

California Agricultural Land Equity Task Force Community Engagement Session Reports

This document provides a brief summary of each community engagement session, in chronological order from earliest to most recent.

Some engagement sessions had more extensive feedback collection. If so, that information can be found in the appendix.

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EcoFarm Conference Listening Session

Date: Jan. 23, 2025

Task Force Representatives: Chair Hawkins and Member Nakahara Staff Support: Tessa Salzman, SGC

Total Attendance: Approximately 30 people Summary author: Tessa Salzman

Presenters provided an overview of the Task Force and outreach to date. The participants then divided into three smaller groups to discuss general challenges, potential solutions, and resources needed related to equitable land access. The participants highlighted a range of persistent barriers for small-scale and historically disadvantaged farmers.

Attendees expressed frustration with outdated, inaccessible, and slow-moving U.S. Department of Agriculture programs including Farm Services Agency loans, zoning restrictions, parcel sizes that are either too small or too large, and funding that favors large-scale operations. There was concern about land being concentrated in the hands of large corporations and absentee owners, along with difficulties around lease terms, insurance liabilities, and the exclusion of undocumented or non-English-speaking farmers from important programs. Many participants also emphasized how one-size-fits-all policies and a lack of culturally appropriate outreach limit access and reduce trust, particularly in communities who have been impacted by land dispossession and discrimination.

In terms of solutions, participants called for a shift toward collective and community-based land management structures such as land trusts, incubators, and cooperative models. There was strong support for creating new zoning and legal frameworks that support alternative land ownership structures, as well as using tax incentives, eminent domain, and statewide planning to limit land speculation and promote productive use of land for community agriculture. Additional proposals included tailored educational efforts (both for landowners and the public), culturally competent technical assistance, reforms to loan and grant programs, and ensuring undocumented farmers are eligible for these resources. Some attendees also proposed adding ancestral land recognition to the land title so when land is sold, the buyer must reflect on who originally stewarded the land.

Coachella Valley Listening Session: Condensed Synthesis Summary

Date: Feb. 11, 2025

Task Force representatives: Members de Barraicua and Payán

Participants: Migrant Farmworkers, Tenant Farmers, Small Farmers, and Huerto Operators. The session was conducted in Spanish.

Partner Organizations: Líderes Campesinas & Pueblo Unido CDC Total Attendance: Approximately 20

Summary author: Elías Aceves, Researcher and Guest Presenter at the February meeting

Executive Summary

This report synthesizes findings from listening sessions with various agricultural stakeholders in Coachella Valley, revealing critical challenges faced by small-scale producers in accessing markets, navigating regulations, managing climate risks, and securing adequate infrastructure. We identify 10 critical themes, community-proposed solutions, and potential state actions which the task force may consider from the session.

Key Insights

- **Market Access Over Land Access:** Tenant farmers prioritized better market access over land ownership due to additional water and property tax costs. Wholesalers significantly undercut buying prices for small producers and limited distribution channels force reliance on unfair wholesaler pricing.
- **Land Tenure Insecurity:** However, other tenant farmers also identified issues with rental arrangements and how they create challenges with landlords, along with limited access to government assistance.
- **Infrastructure Barriers:** Restrictive zoning prevents building necessary infrastructure like cold storage, reinforcing reliance on non-producer facilities and preventing ownership of value-adding processes for disadvantaged farmers.
- **Climate Vulnerability:** Small and tenant farmers lack adequate insurance coverage against increasing climate risks.
- **Limited Support for Home Gardens (Huertos):** Huerto projects need more funding, technical assistance to scale/commercialize, and regulatory exemptions against mandatory cutting for pests.
- **Educational Limitations:** K-12 education fails to showcase diverse career pathways in agriculture, especially towards kids of farm workers.
- **Financial & Regulatory Complexity:** Small operators struggle with complex regulations and a lack of access to favorable loans to build a resilient farm business.

Synthesis of Key Themes

Local Market Development & Fair Pricing

Agricultural producers need publicly funded, local food hubs. Tenant farmer participants prioritized market access over land ownership due to additional water and property tax costs jeopardizing their business viability. This fear loomed with discussions of Los Angeles wholesalers undercutting small/tenant producers, forcing adaptation to more profitable crops rather than cultural preferences. Communities identify farmers' markets with reduced barriers to entry and mechanisms for price transparency to reduce reliance on predatory intermediaries.

Zoning & Infrastructure Support

Restrictive regulations prevent the development of basic processing facilities and independent value-adding infrastructure. For example, participants cannot build necessary cold storage due to zoning regulations. Government grant programs for shared infrastructure are needed, along with streamlined permitting processes and technical assistance through county-level service centers.

Climate Resilience & Risk Management

Participants report devastating crop losses without adequate insurance. Small and tenant farmers receive minimal-to-no support compared to large landowners. State-subsidized insurance products for tenant farmers and a publicly-administered climate disaster fund are urgently requested in the face of rising climate risks.

Huerto Development Support

Home gardens (huertos) are vital community resources. Participants need funding and technical improvements to commercialize these operations and fund collective infrastructure such as a community (plant) nursery. Regulatory pathways for certification and protection from mandatory cutting of huertos due to pest regulations are essential.

Financial & Business Resources

Participants struggle to access appropriate financing and business guidance. State-administered loan programs, business assistance, and legal aid for agricultural regulations are requested to address these barriers. Centralized resource centers would help operations identify and access existing support programs.

Educational Pipeline & Workforce Development

Family-based knowledge transfer currently dominates agricultural training. Participants request agricultural science & entrepreneurship in K-12 curricula and education that presents agriculture to their children as a profession more than manual labor. Specialized agricultural academies, scholarship programs, and mentorship networks would enhance awareness of diverse career trajectories.

Regulatory Navigation & Simplification

Complex requirements overwhelm small producers. Participants need simplified regulatory pathways, multilingual materials, and continuous outreach when policies change.

Coordinated inspections across agencies would reduce administrative burden, while pest management regulations should offer appropriate flexibility for small-scale operations such as huertos.

Water Access & Affordability

Water costs fundamentally shape agricultural viability. Participants report little perceived difference between renting and owning due to high water costs. State-supported community

water systems with democratic governance structures and legal protection of community water rights are requested. Agreement-building services are also requested to facilitate effective cooperative governance of water.

Distribution Network Development

Limited market access is the primary barrier to growth. Participants cannot connect with vendors offering fair prices. State-supported cooperative distribution networks and transportation infrastructure were requested to potentially address these gaps, along with developing local food hubs to reduce the reliance on external intermediaries as voiced in the “local market development” section.

Implementation & Governance

Participants describe communication barriers with agencies and programs designed for “corporate agriculture” rather than small-scale producers. Regular listening sessions with transparent reporting and multilingual resources are essential for meaningful engagement. The lack of reports to communities post-listening sessions was also a massive frustration expressed.

Common Themes & Integrated Community-Proposed Solutions

Common Concerns Across Groups

1. **Market Access & Fair Pricing:** Unfair pricing from intermediaries and preferences for local farmers’ markets.
2. **Insurance & Climate Vulnerability:** Inadequate insurance options amid escalating climate risks.
3. **Financial & Regulatory Complexity:** Frustration navigating regulations not designed for small operations, along with a lack of favorable loans to access.
4. **Water Affordability:** Fundamental economic constraint impacting land tenure decisions.
5. **Educational Improvement:** Desire for education showcasing diverse agricultural career pathways.

Community-led Integrated Solutions

1. **Tiered Support Systems:** Differentiated state programs for various stages from home gardens to large commercial operations.
2. **Cooperative Models with Clear Governance:** Structures addressing past challenges through transparent agreement-building processes.
3. **Comprehensive Educational Strategy:** Programs honoring traditional knowledge while building pathways to technical roles.
4. **Integrated Regulatory Navigation:** Centralized assistance providing personalized guidance through regulatory processes.
5. **Participatory Governance:** Institutionalized community participation with regular forums and transparent reporting.

Summary of Participant-Proposed State Actions

1. **Publicly-Funded Local Food Hubs:** State government establishing local food hubs addressing market access challenges, creating farmers' markets with reduced barriers to entry and implementing price transparency mechanisms.
2. **Rural Zoning Code Reform:** Reforming county-level rural zoning codes to allow infrastructure development, enabling small farmers to build necessary cold storage and processing facilities through streamlined permitting processes.
3. **Public Disaster Insurance Expansion:** Mandating expanded disaster insurance accessibility for small and tenant farmers through state-subsidized products addressing current inequities and establishing publicly-administered climate disaster funds.
4. **State-Funded Huerto Development Program:** Supporting home gardens with funding and technical assistance, creating regulatory pathways for commercial certification and protecting gardens from mandatory cutting due to pest regulations.
5. **Public Agricultural Loan Programs:** Implementing loan programs designed specifically for small farmers through state-chartered credit institutions with sector knowledge, while providing business technical assistance for operations without management staff.
6. **K-12 Agricultural Curriculum Reform:** Integrating agricultural science & entrepreneurship into educational programs, teaching agronomy, engineering, and business aspects while creating scholarship programs targeting children of agricultural workers.
7. **Publicly-Staffed Navigator Program:** Creating navigator programs to help with regulatory complexity through multilingual materials and coordinated inspections across agencies.
8. **Community Water Systems Support:** Establishing publicly-supported community water systems with democratic governance structures and legal protection for community water rights. This should be accompanied by appropriate agreement-building services.
9. **Cooperative Distribution Networks:** Supporting publicly-backed cooperative distribution networks, developing transportation infrastructure connecting small producers to markets through collective marketing channels.

Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) Small Farms Conference

Date: Feb. 23, 2025

Task Force Representatives: Members Payán and Zhou Staff Support: Camille Frazier, SGC

Total Attendance: Approximately 45, all virtual; about 8-12 responses to each survey question

Summary author: Camille Frazier

Presenters selected and shared four goals from the February 2025 draft of the report. The goals were chosen based on what would likely resonate with those attending a conference focused on small farmers. The selected goals were: 1) Support adequate housing and infrastructure on agricultural land, 2) Facilitate equitable transition of private lands, 3) leverage public lands, and 4) improve equitable access to resources.

The presenters began with a brief overview of the Task Force, followed by slides detailing the overarching goal and relevant recommendations. Presenters then paused for attendees to complete the survey for each slide, which asked: 1) What resonates with you? What concerns you? What is missing?

A complete list of poll responses are listed below. Generally, attendees found that the goals and strategies resonated with them. Their primary concerns were related to: 1) the barriers or challenges that might make it difficult to achieve the goals and 2) ensuring that the specific actions were nuanced and thoughtful so that they would not lead to further inequities. For example, in relation to housing, most attendees agreed that housing on agricultural land is necessary but cautioned that it needed to be dignified and affordable and done in such a way to prevent losing agricultural land for residential development. In addition, several participants noted that it was unclear who would be responsible for the action and how it would be funded.

Summary for Susanville Tribal Engagement Session

Date: May 13, 2025

Task Force Members: Members Vice Chair Emily Burgueno, Lawrence Harlan, Darlene Franco, Thea Rittenhouse, Qi Zhou, Dorian Payán

Co-host: Chairman Arian Hart, Susanville Indian Rancheria

Participants: Tribal Council Members, Tribal staff, and Tribal members

Total attendees: Seven total in person and online

Summary author: California Strategic Growth Council (SGC) Staff

Following welcoming remarks from Chairman Arian Hart of the Susanville Indian Rancheria, SGC staff gave a short presentation on the Task Force and its draft report of recommendations. Participating Tribal leaders and members were then invited to share insights and reflections on the draft. This summary highlights key themes from the discussion, including key barriers to land access, the relationship between traditional Tribal stewardship and agriculture, and proposed actions offered by participants. Task Force members may consider and incorporate the insights shared into their draft report.

Key Barriers to Land Access

Restrictions on Tribal sovereignty

- State agencies and their conservation tools, such as easements, often limit land use by prohibiting activities like livestock grazing, installing irrigation infrastructure, and traditional ecological knowledge.
- In other cases, Tribal Nations are required to waive aspects of their sovereignty to access land. One participant described being denied access to public land damaged by wildfire because their Tribal Nation would not agree to waive its sovereignty.
- Tribal sacred sites are not always located on reservation lands; some are on privately held lands or owned by conservancies where Tribal Nations have limited or no access.

Marginal lands

- Often, the government-owned land that Tribal Nations have received is not suitable for agriculture, has been abandoned or mismanaged, or is marginal in terms of size and location.
- One participant shared that their Tribal Nation acquired land with no road access. They are now working with the U.S. Forest Service to recommission old logging roads.

Burdensome public processes that limit access and sovereignty

- One representative shared that it took their Tribal Nation 4.5 years to receive 87 acres of land from a public university. The Tribal Nation had to travel to

Washington, D.C, multiple times; ultimately, an act of Congress was required to transfer the land.

- Even when state agencies support land acquisition by Tribal Nations, long and ambiguous timelines can cause Tribal Nations to lose out to other buyers with capital who can act more quickly.
- Transferring land from fee to trust can take three to five years. During this time, the Tribal Nation must pay property taxes, limiting its resources to develop or work the land.
- One participant shared their Tribal Nation wishes to transfer its fee title into trust land but must wait for the end of their Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) agreement due to inflexibility in the contract.

Racism and discrimination against Tribal Nations

- One *Tribal Nature Based Solutions* grantee shared that their application to this program led to competitive interest in the property the Tribal Nation was working to acquire by others in the community. This land had been on the market for six years prior to the grant award. A private offer was accepted while the Tribal Nation waited for a response from Department of General Services (DGS) to approve its appraisal.
 - The participants emphasized the long timeline and apparent desire of other residents to keep land out of Native hands which resulted in the loss of 15,000 acres originally included in the anticipated acquisition.
- In some rural communities, it is difficult to find contractors specifically for agricultural services (e.g. electricians, well-drillers) because of prejudice within these industries against Tribal Nations.
- Resource conservation districts and other technical assistance providers can also show prejudice against Tribal Nations in rural communities.
- Personal relationships with public agency staff are often needed for fair treatment.

Speed of land market transactions

- Transactions on the open land market happen more quickly than Tribal timelines disadvantaging Tribal Nations even if they have the resources to purchase land. One participant shared that their Tribal Nation's land purchases must be directed by general counsel, a process which normally takes 3-4 months.

Lack of access to water

- Tribal Nations have been left out of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) conversation in many respects. One participant noted that SGMA disadvantages Tribal Nations who are not existing water users.

Relationship between traditional Tribal stewardship and agriculture

Participating Tribal Leaders and members discussed the importance of strengthening and expanding certain definitions within the draft report, including "traditional Tribal uses,"

“agriculture,” and “traditional ecological knowledge” (TEK) to better reflect Tribal Nations’ unique relationship to the land and cultural practices.

Participants shared that TEK and harvesting of traditional foods involve spiritual and reciprocal relationships with the land and ecosystems. Land stewardship is a lifestyle, rather than a day job.

They recommended that the report's description of traditional Tribal uses include:

- The use of fire as a traditional agricultural tool.
- Gathering as a form of harvest.
- Forests as vital spaces for food and cultural resources.
- Recognition of specific first foods such as berries, bison, and acorns, while acknowledging that these practices vary across geographies.

Just as Tribal Nations should have the ability to practice TEK, participants also shared their desire for more Tribal members to be involved in agriculture. They stressed that prime agricultural land should also be included in Land Back efforts. One participant shared their Tribal Nation’s five-year plan includes acquiring land specifically to grow food for elders.

Participants also highlighted equitable water access as fundamental to land access. They recommended the definition of cultural resources include Tribal uses of water for cultural, spiritual, and traditional rights—referred to as Tribal Beneficial Uses. The “small water cycle” is also key to consider; drained lakes and dried up rivers disrupt microclimates and can have cascading effects on larger water cycles at the landscape level.

Participant-Proposed Actions

Participants offered a range of suggestions to improve the structure, impact, and content of the draft report. Their recommendations are outlined below:

- Throughout the report, include stronger language and timebound recommendations for implementation and accountability.
- Strengthen the implementation of first right of refusal policies to ensure Tribal

Nations are included in land transfers.

- One participant shared that their Tribal Nation only learned of a state agency’s intent to transfer land to the federal government by chance. The Tribal Nation was ultimately offered the land, but only because they happened to be present at the right time.
- Provide financial assistance for the fee-to-trust process when Tribal Nations acquire land.
- Eliminate requirements that force Tribal Nations to waive sovereign immunity to access state-held lands and programs.
- The state should act as a supportive intermediary, not a decision-maker, in land transfers to alleviate land market pressures and respect Tribal timelines.
 - The state should assist Tribal Nations in acquiring land by purchasing and holding land until the Tribal Nation is ready to receive it.

- Include specialized real estate services and support for bridging upfront costs.
- Strengthen and reframe the Tribal State Lands Committee.
 - Update the name to the Tribal State Land Return Committee. Review legal definitions of *committee*, *commission*, and *council* and select the option with the most authority.
 - Consider where to situate this body: Native American Heritage Commission, California Natural Resources Agency, or elsewhere.
 - Ensure the body is an intertribal effort and staffed by Tribal representatives who are regionally elected by Tribal Nations.
 - Empower the body to help with the identification and return of ancestral lands, as outlined in the next point.
- Identify and inventory public lands available for return.
 - Include specific recommendations in the report related to returning land to Tribal Nations, including number of acres, regions, recipient Nations, etc.
 - Develop a land inventory by mapping available state lands.
 - Carefully consider what information is publicly available to ensure the safety and privacy of Tribal Nations is prioritized.
- Since nearly half of California’s land is federally owned and many California land stewards and producers use federal programs, state agencies should collaborate with the federal government to streamline processes.
 - Include lands under federal jurisdiction in the land inventory and mapping work noted above.
 - The state should help Tribal Nations interface with federal agencies, such as the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, and others to facilitate the return of land and alignment of programs.
- State and federal agricultural and land-based programs should explicitly support the production of Native foods.
 - Programs should explicitly support Native food production and honor Tribal Nations’ definitions of food systems and animal stewardship. For example, the NRCS requires buffalo to always be enclosed, which is not required for cows and is not a culturally aligned practice. To Tribal Nations, buffalo are neither “stock” nor wildlife (common Western classifications for animals).
 - Conservation easements should allow for traditional Tribal use and restoration. The California Natural Resources Agency should work with NRCS to coordinate easement guidance, increase flexibility of easements to allow for traditional Tribal uses, and prioritize the intent over the letter of the easement.
 - All programs must allow for innovation if they are to support and allow for TEK and traditional Tribal uses.

- Programs should distinguish between traditional Tribal practices and Western Land Management approaches.
 - Participants drew a parallel between prescribed fire and cultural fire as similar to agriculture and traditional Tribal practices. While both applications of fire may have similar goals, they are applied differently. Regulatory agencies are slowly updating their practices to allow for cultural fire. Similarly, agriculture and traditional Tribal uses both have the goal of food and fiber production even though the approach and application differ significantly. Programs should account for these differences by building in flexibility and explicitly supporting traditional Tribal practices.

