

Advancing Agricultural Land Equity in California

Recommendations of the California Agricultural Land Equity Task Force

Select recommendations for California Native American Tribes and Tribal-serving organizations

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.¹ Today, the resulting inequities in ownership and secure access to agricultural land are worsened by increasing land consolidation and financialization, climate change, and burdensome regulations.²

The California Agricultural Land Equity Task Force was established in the California Budget Act of 2022 (**AB 179**) to submit policy recommendations to the Governor and Legislature on how to equitably increase access to land for food production and traditional Tribal agricultural uses. The Task Force developed recommendations through a collaborative public process that engaged over 400 producers, California Native American Tribal leaders and members, and others across California. The final report was submitted in December 2025.

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.

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 are those who have been historically and systematically excluded from landownership and secure tenure for agriculture and traditional Tribal uses.

Select recommendations related to California Native American Tribes and Tribal-serving organizations

There are presently 109 federally recognized and more than 60 non-federally recognized California Native American Tribes in the state who have sustained watersheds, rivers, coasts, marine habitats, and grasslands since time immemorial. The State of California was founded on the violent removal, coercion, intimidation, and genocide of Indigenous Peoples from the lands and watersheds. As a result, many California Native American Tribes currently have little or no access to their ancestral lands, which severely restricts their ability to steward vital ecosystems and practice their cultural and spiritual traditions.

These specific histories and relationships with the State of California require a cohesive, long-term commitment and response from

all levels of government to address the historical injustices that persist today. The Task Force's recommendations were informed by conversations with Tribal leaders and members who consistently emphasized the importance of land return without restrictions, encumbrances, or other requirements. Land return must begin with consultation and communication with California Native American Tribes and always respect Tribal Sovereignty.

The following is a selection of recommendations designed to facilitate land return to California Native American Tribes and prioritize Tribal stewardship. For the full list of recommendations focused on Tribes and a more comprehensive understanding of how land equity may be achieved, please review the [**full report**](#).

1.1.a Develop an Ancestral Land Return Fund for California Native American Tribes to acquire agricultural land within their ancestral territories.

1.2 Embed ancestral land return for California Native American Tribes in the state's policies and programs by conducting government-to-government consultation with California Native American Tribes; creating a Tribal Lands Equity Advisory Council tasked with guiding implementation of this report's recommendations; establishing a Tribal Land Return guiding body; ensuring all state conservation and agriculture policies and programs include Traditional Ecological Knowledge; and amending policies, regulations, and laws to remove barriers and burdens associated with ancestral land return and access for California Native American Tribes.

1.3 Return publicly held land to California Native American Tribes.

1.4.a Remove barriers to the use of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) on public and private lands, including cultural fire.

1.4.e Prioritize Tribal stewardship and Traditional Ecological Knowledge in coastal areas.

4.2.c Require agencies to update existing conservation easement and conservation program guidelines to allow for traditional Tribal uses and flexible agricultural uses.

4.2.d Leverage the Multi-Benefit Land Repurposing Program and LandFlex Program to transition large-acreage agricultural land to stewardship by California Native American Tribes or priority producers and Tribal land stewards.

4.2.f Require land trusts and community-based organizations to co-create conservation goals in collaboration with the communities to which they are accountable, including consultation with California Native American Tribes.

5.5.a Direct the Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation to develop model ordinances that facilitate secure agricultural land tenure and stewardship, with emphasis on equitable land access, regenerative agriculture, and Tribal co-stewardship.

Endnotes

- 1 California Department of Food and Agriculture. (2020). "2020 Report to the California Legislature on the Farmer Equity Act." Last accessed Feb. 26, 2026 from <https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/farmerresources/pdfs/2020FarmerEquityReport.pdf>
- 2 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/>



The full report in English, report summaries in multiple languages, and more information about the Task Force can be found online at: bit.ly/ALETF-about