California Agricultural Land Equity Task Force Virtual Goal 3: *Equitable Land Transition and Land Acquisition* Subcommittee Meeting Summary: Sept. 17, 2025

DRAFT until approved at subsequent meeting.

Meeting Called to Order

Facilitator Wylie opened the meeting at 3:02 p.m.

Welcome and Housekeeping

Facilitator Wylie provided housekeeping information for all meeting participants. Slides and materials presented during the meeting are available on the California Strategic Growth Council (SGC) website.

Roll Call

Roll call was conduct by the facilitator. Members present:

- Irene de Barraicua
- James Nakahara
- Thea Rittenhouse
- Doria Robinson
- Qi Zhou

Members absent:

- None

Quorum was established.

Staff present:

- Camille Frazier, SGC
- Tessa Salzman, SGC
- Caleb Swanson, SGC
- Meagan Wylie, Sacramento State

Action: Approval of Summary

Approval of the Sept. 4, 2025, Meeting Summary was tabled for a subsequent meeting.

Working Session

Recommendation 3.1b – Loan Forgiveness and Ecological Practices
Subcommittee Members discussed whether loan forgiveness should be conditioned on ecological or climate-smart agricultural practices. Members raised the following points:

- <u>Definitions:</u> Members emphasized that definitions of ecological agriculture and Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) should remain flexible, with Tribal Nations defining TEK for themselves.
- <u>Balancing incentives:</u> While some members cautioned against making loan forgiveness exclusively contingent on adopting climate-smart practices, others supported tying forgiveness to the adoption of such practices as a way to incentivize change and align with state climate goals.
- <u>Terminology:</u> Members recommended using "climate-smart agriculture practices," which already has state-level metrics, to avoid punitive framing.
- <u>Clarity of language:</u> The phrase "ensuring eligibility for farmer-governed…" was considered dense; members recommended parsing into separate bullet points.
- <u>Program design:</u> Suggestions included modeling forgiveness after the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program, where benefits accrue over time, and clarifying that forgiveness applies to priority producers and land stewards (PPLS). Members also recommended combining this with other provisions under 3.1b to ensure clarity.

Staff will revise language to simplify phrasing, align with existing state definitions, and balance incentives with flexibility.

Land Market Monitoring Program (LMMP)
Subcommittee Members revisited the LMMP with input from Advisory Committee Member Adam Calo and community stakeholders. Discussion focused on the relative value of pre-sale versus post-sale reporting, the scope of data collection, and alignment with the program's original goals. Key points included:

- <u>Survey priority</u>: Members emphasized that a comprehensive statewide survey of agriculturally viable land should be a priority. Making this data public would improve equity for PPLS by counteracting the information advantage corporate buyers already hold.

- Pre- vs. post-sale data: While post-sale tracking may inform future policy, members felt it would have limited short-term impact on land access. Pre-sale surveys and publicly accessible ownership data were seen as more immediately useful.
- Administrative feasibility: Members noted that integrating reporting requirements into county assessor offices could reduce burden and that frequency of reporting should depend on program budget and staffing capacity.
- Integration with existing tools: Suggestions included building on existing farmland mapping programs (e.g., Department of Conservation's Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program) and aggregating public ownership data into more legible and accessible formats. Innovations could include mapping agricultural land viability, current use, and owner contact information.

Members cautioned that the LMMP should not drift from its core goal of increasing land access for farmers. The survey was viewed as the most powerful tool for this purpose, while post-sale monitoring was seen as more relevant for addressing long-term consolidation trends.

Staff will refine LMMP language to emphasize a survey-first approach while retaining monitoring elements that address corporate consolidation.

Recommendation 3.4 – Land Linking and Technical Assistance (TA)
Discussion focused on the role of regional cohorts of TA providers in supporting land linking:

- Members supported funding both TA providers and coordination, with flexibility to support existing and emerging organizations.
- Clarification is needed to ensure language does not create new burdens or duplicate existing programs.
- Members agreed regional cohorts can be effective but requested refinement to ensure inclusivity and accountability.

Staff will revise and return updated language for review.

Funding Set-Asides and Grant Design
Subcommittee Members debated whether to maintain a 25% set-aside for PPLS in grant funds:

- Some advocated to remove the percentage and instead rename the program as a "Land Transition Grant Fund" dedicated to PPLS. Others suggested increasing the set-aside to 40% if the fund also serves broader populations (e.g., new farmers).

- Members agreed to remove the 25% figure from current recommendations and address set-asides in reference to all state programs elsewhere in the report.
- Discussion also addressed segmenting a general grant fund (e.g., 75% for acquisition, 25% for tenure) to avoid proliferation of multiple new programs.

Revenue and Fees
Members discussed directing revenue from fees on large-scale landowners or corporate ownership toward farmer pension funds or grant programs. Members emphasized aligning fees with land transition goals rather than unrelated infrastructure needs.

Next Steps
Staff will:

- Revise Rec. 3.1b to clarify conditional loan forgiveness, using climate-smart terminology and aligning with existing state metrics.
- Incorporate survey and mapping elements into the LMMP recommendation and flag governance questions for October discussion.
- Refine Rec. 3.4 to clarify funding for TA providers and coordination.
- Update grant fund language, removing the 25% set-aside, renaming the fund, and exploring segmented allocations.
- Revise fee language to ensure alignment with land transition purposes.

Public Comment:

- William Lipe (Monterey County) raised concerns about water issues, the historical context of Mexican land grants, and public perception of land surveys. He cautioned that agricultural landowners may view inventorying land as preparation for forced purchase.

General Public Comment:

- None.

The meeting adjourned at 5 p.m.