Summary of Meeting with Kern County Black Farmers Association

Date: July 15, 2025

Task Force Members & Staff: Doria Robinson, Nelson Hawkins, Tessa Salzman (staff)

Host: Kern County Black Farmers Association

Participants: 19 farmers, technical assistance providers, community members

Summary Author: California Strategic Growth Council (SGC) Staff. This is a summary of the ideas shared by participants and does not necessarily represent agreement by the Task Force or Strategic Growth Council staff.

The participants were farmers, landowners, entrepreneurs, technical assistance providers, and advocates who shared their family and personal stories with food, farming, and land ownership. Many participants described the systemic ways in which land was taken from their families, their access was denied, or the rules were changed to eliminate housing or agriculture possibilities. One participant shared their story in the context of the systemic reduction in Black-owned farmland from more than 14 million acres in the 1920s down to 2.5 million acres in the 1990s due to discrimination by the USDA, land theft, forced sales, and lack of legal support.

The participants also shared the many projects and initiatives they are working on to increase land access and local food production, build on intergenerational legacies of farming, reduce barriers to urban agriculture, and undo the systems that hold Black farmers back. They want a place to tell their stories and seek to change the system and find solutions to reverse centuries of discrimination.

The host closed the session with gratitude and a reminder of why they do the work they do: *“We are fighting to make farming a dignified path to prosperity.”*

Key Barriers and Context

- Many of the farmers operate on very small plots, in backyards or churches. Without a feasible path to scale up, they cannot grow their businesses.
- City and County level zoning codes, regulations, and permitting effectively prohibit community-scale agriculture.
 - Cannot grow and sell even if there is sufficient space in one’s backyard because land is not zoned for agriculture
- Contentious water rights and lack of access are key barriers to agriculture.
 - Even though one participant is a senior water rights holder, he is in court currently to litigate his access.
- Once land is acquired there are significant, unanticipated barriers including the following.
 - Participants shared that once local government found out their families were Black, they limited the allowable uses and water access from their newly purchased land.
 - When a farmer finally identifies a solution, the policymakers change the rules.
 - When facing access or legal challenges, there is no one available for support and advocacy.

Priorities and Solutions

- In the context of equitable farming, Black farmers should be acknowledged for their specific history. When using the “catch all” BIPOC / POC language, resources often don’t reach Black communities.
 - Use the term: “American descendants of enslaved people”
- In the Overview section of the report, add history specific to Black farmers and land loss in California including the racism in agriculture and the plantation economy that was imported here from the deep south. Add citations from: Dr. Michael Eissinger who writes about Black agriculture in the Central Valley
- Support farming programs for kids. One participant shared their program which helps children grow produce, sell it at market, and then save the profits in a college fund.
- Financing and funds to purchase land, hold on to it, and expand when ready.
- Establish land equity-related technical assistance
 - Provide one-on-one, long-term technical assistance specifically designed for Black families and farmers to resolve land access questions.
 - Technical assistance should include what is needed to acquire, access, maintain, and protect existing land, e.g. title and legal questions, long-term land retention, and resolving ownership issues.
 - Provide information to help people understand and navigate land ownership and access laws and to increase awareness of resources, requirements, protections, and restrictions on land and how to change them.
- Address City and County challenges specifically regarding urban agriculture zoning
 - The State should provide cities with technical assistance and pre-designed and pre-approved code for community gardens and urban agriculture and case studies
 - Encourage local governments to update their residential and industrial zones to allow for agriculture and reduce the permit burden, e.g., cost and time.
 - Ensure agriculture zoning allows for growing, storing, processing and selling agricultural products.
- Create local Grassroots Advisory Councils to advise and approve local government agency decisions related to technical assistance and resource distribution and to enhance local agencies’ services for Black farmers and Black-led organizations
- Create a program for Black farmers in California to help resolve heirs’ land ownership and succession issues on agricultural land, e.g., USDA’s Heirs’ Property Relending Program
- A resource that would help is a central hub with information, resources, and a directory of how much public land is available and where.

Summary of Engagement Session with Allensworth Progressive Association

Date: July 15, 2025

Task Force Members & Staff: Doria Robinson, Nelson Hawkins, Tessa Salzman (staff)

Host: Allensworth Progressive Association

Participants: 9 farmers, advocates, community members

Summary Author: California Strategic Growth Council (SGC) Staff. This is a summary of the ideas shared by participants and does not necessarily represent agreement by the Task Force or Strategic Growth Council staff.

The participants shared the history and current conditions in Allensworth. The conversation centered on water rights and access, large scale landowners who dominate the land market, the importance of ecological practices, and who is responsible for remediating the existing and possible future damage from input-intensive agriculture. Participants shared that TAC Farm in Allensworth is currently successfully piloting an arsenic treatment technology to filter the arsenic from their water supply.

Participants discussed how public programs and resources are too often directed to large scale agriculture in their region and discussed alternatives. The group emphasized the importance of streamlining the process of acquiring land, ensuring resources are distributed directly to impacted communities, and developing more feasible opportunities for small and beginning farmers to acquire land. Allensworth Progressive Association seeks to acquire land to overcome many of the challenges and goals participants discussed including soil remediation, establishing a food hub, and installing agrivoltaics for energy.

Key Barriers and Context

- Racial discrimination by banks when seeking loans to purchase land
 - For example, one participant was denied long-term mortgage financing even though they were able to pay a down payment of one third of the land price.
- Water access challenges
 - Participants shared that before receiving support (e.g., a loan) to buy land, they needed to commit to digging a well which can cost \$100,000 or demonstrate sufficient water flow by paying to fix a broken well to test the water flow against the Farm Services Agency's (FSA) requirements.
 - Landowners wield too much control over water usage, flow, and access. During the floods of 2023, Allensworth was flooded as neighboring large-scale landowners effectively redirected the water away from their fields.
- Lack of accountability for large-scale growers and ecological harm
 - For decades, concentrated, large-scale monocrop farms in this region have extracted nutrients, applied chemicals, and drawn down the water table.
 - The farmers export what they grow to other locations and leave communities with ecological damage and limited, contaminated water. The people who want to steward and remediate the land are burdened with these negative outcomes, including lack of water access.

- There are high levels of arsenic in groundwater and soil in part from the intensive historic cotton production that used arsenic based chemicals through early 1990s.

Priorities and Solutions

Increase State funding for land purchase and remediation

- The State should create a new fund for communities and small growers to buy and remediate land that has been damaged by large-scale agricultural operations.
- Establish strong incentives for transition towards holistic, ecological, regenerative agriculture
 - For example, offer loan forgiveness in tiers related to the number of years regenerative practices are employed and soil health and water quality on site.
 - Consider parallel structure to State requiring employers to incentivize their employees to reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT). What does parallel system look like to reduce pesticides?
- Funding for land purchase should be paired with education and training about how to farm sustainably so public dollars are used to achieve its climate goals
- Ensure funding can be used for water access and infrastructure.

Improve design and implementation of State programs

- Offer longer term funding specifically for farmer training, marketing programs, and sustainable farming practices.
- Update and design State programs such as Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) and Multibenefit Land Repurposing Program (MLRP) to directly fund impacted communities for water, land, and community development projects.
- The community outreach component of MLRP often lacks a real community connection, is haphazardly implemented with limited accountability, and is conducted by entities such as irrigation districts which rarely have relationships with small farmers to fully understand community needs.
 - Instead of funding large growers to do community engagement, the disadvantaged communities this program is meant to benefit should receive the funds directly (e.g., small growers, farmworkers, community-based organizations with demonstrated experiencing meeting the needs, and Tribal communities, who are all most impacted by drought and lack of land access).
 - Instead of consulting community on established plans, the community should be able to come up with their own plans and dictate those back to the MLRP grant recipients.
- SGMA and MLRP should both more directly acknowledge the connection between land ownership and water access.

Accountability and regenerative agriculture

- Add to conservation section of report that extractive practices and monoculture are key causes of land degradation and distinguish between stewardship and extractive agriculture.

- Those who are responsible for causing damage to the land should be responsible for funding remediation and repaying the communities. There is a need to stop harmful practices and incentivize sustainable agriculture.
- More effectively regulate synthetic pesticides; specifically, spraying via airplane.
- Offer trainings and resources for established conventional farmers to transitions to regenerative agriculture.

Improve technical assistance for land transactions

- Provide land seekers with technical support to understand the deed and conditions of property, e.g., water or mineral rights.
- Require transparency in land sales.
 - Streamline and make transparent processes for people who want to purchase and permit land to grow food to ensure fees and treatment of everyone is the same.
 - Support prospective buyers by requiring current owner to disclose current status of water rights, water access, permit history of on-site structures, and an estimate of what it would cost to remedy any violations due to pre-sale construction without proper permitting.
 - Require realtors to disclose when they are working on behalf of both the seller and buyer.
- Improve coordination between agencies
 - When one participant finally bought the property with a Farm Service Agency (FSA) loan, the County told her the property wasn't zoned properly, which the FSA had not previously considered.

Participant-Proposed Changes to the Draft Recommendations

Historical context and contemporary barriers

- Include the history of Mexican repatriation in the 1930s and Operation Wetback in the 1950s. Many Latino families lost their land due to the transition from Mexico to the USA. This experience is unique to Western States and was not handled with honor for new Americans.

What can agricultural land equity achieve?

- Add notes on diversity of farming techniques, crop selection, and innovation in technology and added value products.
- Land equity can address rural communities' population loss and healthy food access.
- This section should emphasize the impacts industrial agriculture has on communities versus diverse, small farm businesses to illustrate benefits of land equity.

Recommendations

- The housing recommendations should include language for alternative building materials to defend against climate change and extreme weather.

- In the section “Utilize suitable public lands for agriculture”, reference the 300K acres in Tulare County.

