger operations, communities experience negative economic, environmental, and health outcomes.

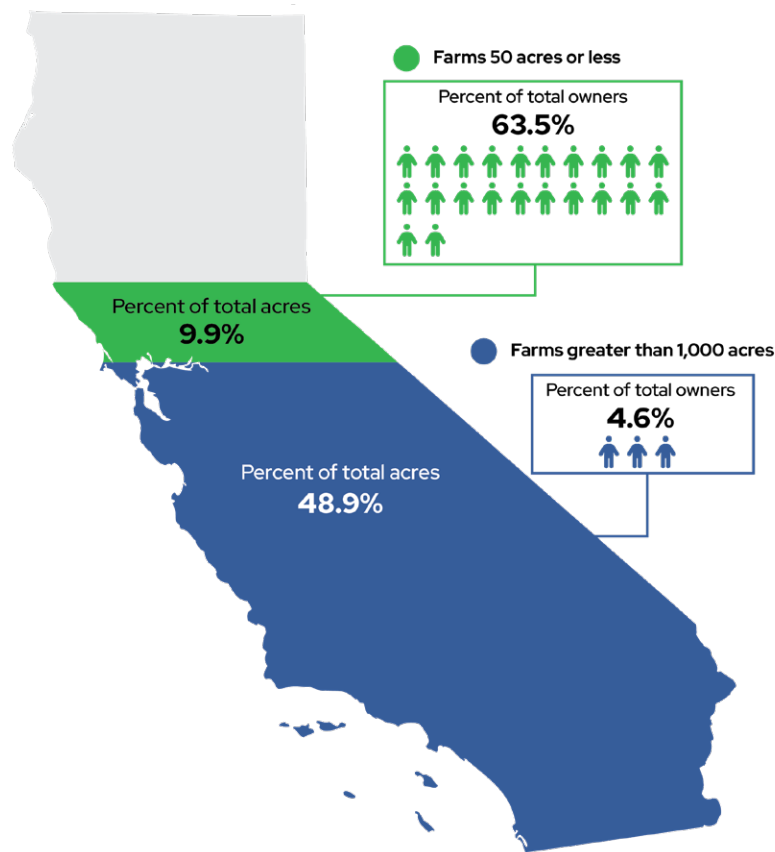
Alongside consolidation, financialization transforms agricultural land into an investment tool for institutional investors and private equity firms, valuing agricultural land for its ability to produce profits rather than food, cultural resources, and community benefits.

These trends worsen disparities rooted in centuries of discriminatory policies that have taken land and generational wealth from priority producers and Tribal land stewards.

