

# California Agricultural Land Equity Task Force

## Virtual Goal 4: *Secure Land Tenure* Subcommittee

### Meeting Summary: Sept. 5, 2025

DRAFT until approved at subsequent meeting.

#### Meeting Called to Order

Facilitator Wylie opened the meeting at 2:03 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 conducted by the facilitator. Members present:

- Irene de Barraicua
- Ruth Dahlquist-Willard
- James Nakahara
- Liya Schwartzman

Members absent:

- None

Quorum was established.

Staff present:

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

#### Working Session

Staff first summarized revisions to Goal 4: *Secure Land Tenure* since the August Task Force meeting before inviting Subcommittee discussion. These edits included:

- Title revisions to reduce jargon.

- New language requiring water quality coalitions to provide outreach and technical assistance.
- Addition of culturally appropriate and translated materials for certification programs.
- Relocation of local zoning recommendations to Goal 4.3.

Subcommittee members requested that the title be reverted to the previous language. Subcommittee members approved the other edits.

#### **Expand Capacity of CDFA's Farmer Equity Office (4.1)**

Subcommittee members discussed whether to recommend expanding the capacity of California Department of Food and Agriculture's (CDFA) Farmer Equity Office.

- Some members supported the idea but emphasized the need for full Task Force discussion, noting this would be the first recommendation directly benefiting a state agency.
- Members distinguished the proposed liaison role within CDFA from the separate Agricultural Ombuds proposal (see below), clarifying that the Equity Office would focus on coordination and interagency engagement.
- Members highlighted the need to view this proposal in the context of other new entities under discussion (e.g., land monitoring and ombuds roles). Staff will compile all proposed entities across the report so the Task Force can determine whether to consolidate functions into a single program or pursue multiple efforts.

#### **Policy and Regulatory Amendments and Technical Assistance (4.2)**

Subcommittee members revisited elements of Recommendation 4.2, focusing on regulatory review, technical assistance, and worker protections.

- Members noted concerns that new review processes could add complexity, though the intent is to reduce inequities in current "one-size-fits-all" systems. Suggestions included shifting language from "mandate" to "support" or "encourage." Members agreed that coordination could occur through the Farmer Equity Office but recognized capacity limits.
- Members raised questions about which agencies would conduct interagency reviews and how to ensure recommendations have impact without statutory or regulatory authority. Some suggested that a new or expanded entity may be needed to turn recommendations into law.
- (4.2.c): Members agreed technical assistance (TA) should apply broadly to farmers, not only priority producers, but noted challenges in defining TA providers without excluding culturally relevant models. This topic will require further discussion.
- (4.2.g.iv): Members confirmed that proposed changes should not undermine existing protections. They recommended revising language to add "without reducing fundamental worker protections" and to replace "compliance" with "enforcement."

### **Land Use and Housing (4.3)**

Subcommittee members considered concerns that streamlining farmworker housing permits could reduce accountability and lead to inhumane living conditions.

- Members clarified that the intent is not to weaken requirements but to make permitting easier. They acknowledged risks posed by bad-faith actors but emphasized that the recommendation, as written, should not undermine standards.
- Members agreed that adding explicit language on ensuring humane living conditions strengthens the recommendation.
- One member noted regional disparities in funding for low-income housing and the undercounting of farmworker communities in census data, highlighting the importance of equitable access to resources.

### **Tenant Farmer Bill of Rights (4.4)**

Subcommittee members continued review of draft provisions for a Tenant Farmer Bill of Rights. Discussion highlights were:

- Implementation and enforcement: Members emphasized the importance of clear guidelines for how new protections would be implemented, noting that without statutory authority they may not be enforceable. Members agreed that pairing new rights with landowner tax incentives would help avoid disincentives to leasing land.
- Lease survivability and water rights: Members discussed the challenges of ensuring lease survivability upon sale of land. They agreed to add “groundwater allocations” to the list of water rights protected under the draft recommendations.
- Infrastructure investments: Members reviewed provisions ensuring tenants can recuperate the remaining usable value of investments (e.g., wells). They agreed this principle is important but may change bargaining dynamics between tenants and landowners.
  - Member Schwartzman will refine language to clarify treatment of publicly funded improvements and to include concepts such as dual indemnification.
- Equity in farmworker housing: Members briefly discussed whether long-term farmworker housing could incorporate shared equity or cooperative models, recognizing this as a potential area for further development.
- Lease terms: Members debated the risks and benefits of very long leases (up to 100 years). While long leases could entrench inequities, they may also allow farm families to secure land use across generations. Members agreed to continue exploring this topic, with staff providing additional research.
- Broader coordination: Members noted the importance of avoiding silos across agencies and suggested considering whether multiple new program and entity proposals could be consolidated into a single effort.