Summary of Meeting with African American Farmers of California

Date: July 16, 2025

Task Force Member & Staff: Nelson Hawkins, Tessa Salzman (staff)

Host: African American Farmers of California

Participants: 4 farmers

Summary Author: California Strategic Growth Council (SGC) Staff. This is a summary of the ideas shared by participants and does not necessarily represent agreement by the Task Force or Strategic Growth Council staff.

The participants who joined the meeting are members of the African American Farmers of California (AAFC) and work at and support the demo farm AAFC runs for beginning farmers. Participants discussed how public programs and resources must prioritize the future of farming by supporting beginning farmers, providing financial and technical assistance, and protecting agricultural land for the future.

Key Barriers and Context

- High costs of land and water infrastructure
 - Specifically, property taxes are a barrier to purchasing and then holding onto the land over time. The expense limits cash flow for developing the land as a productive farm.
- Investment firms are buying land as an investment tool and not for food production.
- Loan programs require farmers to demonstrate unrealistic, inequitable levels of collateral such as 200% of the total loan.
 - For example, to get a loan to purchase 10 acres, a farmer needs to use the 10 acres they own as collateral. If payments aren't made, the farmer could lose all 20 acres.

Priorities and Solutions

- Ensure land is affordable for young people. The goal is land ownership, but a long-term lease between 25-50 years is a good option as well.
 - Offer funding and technical assistance to buy land and water infrastructure, specifically for the next generation of farmers.
 - Create pathways for beginning farmers graduating from their program to get their own land or to farm on public land.
 - Limit price of land and the ability of developers and other powerful interests to buy farmland as an investment
 - Support lease to own arrangements.
- Prioritize specialty and community-based crops (versus commodity) in all funding and policy supports
- Improve government programs and assistance to be more user friendly, streamlined, and readily accessible to everyone
- Update tax law to provide benefits for small farmers

- o For example, lower taxes on land held by small-scale farmers that feed local communities.
- Technical assistance
 - o Needs specialists for crop production (e.g. pest control, etc.) and assistance for installing and maintaining infrastructure like wells.
 - o Support for the formation of cooperatives so some farmers can focus on growing while others focus on selling and distribution
- Create a list to show farmers all the public farmland that is available.
- Make development plans public for transparency.
- Create a plan for implementing the Agricultural Land Equity Task Force's recommendations.

Summary of Meeting with San Diego Farmers

Date: July 22, 2025

Task Force Members & Staff: Tessa Salzman (staff)

Host: Greater San Diego Resource Conservation District (RCD)

Participants: 3 farmers; interpreter, host organization staff

Summary Author: California Strategic Growth Council (SGC) Staff. This is a summary of the ideas shared by participants and does not necessarily represent agreement by the Task Force or Strategic Growth Council staff.

This meeting was an opportunity to follow up with farmers who hosted Task Force members on site visits in May 2024. All three farmers began farming in San Diego in community garden plots and currently operate on small plots between 1/2 acre and 4 acres, each with aspirations to expand into additional acreage.

One farmer would like to expand into the public agriculture-zoned land across the street from where she farms currently, and the other two noted their interests in leasing or buying additional private farmland was limited by competition, cost and misaligned qualification criteria for public programs.

Key Barriers and Context

- The high cost of agriculture land
- Finding and accessing suitable public or private farmland to own or lease.
- Competition for land with large businesses and corporate agriculture.
- Competition with developers. Development pressure is strong and fully operating avocado orchards are being sold and then burned to clear way for construction.
- Public loan programs have a pre-set, misaligned set of qualification criteria including the need to document three formal years of land management experience that exclude farmers with other qualifications such as formal education, a business plan, and a community of support.
- Tenant farmers are subject to landowner preferences and decisions.

Priorities and Solutions

- Subsidize the cost of agricultural land for small producers at 50% of the price in order to protect farmland from development, to increase access, and to entice people into farming who otherwise wouldn't see a viable path into the career.
- Establish pilot loan program for small, young or beginning farmers to purchase working farms. The managing agency should experiment with different eligibility criteria and qualifications and use the pilot to generate data on alternative models. One farmer shared a 20-acre avocado orchard listing he anticipated would be sold for housing and noted, if provided a loan, he would be able to keep it in production and produce co-benefits such as counteracting development of agricultural land and climate benefits through diversifying the monoculture cropping system.
- Support finding available land – both private and publicly owned farmland.
- Technical assistance for accessing publicly owned land and navigating leasing with government agencies. Some farmers in the region are working on a lease with the City of San

Diego, but the participants also noted other publicly owned farmland that should be made accessible to small farmers. Strong technical assistance is needed with finding, accessing and negotiating leases on these lands.

- Funding for essential equipment and infrastructure like tractors.
- The State should strengthen its voice for small businesses and farmers by helping connect producers to large scale retailers and requiring large scale grocery stores to sell a certain percent of local produce from small farmers.
- Support for a producer pension fund.

Summary of Golden Eagle Farm Tribal Engagement Session

Date: July 23, 2025

Task Force Members & Staff: Vice Chair Emily Burgueno, Thea Rittenhouse, Tessa Salzman (staff), Meagan Wylie (facilitator)

Host: Golden Eagle Farm, Mesa Grande Band of Mission Indians

Participants: 24 Tribal leaders, Tribal staff, and Tribal members (21 in person, 3 online)

Summary Author: California Strategic Growth Council (SGC) Staff.

This is a summary of the ideas shared by participants and does not necessarily represent agreement by the Task Force or Strategic Growth Council staff.

Following welcoming remarks by Essence Oyos, host from the Mesa Grande Band of Mission Indians, and Emily Burgueno, California Agricultural Land Equity Task Force (Task Force) Vice Chair, SGC staff provided an overview of the Task Force and walked through draft report recommendations. As most participants had not reviewed the Task Force's draft report in advance, select sections of draft language were presented and read collectively for the first time during the session.

The session created space for Tribal leaders and members to reflect on the recommendations and share their lived experiences, questions, and proposals for improving land access, return, equity, and stewardship. Below is a summary of key themes and insights that emerged during the discussion.

All four Tribal Nations in San Diego County including Luiseño, Cupeño, Cahuilla and Kumeyaay were represented in addition to one from Northern California who joined online.

Barriers & Solutions to Tribal Land Access and Use

Conservation Easements & Zoning Restrictions

- State conservation tools prohibit economic development and Tribal sovereignty.
 - One participant shared how their opportunity to develop an equestrian venue on their fee land, which would have attracted substantial international economic benefit to their region, was blocked due to the restrictions on the property associated with the California Williamson Act. Their options were to terminate the Williamson Act contract with the jurisdictional county which would have incurred substantial costs to buy out the contract terms or wait for 10 years after submitting the formal application for “non-renewal” of the APN's designated as Williamson Act parcels.
 - State-supported land return and acquisition programs, such as those funded by the 30x30 California initiative, often require conservation easements that restrict land use and do not align with Tribal sovereignty.
- California State and local zoning and land use regulations conflict with Tribal sovereignty and limit Tribal Nation’s ability to pursue economic development.
 - One example provided is when land is zoned for agriculture, infrastructure, community, and housing development can be entirely restricted.

Lack of True Land Return

- The State’s current approaches to returning land to Tribal Nations comes with limitations, high costs if the tribe has to purchase the land in fee status, which often includes high property taxes, and the need to waive sovereignty immunity. Tribes often have to purchase back degraded lands, which can include deteriorating infrastructure and equipment that needs repair. Participants questioned whether true “land return” is possible if the land must be purchased through real estate transaction with high closing costs, the soil, water, and infrastructure resuscitated and renovated, and/or comes encumbered with other restrictions.
- Participants urged that any return of land should come free of encumbrances and with State technical and financial assistance for stewardship, especially when land is in poor condition due to the prior owner’s activities.

Sovereignty and State Overreach

- Concerns were raised about draft recommendation #4, which was perceived as infringing on Tribal sovereignty by involving the State in zoning.
- A participant emphasized the need to avoid the appearance and reality of subordinating Tribal authority to State planning bodies or climate offices.
- Suggestions were made to shift conservation strategies toward federal jurisdiction or allow Tribes to hold and define easements, such as through the idea of “cultural easements.”

Fee-to-Trust Process

- Participants shared that the fee-to-trust process is costly in terms of financial and human capacity demands and often takes 10 years or more, creating significant delays, expenses, and barriers to land stewardship.
- Participants suggested that if land is returned in trust, the state should work with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to expedite transfers.

Loss of Ancestral Village Sites

- Several participants raised the issue of ongoing destruction and development over ancestral village sites throughout San Diego, Imperial, and Riverside Counties.
- Recommendation that the State intervene with municipal governments to protect and preserve such sites particularly in the face of new housing developments – another state priority.
- The State should return land to Tribes as a form of repatriation. One participant emphasized that “This is what will help us heal and make us stronger.”

Additional Reflections

- Participants raised concerns about big agriculture and water monopolies, citing the political power of large agricultural producers (e.g., Wonderful Pistachios).
- Several participants noted that even within federal definitions, updates to Tribal land status (fee-to-trust) have recently changed and should be addressed in the report. See [Tribal Lands: Overview and Issues for Congress](#) for definitions of Tribal Lands.

- Participants emphasized the importance of repatriation and urged action to return ancestors and burial sites currently housed or neglected across California.

Relationship Between Land, Culture, and Healing

- Many participants spoke about the deep emotional and cultural healing that occurs when Tribes regain inherent rights and access to ancestral lands.
- Stewardship of ancestral lands is an intergenerational and inherent right deeply rooted in symbiotic cultural practices with the land. There is an expectation that returned land will be cared for, but Tribes need financial support and capacity to rehabilitate degraded ecosystems.
- Participants stressed that land return is not just about access but also about the capacity to thrive with the land.

