

California Agricultural Land Equity Task Force Virtual Goal 4: *Secure Land Tenure* Subcommittee Meeting Summary: Sept. 23, 2025

Meeting Called to Order

Facilitator Meagan Wylie opened the meeting at 9:03 a.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:

- Tessa Salzman, SGC
- Caleb Swanson, SGC
- Meagan Wylie, California State University, Sacramento

Action: Approval of Summary

Approval of September 5, 2025, Meeting Summary.

Task Force Discussion:

None.

Public Comment:

None.

Action:

Member Nakahara moved to approve the meeting summary. Member Dahlquist-Willard seconded. Motion passed. (4-0-0).

Working Session

Goal 4 Revisions

Staff reviewed edits made to Goal 4 recommendations, including:

- Reverting the title of Recommendation 4.2 to its prior version.
- Adding a new bullet to 4.2(h)(ii).
- Clarifying examples in 4.2(b) related to water and soil health.

The Tenant Farmer Bill of Rights remains in progress and will be refined further based on capacity.

Farmer Equity Office (Rec. 4.1) and Regional Coordination

Staff reviewed proposed edits to Goal 4.1, noting significant discussion about interagency communication. Briefing materials with tracked changes will be uploaded for reference.

- Members suggested explicitly adding diversified farms to the recommendation.
- Members discussed whether local and regional coordination should remain distinct from the Farmer Equity Office's role.
 - Some members support keeping these functions separate, noting that a state agency may not be best positioned to streamline local communication.
 - Members highlighted the potential for ag ombuds to serve as liaisons, bringing grassroots concerns to state-level entities.
-
- A member shared at the release of the UC Merced Farmworker Health Study, CDFA Secretary Karen Ross pointed to the Ventura coalition as a model of effective regional collaboration around farmworker wellbeing. Members agreed to maintain Recommendation 4.3(a) as a separate item but ensure alignment across the Farmer Equity Office, nonprofit advocacy groups, and the ag ombuds program, with sub-bullets or cross-references showing their complementary roles.
- Staff will refine language for inclusion in the October meeting draft.

Agricultural Ombuds Program (Rec. 4.2a)

- Members broadly supported the establishment of new, permanent ag ombuds positions and emphasized the need to fund, establish, and resource them.
- Discussion highlighted the importance of:
 - Creating county-level positions housed within non-regulatory bodies (e.g., the University of California Cooperative Extension or Resource Conservation Districts).
 - Adding a statewide coordinator to consolidate input, track patterns, and elevate recommendations from historically underserved producers to regulatory agencies.
 - Establishing an advisory group with grassroots experience to guide the coordinator and ensure accountability.
- Members raised questions about where the program should be housed:
 - Some supported alignment with the Farmer Equity Office or Department of Conservation to strengthen interagency collaboration.

- Others expressed concerns about situating the effort under the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA), citing the need for safe, trusted, and inclusive structures.
- Members noted ombuds should serve as practical liaisons who help troubleshoot issues (e.g., permitting, well installation), collect data, and convene regional mini-task forces to inform statewide coordination.
- Regional needs assessments should guide distribution of positions to ensure equitable coverage across the state.
- Staff will draft revised language (including statewide coordination and distribution by regional priorities) for further member input.

Technical Assistance (TA)

- Staff proposed consolidating TA-related recommendations into a single subgoal, creating an umbrella framework. In Goal 4, this includes TA linked to the ag ombuds program, regulatory support for priority producers and land stewards (PPLS), and lease negotiation assistance.
- Members discussed the California Agricultural Land Mediation Program (CALAMP):
 - Recognized as a valuable service but limited in scope.
 - Suggestions to keep language broad and flexible, rather than naming individual programs.
 - Members noted opportunities to expand mediation or legal support services, including for lease disputes, pesticide drift, and labor-related issues.
- Members emphasized clarifying who qualifies as a TA provider:
 - Preference for nonprofit organizations, businesses, and cooperatives that explicitly serve PPLS and land stewards.
 - Consensus to use “no or low cost” language when describing TA services.
- Members agreed on developing a definition of TA in the glossary to avoid repetition across recommendations. This definition should clarify that TA applies directly to farmers, businesses, and cooperatives, not just organizations.
- Overall agreement to broaden and consolidate TA provisions, ensure prioritization of PPLS, and support coordination with community-based and non-regulatory entities.

County-Level Agricultural Land Liaisons

- Members discussed creating city- or county-based liaison positions to support PPLS in navigating access to publicly owned agricultural lands. These liaisons would:
 - Identify and advertise available ag land.
 - Facilitate transactions with PPLS.
 - Collaborate with state/county agencies and TA providers to streamline leases and advocate for equitable access.
- Members noted that current real estate departments often lack expertise in agricultural land leases, creating barriers for small-scale transactions.
- Example: San Diego is beginning to pilot this type of role under its 30x30 efforts, but positions remain rare statewide.

- It was agreed to refine language to clarify intent and build momentum for hiring dedicated liaisons to expand equitable land access.

Regulatory Amendments and Interagency Review (Rec. 4.2)

- Staff proposed edits to Recommendation 4.2, including:
 - Adding language to encourage and, where possible, ensure representation of PPLS in public decision-making bodies.
 - Amending and implementing laws to strengthen land tenure protections, including prohibiting groundwater markets or developing regulatory frameworks to protect tenant farmers.
- Members emphasized the need for clarity in language:
 - A member raised concerns about resource conservation district (RCD) board membership being limited to landholders, suggesting more direct wording beyond “encourage where possible.”
 - Members preferred “ensure” to reflect stronger intent.
- Staff will circulate draft edits, including refinements on groundwater markets and Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) provisions, for member review.

Community Input: Land Use and Housing (Rec. 4.3)

- Members reviewed community input recommending that local governments be directed, incentivized, and supported to adopt land use practices that:
 - Support on-farm infrastructure; and
 - Legalize existing informal structures by creating pathways for compliance without penalizing farmers.
- Discussion emphasized that any legalization must still meet minimum health and safety standards.
 - Members cited challenges with farmworker housing and septic requirements, noting the need for flexibility (e.g., composting toilets in some contexts) while maintaining safe conditions.
- Members agreed on the importance of nuanced approaches that recognize the needs of smaller-scale producers without weakening protections that hold larger operations accountable.
- Consideration was given to developing scaled regulatory thresholds (e.g., by acreage or workforce size) to balance equity and safety.

Next Steps

- Staff will prepare revisions for Subcommittee and Full Task Force consideration.
- Draft language with tracked changes will be circulated prior to the October meeting for member review.

Public Comment:

- Yvonne Franco (CA RCD) cautioned that not all RCDs are represented by the statewide association and raised concerns about Division 9 changes.
- Stephanie Moreno reiterated concerns regarding potential Division 9 recommendations, noting existing pathways for non-landowner participation on RCD boards and risks of unintended limitations on RCD authorities.

General Public Comment:

None.

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

The meeting adjourned at 11 a.m.