Member Schwartzman will refine draft Tenant Farmer Bill of Rights language for inclusion in the October draft Report.

## **Agricultural Ombuds Proposal**

The Subcommittee revisited the proposal to establish an Agricultural Ombuds program to support farmers in navigating regulatory processes and securing land tenure. Key points included:

- Core functions: Members noted the importance of defining the base services that an ag ombuds would provide. Members emphasized that ombuds should provide culturally competent training and baseline services such as regulatory guidance and compliance support. Ombuds should serve as general practitioners, with referrals to specialists as needed.
- Longevity and accountability: Members supported creating long-term positions and establishing a feedback loop to ensure farmer experiences inform improvements in state programs. Members agreed that a regular process for recording, consolidating, and responding to issues is preferable to annual reports.
- Structure and placement: Members recommended housing ombuds within neutral, non-regulatory institutions such as Universities or Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs), with criteria for which offices could host positions. This would ensure trust while maintaining broad mandates. Members agreed consistency across counties is important.
- Land access services: Members highlighted the need for ag ombuds services as important for land tenure but noted that issues surrounding land access may require complementary programs beyond the ombuds role.
- Statewide coordination: Members agreed that county-level ombuds should be connected through a statewide coordinator, ideally housed within the University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources/Resource Conservation Districts, to unify reporting and ensure issues are elevated to state agencies.
- Public lands liaison: Members also recommended creating county-level agricultural lands liaison positions to improve access to publicly owned farmland, noting the lack of consistent points of contact across jurisdictions.
- Connection to broader proposals: Members discussed how ombuds could align with a potential Department of Agricultural Equity to ensure coordination and oversight.

The Subcommittee agreed to include the Ag Ombuds proposal in the October draft Report for further Task Force consideration.

## **Department of Agricultural Equity Proposal**

The Subcommittee revisited the August proposal to establish a new Department of Agricultural Equity.

- Members raised concerns about creating an entirely new state department, noting the complexity of consolidating multiple functions and the risk of duplicating existing efforts. Some suggested instead to bundle specific new functions into a coordinated framework for consideration.

- Staff clarified that the proposed Land Observatory has been renamed the Land Market Monitoring Body, which could be one of the functions considered for alignment.
- Members agreed to hold the Department of Ag Equity proposal outside of the October Draft Report for broader Task Force discussion.
- A member emphasized the importance of having an entity to weave together oversight and coordination, even if not a full department, suggesting options such as an oversight committee or other structure to track and integrate equity-focused efforts.
- Staff will compile all related proposals across the Draft Report to support a future conversation about the most effective structure or “package” of entities.

### **CEQA and Permitting**

Members revisited prior discussions on California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). While acknowledging burdens on small and Tribal producers, members were cautious about “streamlining” measures. Member Nakahara offered to work with staff to refine language, focusing on balancing protections for natural and cultural resources with reducing undue barriers.

### **Next Steps**

- Staff will prepare revisions for Subcommittee consideration related to:
  - Clarifying roles of the Farmer Equity Office and Ag Ombuds.
  - Consolidation of proposed new entities and programs into a unified framework.
  - Refining land tenure protections (tenant bill of rights, lease terms, tax incentives, groundwater rights).
  - Adjusting regulatory language to emphasize support, worker protections, and enforcement.
  - Incorporating new recommendations for county-level agricultural land liaisons.
- Staff will also consult with Member Nakahara on CEQA streamlining language and legislative pathways, and with Member Schwartzman on tenant protections.
- Subcommittee members agreed to reconvene for a follow-up discussion in the week of **September 22, 2025** (1.5-hour session).

### **Public Comment:**

- Mae Piacenza-Jones shared appreciation for the discussion and the opportunity to listen in.

## **General Public Comment:**

- None.

Facilitator Wylie summarized action items and next steps and highlighted upcoming meetings.

Subcommittee members agreed to reconvene for a follow-up discussion in the week of Sept. 22, 2025 (1.5-hour session).

The meeting adjourned at 4 p.m.