Participant-Proposed Changes to the Draft Recommendations

- Define “return” and ensure it includes unencumbered transfers.
 - "Definitions" were discussed, critiqued and debated during the session and should be explored further.
- Review zoning-related language in Goal #4 to specify how and when it does and does not apply to Tribal lands and ensure recommendations do not suggest State control over Tribal sovereignty.
- Expand definition of the term "veteran farmer or rancher" in the glossary to reflect broader service definitions, including Space Force and National Guard members. Remove reference of time restrictions related military service to qualify one as a veteran.
- Ensure “priority” is always included before “producers and land stewards” throughout the document to ensure the intended beneficiaries of these recommendations is clear (e.g., pages 19 and 26).
- Clarify terms like “entities that support these communities” to avoid exploitation by non-Tribal third-party organizations.
- Include stronger protections and preservation strategies for ancient village sites.
- Propose a separate funding pool to assist Tribes with restoration and stewardship of returned lands.
- Support Tribal-defined public access and conservation standards, such as cultural easements.

Summary of Engagement Session with Project MILPA

Date: July 30, 2025

Task Force Members & Staff: Irene de Barraicua, Dorian Payan, Tessa Salzman (staff)

Host: Project MILPA – Líderes Campesinas (LC), Mixteco Indígena Community Organizing Project (MICOP), Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy (CAUSE)

Participants: 16 farmworkers; 2 interpreters; host organization staff

Language: Spanish and Mixteco

Summary Author: California Strategic Growth Council (SGC) Staff. This is a summary of the ideas shared by participants and does not necessarily represent agreement by the Task Force or Strategic Growth Council staff.

The conversation began with one participant sharing that, to them, land equity means that every person should have access to land independent of their social class or economic conditions. The participants then talked about their challenges and different resources that could support their transition from farm employee to farm operator, business owner, or landowner. The participants shared their passion for growing food and interest in both renting and purchasing land if given the opportunity. They were interested in starting small with between 2-10 acres, working collaboratively to share resources and knowledge, and investing in land over time, little by little.

Key Barriers and Context

- The landowners don't provide the opportunity to their employees to rent or purchase the land.
- Farmworkers have limited financial and other resources to be able to acquire land and transition from farm employee to farm owner.
- Language barriers from Mixteco to Spanish and from Spanish to English limits what they are able to do.
- We have to start from zero while established companies have all the necessary and expensive tools, systems and capital to be successful.
- The systems are designed to benefit large scale landowners.

Priorities and Solutions

- Support small farmers to start cooperatives in which they can share land, knowledge and resources. Co-management of land and business allows for those who are comfortable and able to navigate government processes to do so, and for others to fill other roles best suited for them.
- There was interest expressed in both purchasing and renting land depending on available resources.
- The support organizations like the hosts of this event are very helpful and supportive to their success.
- Financial and technical support for beginning farmers and for farmworkers to transition to farm operators and owners. Examples include:
 - Funding to purchase land and equipment

- o Technical support to share knowledge and resources about growing practices for specific crops, install and manage irrigation systems, and to navigate relevant laws, regulations and bureaucracy.
 - o Permitting and marketing channels to sell their harvest
- The participants shared that groups like Project MILPA are so important to share knowledge, receive support, and work towards their goals little by little.
- Give small farmers opportunities to gain access to land, give them the right to start a business and ensure water access to allow them to grow over time.
- First opportunity to purchase program would be helpful to give farmworkers the chance to acquire land where they have worked.
 - o A program like this would need to include financial support to actually purchase the land that is offered
 - o The participants were interested in working and collaborating with Tribal Nations

Appendix A: Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) Small Farms Conference Zoom Poll Responses

Support adequate housing and infrastructure on agricultural land

What resonates with you?

- provide for housing
- housing construction for farmworkers
- I like that it emphasizes local policies, as all parts of California will have unique preexisting zoning and permitting practices.
- increasing opportunities for zoning to increase to include farm worker housing.
- thinking about cluster housing on ag zoned land that allows for more than 2 houses (one owner and one worker)
- It's important to acknowledge the value of creating housing for the ag workforce.
- I am looking for three to five acres land to purchase in Lodi, Galt, and Lockford, California. The land is just too expensive.
- I believe that the housing on agricultural land is important for the small to medium farms. It is a big incentive for employees to offer onsite housing.
- Both seem accurate, I would say for the first rec, beyond "incentivize" local government I recommend "provide local government with best practices, policies and concrete steps to take..."
- Agree this is super important! One thing I have heard related to the first item here is the need for regulations allowing tiny houses and composting toilets (super specific but it's what I've heard!)
- Aligning housing and agricultural equity
- seems sensible
- housing on ag land!!
- Can you rezone land permitted for housing for agricultural purposes?

What concerns you?

- A lot of land does not (currently) belong to the ones who work it.
- Ensuring housing is affordable for workers
- dignified housing for farmworkers
- I would be interested to know what safeguards could be implemented to prevent subdivision-style development while facilitating agricultural housing on ag land.
- each county implements their own version of Williamson Act
- How will affordability of the constructed units for food workers be guaranteed?
- Getting the loan and if can qualify.
- I worry that permitting housing construction developments for farmworkers may be too exclusive with income limits.
- No one entity is identify to do these tasks, so they aren't very concrete actions.

- Renting or leasing land: putting in work and finances that cannot go with renter when land is sold or otherwise when land is no longer available.
- Who is implementing these recommendations? I believe Williamson act implementation is set largely at the county level so can that be addressed statewide?
- Dignified housing for farm workers.
- What level of risk is there that this proposal will kick off a slippery slope effect re: housing/development in agricultural zones? E.g., let's say a housing developer purchases agricultural land.
- Does this make farms more affordable?
- How to do this and what are the odds and timeframe?

What's missing?

- Housing regulations that ensure dignity of farmworkers.
- Perhaps something about ensuring land's primary use remains agricultural even while permitting housing for people involved in the land management.
- How can we better help farmers and farmworkers build equity like potentially owning their home at a discounted rate etc.
- Not sure, I am new.
- Who is responsible or can do these actions?
- Collaboration with community land trusts or other affordable housing orgs to own/lease/build/maintain homes affordably?
- Utility connections? Composting privies?
- How does this apply to nonprofit spaces?

Facilitate Equitable Transition of Private Land

What resonates?

- As a partial (1/3) owner of a family property, we're gonna need some kind of incentives for those who simply want money, to balance out plans with those who prioritize stewardship.
- Transparency (publicized land sales) seems like a very important component and I think it's a great idea. I also really like the ROFR approach and would love to see how it could be implemented.
- The state tax credit idea.
- Making land sales public information.
- Incentivizing Succession strategies and tax credits would be a great start to push landowners to sell for agricultural purposes rather than just the highest bidder.
- These all sound like good solutions, I have very little understanding of how one would do these things or if/how to make them legal and effective.
- Require land sales to be public, ROFR, succession strategy, *Lease to own!, Trusts when landowner dies.

- Tax credits will be big incentive for landowners. Minimizing taxation is very high priority for succession planning. Acquisition "and related costs" - important to bring "estate" properties to producer.
- Public info!!! can't have anonymous transfers
- Good ideas

What concerns you?

- our land is not a "farm" but a small piece with rolling hills, and soils more apt to grazing, but not really big enough for a livestock operation. Also peri-urban. What options do we have?
- Is there any way to incentivize sales by large corporate or out-of-state owners to local, on-site owner/managers?
- This sounds very heavy handed and I'm concerned it might have unintended consequences in terms of disincentivizing improvements to ag property.
- How can we ensure that "funding support" is not primarily "provide" in the form of loans, which have historically been an ineffective way to support land access for marginalized communities?
- I'm interested in land that would go to probate going into another trust, but I want more information about this.
- I am worried that as a young, white, male farmer...the focus on socially disadvantaged, historically underserved, and BIPOC may cause barriers to entry to secure land if final decision is based on that
- Farmlands get sold to mega corporations as investments, Farmland sold to developers, lot splits
- Land sales being public information seems like something that may get a lot of opposition, people are sensitive about this information sometimes.
- ultra wealthy buying up all land and water
- red tape?

What is missing?

- Ways to work with land that has ecological / watershed value, but is not prime ag land. Still, it is zoned open space, so housing is not an option unless it goes before the voters.
- An opportunity to sell portions of agricultural land to smaller scale farmers could be an interesting component. E.g. if a large corporate farm of 1000ac downsizes and makes land available to others.
- Have you considered simply supporting the use of more progressive land trust structures, like the farmers commons model that was presented earlier today, instead of state-mandated purchase constraint.
- Good farmland and land that is good at infiltrating rainwater should be designated and not immediately sold to developers.
- Would like to see collaboration with land trusts and similar entities highlighted. Would like to see discussion of state rule against perpetuities limits long-term affordability tools of land trusts.

- Adjusting, counterbalancing economic inequality.

Leverage public lands

What resonates?

- Need for planning.
- I am 100% on board with improving access to local lands, especially community-run urban ag such as gardens and small farms. Vacant lots and turf-heavy parks could better serve communities as farms.
- Making better use county-owned parcels.
- I would love to assess to public land so I can farm.
- There is so much government owned land that is sitting dormant. Allowing leases for Ag use would benefit the community, the ecosystem, and the land health.
- All of these sound like excellent solutions.
- Love everything in Local and state govt.-owned land.
- Love the idea of support for local gov to make land available for food production!
- Returning land to Tribal Nations, and other persons from families who were disenfranchised by racism or USDA (land stolen or taken away). UA!!! And pollinator spaces.

What concerns you?

- Long-term, broad vision for regional planning that includes towns and cities as well as “rural” lands.
- Consider that returning land to Tribal Nations would likely be best done with no restrictions on their use of the land; and having the State accept if they don't "do ag" the way it might expect/want.
- The mechanism for deciding which orgs or groups gain control, and for how long, would need to be carefully designed.
- Lease too expensive and not good well water.
- Strict government oversight of leased land for agricultural use. As well as limiting improvements to the property for Ag uses. (barns, irrigation, etc)
- Who will be responsible for developing, implementing and tracking this work? If we leave it to individual orgs and governments it will be slow and disorganized.
- What guarantees would farmers have to be able to remain on those lands?
- Especially seeing current issues at Federal level, how to make sure that contracts for ag production on public land are distributed equitably and in way that supports sustainable practices
- The current administration stopping forward motion of environmental work.

What is missing?

- Is there such a thing as a trust that could buy community ag (farm/ranch/forest/watershed) lands for the purpose of protecting their stewardship in a way that includes their use as working lands?
- Account for how tribal stewardship (which I do think should be prioritized) may not look like "agriculture" to the state.
- Not sure.
- Have any landowning government agencies been asked their opinion of opening to Ag use and leases?
- Is there a formula for how this can be implemented quickly and at scale without creating a ton of red tape.

Improve Equitable Access to Resources

What resonates with you?

- Sharing into and hearing others' ideas! Thank you.
- Low to 0% rates on grants/loans will be a great way to improve accessibility.
- Grants for beginning farmers and ranchers, lower interest rates!
- Down payments grants, forgivable loans are preferred instruments.
- These all sound like great recommendations.
- Redesigning resources to meet Soc disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.
- More grants, more land trust purchasing in Buy-Protect-Sell programs, low interest loans for land used for public good such as producing food.
- Love the idea of funding for "intermediary actors" (of course this is my job so I may be biased!). Down payment support and low/no interest loans also seem to be really effective. (ex Los Corralitos).
- Highlighting a comment in the chat, is it feasible or even desirable to, for instance, give tax breaks to farmers of certain races but not others?
- I was very late to this, so this may have already been covered. But how to get civic leaders hold space for UA in urban areas. Open land is almost gone in Orange County.
- Access to grants for lands and funding land trusts to aid certain disadvantaged communities.

What concerns you?

- Ensuring accessibility in terms of language access/technical assistance support to ensure all interested farmers have a similar chance of obtaining these funds.
- Increasing high interest operating loans for farmers. Avg loan rate was at 10%!
- This will only make a significant impact if wealthy large landholders change their perception of land as something to acquire, rather than as a resource that we steward.
- That these policies won't be happening fast enough.
- Getting elected leaders in on this conversation.

- countering economic inequality should be the first priority for reform and equity
- Not typical usage of urban lands.

What is missing?

- Who / what orgs and government departments would be providing these funds? What would be the mechanism to develop funding availability?
- Accessing affordable farmland.
- I'm interested in the idea that the Task Force doesn't want to take land via eminent domain because they want to maintain good relationships. What about ppl who violated those relations, like polluters?
- Didn't mention this before, but and land use that helps infiltrate water, and the use of composting toilets is a must.
- Would also like to see training and info sharing for intermediary actors. They may not have ever heard of some of these innovations.
- Talking to the powers that be.
- What resources?
- Re-zoning urban land up for sale and/ or unused.

Appendix B: Coachella Valley Listening Session Full Report: Findings & Synthesis

Date: February 11, 2025

Participants: Migrant Farmworkers, Tenant Farmers, Small Farmers, and Huerto Operators

Partner Organizations: Líderes Campesinas & Pueblo Unido CDC Attendance: Approximately 20

Summary author: Elias Aceves, Researcher and Guest Presenter at the February meeting

Executive Summary

This report synthesizes findings from the Coachella Valley Listening Session conducted with migrant farmworkers, tenant farmers, small farmers, and huerto operators. The session revealed critical challenges faced by small-scale agricultural producers in accessing markets, navigating regulations, managing climate risks, and securing adequate infrastructure. Based on participant input from three distinct discussion groups, we present 10 critical themes which emerged throughout the listening session.

Key Insights

- **Market Access Over Land Access:** Tenant farmers prioritized better market access over land ownership due to additional costs like water and property taxes.
- **Unfair Pricing:** Los Angeles wholesalers significantly undercut buying prices for small producers.
- **Infrastructure Barriers:** Restrictive zoning regulations prevent building necessary infrastructure like cold storage.
- **Climate Vulnerability:** Small & tenant farmers lack adequate insurance coverage against climate events, with significant crop losses reported.
- **Limited Support for Home Gardens:** “Huerto” projects need more funding and technical assistance.
- **Educational Limitations:** Agricultural education currently fails to showcase diverse career pathways in the industry beyond manual labor for children of immigrants.
- **Regulatory Complexity:** Small operators struggle to navigate complex regulatory environments.
- **Water Affordability:** Water costs represent a significant disincentive for tenant farmers to pursue land ownership and resilient profitability.
- **Distribution Challenges:** Limited distribution channels force reliance on wholesalers offering unfair prices.
- **Certification Barriers:** Different buyers require various food safety certifications that are difficult to obtain and navigate.
- **Land Tenure Insecurity:** Rental arrangements create additional challenges with landlords and limit access to government assistance.

GROUP-SPECIFIC INSIGHTS

Detailed notes from each discussion group during the listening session

Group 1 Notes

Food Safety & Market Access

- Different food safety certifications needed depending on the buyer (Costco, Winco, etc.)
- Need for guidance navigating certification requirements

Agricultural Losses & Climate Challenges

- Lost 100 acres of green beans
- Climate and temperature limitations in Coachella restrict what they can grow
- Interest in greenhouses as climate solutions but lack resources to build them
- Lost significant moringa crops
- Need better compensation for losses from natural disasters

Land & Tenure Issues

- USDA doesn't help them because they rent rather than own land
- Landlord restrictions on harvesting and business activities
- Concerns about succession - no one to leave the land to when they're gone
- Landlord wouldn't allow harvesting because farmer was "doing business" on rented land

Labor & Business Challenges

- Trust issues with workers (mentioned lawsuits)
- Need more time to dedicate to crops
- Too many political issues with land ownership, production, and hiring
- Some mention of communal approaches ("land belongs to everyone")
- Care deeply about their land despite long hours with limited compensation

Financial & Support Needs

- Working with large companies/stores isn't profitable due to low payments
- Costs include rent, seeds, workers for planting and harvesting
- Need practical help beyond just talk
- More help for machinery and equipment
- More guidance with workers and hiring
- Better disaster relief for renters
- Easier, more flexible loans for disaster recovery
- Recognition that farming is their livelihood, not a hobby
- Inclusion in budget considerations as small farmers

Community Resources

- Interest in creating a community nursery in a parking lot for 12 trailers

- Interest in forming a union for mutual support
- Need information on engaging with local governments
- Need dedicated information resources for small farmers

Group 2 Notes

Land & Huertos

- Participants grow various herbs for home remedies, vegetables, and fruits in their gardens
- Some manage large acreages while others maintain small household gardens
- Blueberries, grapefruits, citrus, strawberries, and pomegranates are common crops
- Land acquisition required considerable effort, homeownership, and developing natural pest management strategies

Business Interests

- Some participants rent agricultural land (up to 20 acres)
- Seasonal crops include corn, melon, and watermelon with harvest from March to early June
- Landlords typically manage maintenance and equipment
- Little perceived difference between renting and owning due to high costs of water and taxes
- Interest in LLC formation and tax management for agricultural businesses

Youth & Education

- Agricultural skills primarily learned through family rather than formal education
- Strong interest in schools teaching agricultural skills and business concepts
- Desire for education that presents agriculture as more than just manual labor

Cooperative Models

- Mixed experiences with cooperative farming models
- Challenges reported with water access and distribution in cooperatives
- Preference for starting small and independent before considering cooperative approaches
- Suggestion that clearer agreements and communication could improve cooperative success

Government Support

- Concerns about restrictive regulations, particularly regarding pest management
- Preference for natural methods like beneficial insects and organic fertilizers
- Desire for government programs that understand small-scale agricultural operations

Goals and Vision

- Many focus on subsistence farming for family consumption

- Others interested in gradual expansion with potential for commercial growth
- Market access identified as primary barrier to expansion
- Interest in local markets rather than distant Los Angeles markets
- Need for legal and regulatory guidance to access commercial markets

Challenges and Barriers

- Unequal payment compared to corporate agriculture
- Lack of information about permits, regulations, and legal requirements
- Limited connections to vendors and distribution channels
- Difficulty securing fair prices from local retailers
- Adaptation of crop selection based on profitability (shift to chickpeas and watermelon)

Community Asks

- Request for local seasonal farmers' markets
- Need for machinery upgrade assistance
- Support for home-based (huerto) agriculture and small-scale operations
- Concerns about mandatory cutting of gardens due to pest regulations
- Difficulty accessing financing and affordable loans
- Need for crop insurance accessible to small producers
- Challenges with climate impacts including freezing and extreme heat
- Interest in irrigation system support
- Request for simplified food safety certification processes

Additional Insights

- Los Angeles wholesalers undercut buying prices for their produce
- Asked for local market creation to ensure intermediaries in urban centers did not dictate prices
- Complaints about not being allowed to build cold storage due to zoning regulations
- Felt cheated by climate events wiping out crops without proper insurance coverage
- Noted that large landowners receive better subsidies and insurance
- Asked for more help with huerto commercialization
- Called for education showing various pathways in agriculture beyond manual labor

Group 3 Notes

Goals and Vision for Agriculture

- Make a stable living for families
- Grow their businesses
- Provide quality food and vegetables to surrounding communities

Barriers to Goals

- High costs of materials, particularly chemicals

- Specialized tools aren't readily available like construction tools
- Large corporations buy at very low prices and resell at higher prices
- Unfavorable or nonexistent loans
- Costly requirements they aren't always aware of
- Lack of centralized information

Requested Resources and Support

- Better loans with favorable terms
- Centralized access to information, tools, and products
- Legal help with paperwork
- Continuous outreach when policies change
- Help with production costs
- Exposure to different career opportunities within agriculture

Messages for State Leadership

- Agriculture is changing, making it harder for smaller farmers to compete
- Need for a cooperative to support smaller farmers with resources, information, and tools

SYNTHESIS

Synthesis of community feedback and regional challenges

Local Market Development & Fair Pricing

Agricultural producers in Coachella Valley emphasize the need for California state government to establish publicly-funded local food hubs addressing their primary concern: "Market Access Over Land Access." These small-scale tenant farmers consistently prioritized "better market access over land ownership due to additional costs like water and property taxes." Reports from Group 2 highlight how "Los Angeles wholesalers significantly undercut buying prices for small producers," creating untenable economic conditions. Faced with these challenges, many have had to "adapt crop selection based on profitability," shifting to crops like chickpeas and watermelon rather than following cultural preferences.

Urgent calls from the community request the creation of farmers' markets with reduced barriers to entry. This directly responds to participants' requests for "local seasonal farmers' markets" to address their "difficulty securing fair prices from local retailers." Participants from Group 2 specifically voiced the need for "local market creation to ensure that these intermediaries in urban centers did not dictate prices" and expressed strong interest in "organizing a monthly farmers market." Moreover, Group 3 emphasized that "larger corporations want to buy our product at a very low price and then resell at higher price; we do all the work, and they get to reap the benefits," necessitating state-mandated price transparency mechanisms.

Multiple participants also voiced that they "can't hold out for better prices" due to limited storage options, which is explicated further in the next section.

Zoning & Infrastructure Support

Restrictive regulations stand as major barriers according to community testimony, leading to requests for California state and county governments to reform publicly-administered rural zoning codes. Multiple participants described being unable to develop basic processing facilities, with one noting, “We can grow the food, but we have nowhere to keep it fresh.” Particularly vocal on this issue, Group 2 participants “complained about how they were not allowed to build cold storage (given zoning regulations) of their own,” forcing them to “pay extra to cold storage companies.”

Government grant programs for shared infrastructure represent a crucial need identified by Group 1, who highlighted their struggle with “climate and temperature limitations in Coachella that restrict what they can grow.” Their expressed “interest in greenhouses as climate solutions but lack the resources to build them” reflects a common theme across discussions. For many participants, especially those in Group 3, specialized equipment support from state agricultural extension services would address their observation that agricultural tools aren’t readily available, “forcing them to improvise and make their own tools.”

Streamlined permitting processes would acknowledge the different circumstances and capabilities of small-scale operations compared to industrial agriculture. Several participants described complex and costly permitting processes that effectively barred them from developing even modest infrastructure improvements. County-level service centers would provide technical assistance currently accessible primarily through private consultants beyond the financial reach of many small producers. Integrated rural development planning addresses the fragmented approaches that overlook systematic challenges faced by small-scale agriculture. The communities request that local governments establish state-recognized & centralized communal infrastructure management committees with formal authority to ensure facilities respond to diverse producer needs.

Climate Resilience & Risk Management

Devastating crop losses have created urgent requests for state legislature to mandate expanded public disaster insurance accessibility. Participants shared vivid accounts of how freezing temperatures and extreme heat devastated their crops, with one poignantly noting, “The big farms have insurance, but when we lose our crops, we lose everything.” Particularly affected, Group 2 participants “felt cheated by how climate (such as freezing) could wipe out their crops and subsequently put them into the red without proper insurance coverage.” Their experiences highlighted systemic inequity, noting that “insurance companies and even the state/federal government have massive subsidies and insurance coverage for large landowners and agribusiness for these same circumstances” while small and/or tenant farmers received minimal support.

State-subsidized insurance products for tenant farmers would directly address Group 1’s reported significant losses, including “100 acres of green beans and substantial moringa crops.”

Establishing a publicly-administered climate disaster fund would respond to widespread concerns that “USDA doesn’t help renters effectively after disasters” and the community’s call for “better disaster relief specifically designed for those who rent land rather than own it, along with easier, more flexible loans for disaster recovery.”

Several participants also expressed a desire to adapt their growing practices in response to changing weather patterns but expressed frustration about limited access to information on climate-resilient techniques and resources to transition.

Huerto Development Support

Home gardens (*huertos*) serve as vital lifelines for many in the community, leading to calls for state government to establish a state-funded and administered Huerto Development Program. Participants described these gardens as essential for “growing various herbs for home remedies, vegetables, and fruits” including “blueberries, grapefruits, citrus, strawberries, and pomegranates.” Particularly passionate about this issue, Group 2 participants “asked for more help regarding funding and technical improvements for ‘huerto’ projects,” expressing interest in “learning how to turn these huertos into commercial operations.”

Regulatory pathways for commercial certification would support Group 1’s “interest in creating a community nursery in a parking lot for 12 trailers” to enhance home-based growing. Many participants embrace the philosophy that “land belongs to everyone,” highlighting the importance of publicly-funded community-based training networks. Regulatory reform is also urgently asked to address participants’ concerns about “mandatory cutting of gardens due to pest regulations” that threaten these vital *huerto* food systems.

Community members ask that county agricultural extensions create publicly-funded community-based training networks to facilitate knowledge exchange, reflecting how participants described primarily learning agricultural skills “through family rather than formal education.” Several participants emphasized the need for technical assistance with natural pest management strategies, which they preferred to conventional chemical approaches. Mobile demonstration units would extend technical resources to these historically underserved communities in mobile trailer parks.

Financial & Business Resources

Access to appropriate financial tools emerged as a major barrier, with communities requesting state financial agencies implement publicly-administered loan programs. Participants shared their difficulty “accessing financing and affordable loans” while expressing interest in “LLC formation and tax management for agricultural businesses” but finding little guidance tailored to their scale. Financial challenges were emphasized by Group 1, who detailed costs including “rent, seeds, and labor for planting and harvesting,” making profitability difficult when buyers offer low prices. Their requests included “easier, more flexible loans for disaster recovery and recognition that farming is their livelihood, not a hobby.”

Business assistance programs would address Group 3’s frustration that “loans are not favorable or don’t exist.” State-chartered agricultural credit institutions with specialized sector knowledge could respond to community requests for “better loans with more favorable terms” along with “help with costs of production.” Many participants recounted being denied financing despite successful production histories because they did not fit conventional lending criteria.

The communities ask that the state fund government-operated business technical assistance programs extending essential administrative knowledge to operations without dedicated management staff. Legal aid focusing on agricultural regulations would help

equalize access to regulatory guidance, addressing participant concerns about “lack of information about permits, regulations, and legal requirements.” The communities request centralized resource centers to address the information fragmentation repeatedly mentioned by participants who described struggling to identify and access existing support programs. For example, current California State law on equipment sharing programs offer alternatives to capital-intensive individual ownership models, reflecting participant requests for “machinery upgrade assistance” that could be fulfilled if information was distributed effectively to these communities.

Educational Pipeline & Workforce Development

Family-based knowledge transfer currently dominates agricultural training, prompting requests for state education departments to mandate integrating agricultural entrepreneurship into publicly-funded K-12 curricula. Throughout the discussions, participants expressed “strong interest in schools teaching agricultural skills and business concepts” and a “desire for education that presents agriculture as more than just manual labor.” Reform of educational approaches was particularly emphasized by Group 2, who voiced concerns about “the role of primary - middle - high school schools in educating their children in all aspects of agriculture.”

Publicly-funded specialized agricultural academies could transform how agriculture is taught, moving beyond the limited view that “agriculture is not merely you are either a farmer - farmworker, but all components which constitute the industry,” including “scientific study of agronomy, tax and business planning, engineering for irrigation and machinery.” The current educational approach leaves many children “predetermined in their career choices” according to participants, necessitating broader exposure to agricultural career pathways. Group 3 explicitly voiced the need for “exposure to different career opportunities within agriculture,” highlighting this cross-cutting concern.

The communities request that the state higher education system create state-funded scholarship programs specifically targeting children of agricultural workers to acknowledge persistent barriers to educational advancement. Mentorship networks would enhance awareness of diverse agricultural career trajectories, while technical apprenticeships in precision agriculture, irrigation engineering, and soil science create alternative skill development pathways.

Regulatory Navigation & Simplification

Overwhelmed by complex requirements, community members strongly advocate for state agricultural departments to create a publicly-staffed navigator program. The frustration was captured by one participant who noted, “There are so many rules, and they keep changing, but no one explains them to us.” Regulatory hurdles particularly affect growing practices, with several expressing frustration about “restrictive regulations, particularly regarding pest management” and a “preference for natural methods like beneficial insects and organic fertilizers.”

Government-mandated simplified regulatory pathways would address Group 1’s challenges with “food safety certifications that vary by buyer, creating a confusing regulatory landscape.” Multilingual regulatory materials would respond to Group 3’s observation that “there are a lot of requirements that cost money that we don’t always know of” and that “the information isn’t centralized.” Many participants emphasized the need for “continuous outreach to our communities when policies change,” highlighting

communication gaps between regulators and producers.

The communities ask that state regulatory bodies implement publicly coordinated inspections across agencies to reduce the cumulative administrative burden created by fragmented oversight systems. Pest management regulatory reform should consider appropriate flexibility for small-scale operations while maintaining ecological standards, directly responding to concerns about “mandatory cutting of gardens due to pest regulations.” The communities request specialized agricultural dispute resolution mechanisms to provide accessible processes designed for agricultural contexts, while community-based regulatory promoters would build local capacity for compliance assistance.

Water Access & Affordability

Water costs fundamentally shape agricultural viability in the region, driving community requests for state water boards to establish publicly-supported community water systems. Numerous participants reported “little perceived difference between renting and owning due to high costs of water and taxes,” while others described “challenges with water access and distribution in cooperatives” alongside “interest in irrigation system support.” Particularly direct on this issue, Group 1 urged authorities to “not raise water prices for farmers” and called for “an average price for everyone,” emphasizing water costs as a major constraint on profitability.

Democratic governance structures for communal water management would address participants’ emphasis on the need for “clearer agreements and communication” to avoid water access conflicts. Many expressed confusion about allocation systems and limited understanding of water access options, highlighting the need for educational workshops for these communities’ producers.

The communities ask that state legislation provide government-recognized legal protection of community water rights for the collaborative approaches that participants identified as potentially beneficial when properly structured.

Distribution Network Development

Limited market access stands as the primary barrier to growth according to most participants, leading to calls for state support of publicly-backed cooperative distribution networks. One frustrated farmer explained, “We can grow great produce, but we have limited connections to vendors and distribution channels.” Group 1 highlighted economic disparities, noting that “working with big companies and stores doesn’t yield returns because they pay less and they make much more money.” From Group 3 came emphatic testimony that “larger corporations want to buy our product at a very low price and then resell at higher price; we do all the work, and they get to reap the benefits.” Group 2 also noted these intermediary relationships which often undercut these producers.

Transportation infrastructure represents another critical need, with one participant clearly stating: “We know how to grow food. We need help getting it to people who will pay fair prices for it.” The communities request that the state provides funding for producers to create (individual or cooperative) transportation channels. State-supported transportation networks connecting production areas to markets would address infrastructural gaps that currently limit options for operations without integrated distribution capacity.

Implementation & Governance

Many described communication barriers with regulatory agencies, while others noted that existing programs seemed designed for “corporate agriculture” rather than small-scale producers.

The disconnect was captured by one participant who remarked, “They make policies without understanding how we work,” while another emphasized that “government programs that understand small-scale agricultural operations” were urgently needed.

Regular listening sessions with transparent reporting would address one participant’s frustration about how to “remain updated with the task force’s progress,” noting that “the government always comes, and then they disappear, and we never hear what happens.” From Group 1 came the specific request that “USDA not just help big corporations” and that “the county be fair with everyone, not just small farmers.” Many expressed the need for “more information on how to get involved with their cities and counties to provide feedback.” Group 3 highlighted structural challenges, observing that “agriculture is changing and it is making it really hard for smaller farmers to compete,” underscoring the need for structures that could amplify their collective voice.

Multilingual resources & facilitation are essential for meaningful engagement by the Valley’s linguistically diverse agricultural stakeholders with participatory planning processes for resource allocation decisions.

CROSS-GROUP ANALYSIS

Trends, similarities, and differences across all three discussion groups

Common Themes Across All Groups

The three discussion groups demonstrated remarkable convergence on several key issues, suggesting these represent foundational challenges for small-scale agricultural producers in the Coachella Valley:

Market Access & Fair Pricing: Universal concerns emerged about unfair pricing from intermediaries and large buyers, with consistent reports of “Los Angeles wholesalers undercutting producers” and “large corporations capturing disproportionate value.” Strong consensus across all groups points toward local farmers’ markets as preferred solutions that state programs should prioritize.

Insurance & Climate Vulnerability: Significant crop losses due to extreme weather events affected participants across all groups, who identified inadequate insurance options for small producers as a critical gap. This universal concern highlights escalating climate risks faced by farmers in the region, requiring expanded program access through state agencies.

Regulatory Complexity: Frustration with navigating complex regulatory environments “not designed for small-scale operations” permeated all discussions. Repeatedly mentioned was the need for “centralized information resources,” revealing systemic failures in making regulatory guidance accessible that state departments must address.

Water Affordability & Land Tenure: High costs of water emerged as a fundamental economic constraint across all discussions, with particular emphasis on how these expenses impact the viability of land ownership versus renting. Long-term agricultural sustainability depends on water pricing reforms by state authorities, along with proper

public financing across multiple scales of operations (from *huerto* to hundreds of acres).

Educational Improvement: Expressed throughout all groups was the desire for improved agricultural education that “presents diverse career pathways beyond manual labor,” revealing widespread concern about intergenerational mobility and sector perception that educational curricula must address.

Group-Specific Emphases

While sharing common concerns, each group emphasized different priorities reflecting their particular circumstances:

Group 1 Distinct Emphases:

- Land tenure insecurity and landlord restrictions severely limit productive capacity, requiring state policy intervention.
- Certification challenges with different buyers (Costco, Winco) create administrative burdens that streamlined processes could alleviate.
- Interest in community-based supports like a communal nursery highlights the need for public funding of collective infrastructure.
- Labor management concerns and worker relations underscore the need for guidance from state labor agencies.
- Succession planning resources would address concerns about having “no one to leave land to”.

Group 2 Distinct Emphases:

- Zoning regulations create infrastructure limitations that county government reforms could address.
- Comprehensive agricultural education reform represents a priority need for state education departments.
- Commercialization pathways for home gardens (*huertos*) require specific funding and technical support from state programs.
- Past experiences with cooperative models suggest the need for better governance frameworks supported by state agencies.
- The gap between small and large producer insurance coverage must be addressed through state insurance program reforms.

Group 3 Distinct Emphases:

- Business growth aspirations beyond subsistence farming require support from state business development programs.
- Tools and material costs create specific barriers that targeted state assistance could address.
- Cooperative structures for mutual support feature prominently in their vision for state-facilitated collective action.
- Continuous outreach and information sharing when policies change represents a critical need for state agency communication.

- Publicly-backed finance & loans for disadvantaged farmers on favorable terms.

Bridging Differences Through Integrated Solutions

Diverse but complementary perspectives across groups point toward cohesive public programs that integrate multiple needs:

Tiered Support Systems: Varying stages of agricultural development—from subsistence huertos to growth-oriented small businesses—necessitate differentiated support programs. Group 1’s interest in creating “a community nursery in the parking lot for 12 trailers” aligns with Group 2’s request for “more help regarding funding and technical improvements for ‘huerto’ projects” and interest in “learning how to turn these huertos into commercial operations,” while complementing Group 3’s goal to “step up and grow our business.” Effective government programs would include entry-level support for home gardens, intermediate assistance for small commercial plots, and advanced resources for expanding operations, creating publicly-supported pathways for progression while respecting different aspirations.

Cooperative Models with Clear Governance: Past challenges with collective approaches must inform new cooperative structures with public oversight. Group 2 reported “challenges with water access and distribution in cooperatives,” while Group 3 expressed desire for “a cooperative that could be formed to support smaller farmers with access to resources, information and tools,” and Group 1 showed interest in “forming a union to support each other.” Public programs should establish clear governance protocols, transparent decision-making processes, and equitable resource allocation mechanisms. Many participants preferred “starting small and independent before considering cooperative approaches” due to past negative experiences, suggesting incremental trust-building through small-scale collaborations might address concerns that “clearer agreements and communication could improve cooperative success.”

Comprehensive Educational Strategy: Transforming agricultural education requires integrating multiple visions across groups. Group 2 articulated education that teaches “agriculture as not merely you are either a farmer - farmworker, but all components which constitute the industry” including “scientific study of agronomy, tax and business planning, engineering for irrigation and machinery.” This complements Group 3’s request for “exposure to different career opportunities within agriculture” and Group 1’s emphasis on practical training. Multi-level educational programs should start with traditional knowledge transmission while building pathways to technical and professional roles through partnerships between community-based knowledge holders, educational institutions, and agricultural employers. Many expressed concerns that children become “predetermined in their career choices,” highlighting the need for diverse options while honoring traditional practices.

Multi-Level Market Development: Different scales of production require varied market access solutions. Group 1 requested “local seasonal farmers’ markets” while Group 2 expressed interest in “organizing a monthly farmers market.” Group 3 voiced concern that “larger corporations want to buy our product at a very low price and then resell at higher price.” Differentiated market channels appropriate for various scales would range from direct consumer sales for small producers to aggregation systems giving medium-sized operations better negotiating power with wholesale buyers. Digital platforms connecting producers to appropriate buyers would complement price transparency mechanisms

addressing concerns that “Los Angeles wholesalers significantly undercut buying prices for small producers.”

Integrated Regulatory Navigation: Navigating complex requirements demands coordinated assistance programs. Group 1 faced certification challenges where “food safety certifications needed” vary “depending on the buyer (Costco, Winco).” Group 2 struggled with “restrictive zoning regulations” that “prevent building necessary infrastructure like cold storage.” Group 3 highlighted that “there are a lot of requirements that cost money that we don’t always know of” and “the information isn’t centralized.” Comprehensive navigation assistance would provide personalized guidance through regulatory processes, centralized information access, multilingual materials, and targeted technical assistance for compliance. Simplified pathways for small-scale producers must maintain standards while addressing “complex regulatory environments” where rules “keep changing, but no one explains them to us.”

Participatory Governance Structure: Meaningful inclusion in decision-making represents a foundational need across all groups. Group 1 requested “more information on how to get involved with their cities and counties to provide feedback.” Group 2 voiced concern about policies made “without understanding how we work.” Group 3 emphasized the need for “continuous outreach to our communities when policies change.” Formally institutionalizing ongoing community participation beyond one-time listening sessions would establish accountability through transparent reporting on implementation progress. Regular community forums would maintain dialog while ensuring governance represents the full spectrum of agricultural operations, addressing widespread frustration that “the government always comes, and then they disappear, and we never hear what happens.”

These integrated approaches help bridge the differences found across the distinct emphases of each group, while also incorporating proposals and insights from the participants to inform how the task force and the state government’s approach to land access, market access, and comprehensive agrarian development.