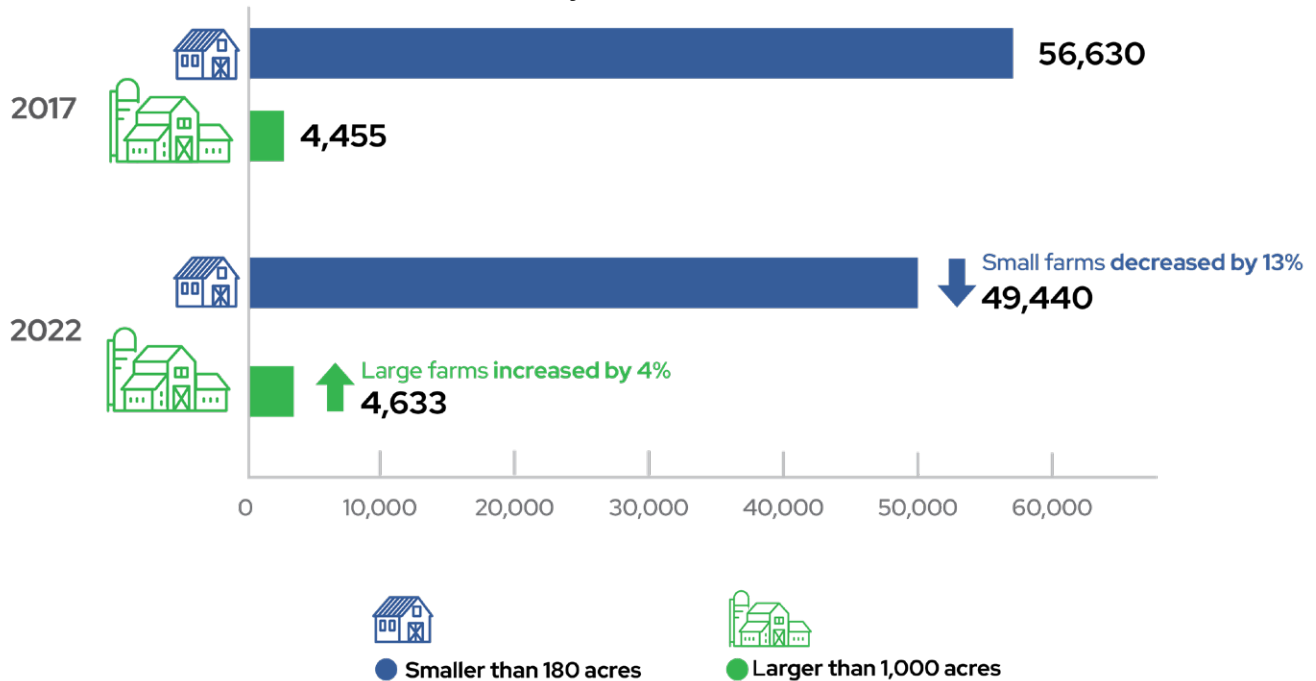
Recommendations

- 3.1 Limit agricultural landownership by investment companies.
- 3.2 Develop local first opportunity to purchase ordinances for priority producers and Tribal land stewards.
- 3.3 Establish a California Producer Retirement Fund.
- 3.4 Establish and fund a Land Market Monitoring Program.

Farm size in relation to percent of total owners and percent of total acres of cropland owned in California (2017)⁸



Number of California farms by farm size in 2017 and 2022⁹





4. Preserve California's agricultural land while prioritizing equitable land access and stewardship

California's agricultural land base is under threat from urban and industrial development and the negative impacts of centuries of extractive agriculture. California lost more than 1.6 million acres of farm and grazing land between 1984 and 2018, with urban development driving 75% of this loss.¹⁰ The state's highest quality agricultural soil has seen the largest decrease in acreage. In working to address centuries of extractive agricultural practices, the state's groundwater sustainability goals may require an estimated 500,000 to 1 million acres of agricultural land to be taken out of production.¹¹

In this context, the State of California has set a goal of conserving 12,000 acres of cropland and 33,000 acres of grassland per year beginning in 2030, with additional targets beyond this time horizon.¹² These and other climate and conservation efforts should be guided by a comprehensive statewide strategy that addresses both publicly and

privately held land and centers land access opportunities for priority producers and Tribal land stewards.

Recommendations

- 4.1 Develop a statewide agricultural land preservation and stewardship plan.
- 4.2 Improve conservation programs and tools to enable equitable land access and stewardship.
- 4.3 Promote local strategies for agricultural land preservation.
- 4.4 Expand state and local government capacity to effectively and fairly lease publicly held land.



5. Prioritize and protect secure land tenure

Achieving agricultural land equity requires stable and secure relationships to land, supportive regulatory structures, and long-term economic viability. Many priority producers and Tribal land stewards operate on short-term or informal leases, which can disqualify tenants from public funding programs and discourage regenerative practices and infrastructure improvements. Burdensome regulations, restrictive zoning codes, and housing barriers also present significant challenges to maintaining secure tenure and agricultural businesses.

Overcoming these barriers requires fair lease structures, appropriately designed regulations, flexible zoning and housing policies, and technical assistance designed to ensure long-term viability and stewardship.

Recommendations

- 5.1 Address power imbalances in landowner-tenant relationships.
- 5.2 Expand the capacity of the California Department of Food and Agriculture's (CDFA) Farmer Equity Office.
- 5.3 Establish and fund regional Ag Ombuds positions.
- 5.4 Address inequitable policy consequences while respecting the intention of the law.
- 5.5 Incentivize and support local governments to adopt zoning and land use planning practices that facilitate secure land tenure and stewardship.



Yo'Ville Community Garden and Farm in Fresno



6. Support urban agriculture

California's cities and suburbs present unique challenges and opportunities for advancing agricultural land equity. Urban agriculture offers benefits such as improved access to nutritious foods, community engagement, workforce development, and expanded green spaces. Urban producers and Tribal land stewards benefit from these opportunities by working close to their customers and the communities they serve.

Despite these benefits, there are many barriers to urban agriculture, including exclusion from funding programs, high water costs, and restrictive zoning. Recent initiatives, such as California Department of Food and Agriculture's (CDFA) Urban Agriculture Grant Program and the 2024 Climate Bond (Proposition 4), provide much-needed funding. Beyond financial support, systemic changes are needed to integrate urban agriculture into planning, reduce regulatory barriers, and ensure equitable access and secure tenure for urban growers.

