

Advancing Agricultural Land Equity in California

Recommendations of the California Agricultural Land Equity Task Force

Select recommendations for conservation 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 for conservation organizations

California's agricultural land base is under threat from urban and industrial development. More than 1.6 million acres of farm and grazing lands were lost between 1984 and 2018, with Prime Farmland seeing the largest decrease in acreage.³ At the same time, negative impacts from centuries of extractive agriculture continue to cause environmental degradation and climate instability, likely resulting in further losses of viable agricultural land.⁴

Preserving California's agricultural lands and supporting regenerative agricultural practices are critical for the state's future, but ensuring equitable stewardship opportunities on these lands is just as important. Conservation targets, such as the 30×30 Initiative,⁵ will only be effective if the implementation includes fair land access opportunities and long-term tenure for those who have been excluded. Conservation-focused organizations have an essential role to play in updating their tools and strategies toward this goal.

Below is a selection of recommendations most relevant to conservation-focused organizations, including but not limited to land trusts, open space districts, and the University of California Natural Reserve System. For detailed information, including complementary recommendations and a more comprehensive understanding of how land equity may be achieved, please review the [full report](#).

2.3.a Fund organizations that directly benefit priority producers and Tribal land stewards to purchase and then lease or transfer agricultural land to priority producers and Tribal land stewards.

2.3.b Encourage, incentivize, and strengthen conservation tools that conserve agricultural land, such as buy-protect-sell+ programs, while prioritizing equitable and affordable land access. Require that priority producers and Tribal land stewards are prioritized for the lease or transfer of these properties.

4.1.a Develop a statewide plan that centers equitable land access in projects to preserve and manage California's agricultural land, especially Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance, in alignment with Nature-Based Solutions Climate Targets. This plan should improve existing conservation goals and strategies and be focused on preserving publicly and privately held agricultural land and securing land access opportunities for priority producers and Tribal land stewards.

4.2.a In new and existing conservation programs, fund the following activities: acquisition of agricultural conservation easements and enhancements that facilitate equitable and affordable land access; transaction costs and legal and technical support to negotiate and close land transactions and easements with land trusts, public agencies, and private landholders; and implementation of regenerative and Traditional Ecological Knowledge practices.

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.e Fund the creation and delivery of training programs for land trusts, public

agencies, appraisers, lenders, and technical assistance providers that: teach how to develop conservation tools that benefit priority producers and Tribal land stewards; promote cultural humility, especially in working with California Native American Tribes; and are co-developed and implemented with 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.

4.4.a Establish structures for effective and fair land access agreements on publicly held land by funding nonprofits, Resource Conservation Districts, land trusts, and other community-based organizations to serve as liaisons and facilitators between priority producers and Tribal land stewards and landholding agencies.

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/>
- 3 "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>
- 4 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/>
- 5 "Conserving 30 percent of California's lands and coastal waters by 2030." (2025). 30x30 California. Last accessed Oct. 2, 2025 from <https://www.californianature.ca.gov/>



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