Recommendations

- 6.1 Ensure eligibility of urban producers and Tribal land stewards in existing programs and provide tailored funding.
- 6.2 Make land available for urban agriculture and address barriers to secure tenure.

Eleven of 13 Task Force members in Sacramento



Next steps: Implementation and evaluation

The context, stories, and recommendations in the California Agricultural Land Equity Task Force's report lay the groundwork for future action. In many cases, the fastest and most effective way to enact these recommendations will be through legislation. The Legislature should clearly state that supporting the stewardship of agricultural land by priority producers and Tribal land stewards is a core legislative intent. Legal guidance will be necessary to ensure all applicable laws are considered.

Effectively developing and implementing these recommendations will require centering priority producers and Tribal land stewards and prioritizing cultural humility, capacity building, and flexible processes. A robust evaluation framework with goals, metrics,

and timelines should be developed to track progress and ensure long-term impact.

While the Governor and the Legislature are the principal audiences for this report, implementing its policy recommendations will require coordinated advocacy, dedication, and investment by everyone who seeks to address the agricultural land equity crisis in California.

Please review the full report for more context and detail on the challenges identified and solutions proposed for advancing agricultural land equity.

Endnotes

- 1 Johnston-Dodds, Kimberly. (2002). "Early California laws and policies related to California Indians." California Research Bureau. Last accessed Feb. 3, 2026 from <https://courts.ca.gov/publication/california-research-bureau-early-california-laws-and-policies-related-california>
- 2 Hunter, M., A. Sorensen, T. Nogeire-McRae, S. Beck, S. Shutts, R. Murphy. (2022). "Farms under threat 2040: Choosing an abundant future." American Farmland Trust. Last accessed Mar. 16, 2026 from <https://farmlandinfo.org/publications/farms-under-threat-2040/>
- 3 Last accessed Oct. 2, 2025 from <https://www.nass.usda.gov/> with: Last accessed Mar. 13, 2026 from https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2022/Online_Resources/County_Profiles/California/
- 4 "Land values 2022 summary." (2022). U.S. Department of Agriculture. National Agricultural Statistics Service. Last accessed Oct. 2, 2025 from https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/Todays_Reports/reports/land0822.pdf
- 5 U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2024). "2022 Census of Agriculture: California state and county data." National Agricultural Statistics Service. Last accessed Mar. 16, 2026 from https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2022/Full_Report/Census_by_State/California/
- 6 Macaulay, Luke and Van Butsic. (2017). "Ownership characteristics and crop selection in California cropland." California Agriculture 71(4), pp. 221-230. <https://doi.org/10.3733/ca.2017a0041>
- 7 O'Connor, Teresa. (2024). "What the 2022 Census of Agriculture confirms about California." American Farmland Trust. Last accessed Oct. 2, 2025 from <https://farmland.org/2022-census-of-agriculture-california/>
- 8 Macaulay, Luke and Van Butsic. (2017). "Ownership characteristics and crop selection in California cropland." California Agriculture 71(4), pp. 221-230. <https://doi.org/10.3733/ca.2017a0041>
- 9 O'Connor, Teresa. (2024). "What the 2022 Census of Agriculture confirms about California." American Farmland Trust. Last accessed Oct. 2, 2025 from <https://farmland.org/2022-census-of-agriculture-california/>
- 10 "Fast facts." (n.d.). California Department of Conservation. Last accessed Oct. 2, 2025 from <https://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp/fmmp/Pages/Fast-Facts.aspx>
- 11 Sunding, David and Roland-Holst. (2020). "Water blueprint for the San Joaquin Valley economic impact analysis: Phase one results." The University of California, Berkeley. Last accessed Mar. 16, 2026 from <https://cawaterlibrary.net/document/water-blueprint-for-the-san-joaquin-valley-economic-impact-analysis-phase-one-results/>
- 12 "California's nature-based solutions climate targets." (2024). Nature-Based Climate Solutions. Last accessed Mar. 16, 2026 from <https://resources.ca.gov/initiatives/expanding-nature-based-solutions>



More information about the Task Force and member bios are available at: sgc.ca.gov/initiatives/alei

The Task Force was administered by the California Strategic Growth Council (SGC) yet operated independently and maintained final decision-making control over the contents of its report. The views and recommendations expressed in the report are those of the Task Force and not necessarily those of SGC or the Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation.