

# California Agricultural Land Equity Task Force Grants and Resources Subcommittee Meeting Summary: January 9, 2025

## Meeting Called to Order

Facilitator Wylie started the meeting at 1:02 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 Strategic Growth Council ([SGC](#)) [website](#).

## Roll Call

Roll call was conducted by the facilitator. Members present:

- Thea Rittenhouse
- Doria Robinson
- James Nakahara
- Liya Schwartzman

Members absent:

- None

Quorum was established.

## Action: Approval of Past Meeting Summaries

Approval of July 10, 2024, and September 18, 2024, meeting summaries.

- Motion to approve made by member Robinson.
- Motion seconded by member Rittenhouse.
- Motion passed unanimously.

## Research Updates and Discussion

Staff provided updates on grant program research:

- Staff selected 12 programs to evaluate: 11 from the State of California and 1 federal.
- Staff created a questionnaire for program leads focused on funding consistency, language access, set asides, applicant versus awardee data, and acres transitioned or impacted for the last five years the program has been active.
- Staff hope to share research findings at the next subcommittee meeting.

Staff then shared research updates on non-California state-level policy incentives for beginning farmers:

- Staff reviewed the primary policy incentives discussed in existing literature:
  - o Beginning farmer tax credits,
  - o Conservation Reserve Program – Transition Incentives Program, and
  - o State-level agriculture easement incentive programs.
- Staff highlighted the key findings of existing literature, including that:
  - o More research is needed on these programs,
  - o Policies may slightly increase the number of farms owned by beginning farmers and help beginning farmers stay in the profession longer,
  - o Program participants are overwhelmingly white and male, and
  - o Beginning farmer tax credits often benefit pre-existing relationships.
- Staff also shared key factors affecting program participation and effectiveness.
- Staff provided an overview of the non-California state-level policy incentive programs spreadsheet developed, noting that the most common programs were low-interest loans, beginning farmer tax credits, and grants.

Members asked about programs, such as in Washington state, where land trusts act as intermediaries by buying land and then transferring ownership to beginning farmers. Members noted that the Sustainable Agricultural Land Conservation (SALC) program can be valuable for this type of transaction, and that this concept should be explored beyond land trusts to entities like resource conservation districts.

Staff then provided a brief overview of California Climate Investment’s definition of priority populations. Douglas Bojack, Senior Staff Council at the Governor’s Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation, gave a presentation on Proposition 209 and programmatic compliance.

Members noted the challenge of relying on programs like CalEnviroScreen, particularly in rural areas, to advance the goals of the Task Force. Members asked staff if the non-California state policy incentives research revealed programs based on income and if restricting program eligibility based on income would violate Proposition 209. Staff responded that no such programs came to mind. Staff noted that the California Climate Investments program defines priority populations based on income, pollution burden, and health outcomes, including lands under the control of federally recognized Tribal Nations and low-income communities and households.

## **Public Comment**

None

## **Working Session**

Staff presented ideal funding concepts from previous Task Force discussions, including block grants, well-funded technical assistance providers, and tax incentives that directly benefit priority communities. They asked whether these concepts align with members’ vision for an ideal funding landscape. Members

agreed but also emphasized the role of land trusts as intermediaries to quickly purchase and transfer land.

Members noted that flowcharts would be helpful to map the funding landscape for hypothetical scenarios to identify needs. They encouraged exploring collaboration between entities such as philanthropy and nonprofits, as well as considering succession in this exercise. Additionally, members suggested adopting effective policies from other states and stressed the importance of flexibility and accessibility in funding programs.

Staff asked for greater clarity regarding the subcommittee's earlier requests to hear from a tax specialist. Members expressed the following:

- A desire to learn what they do not know about tax law pertaining to the recommendations they are considering.
  - What are the limitations?
  - What are the best incentives and requirements?
- Interest in learning how tax incentives can be used to offer beginning farmers other benefits, such as those applicable to insurance and loans.
- Curiosity in learning how state tax laws can be modified to not disincentivize land and business transfer during a farmer's lifetime.
- The need for the Task Force's recommendations to be reviewed by legal and tax experts.
- Debt forgiveness should be considered as an alternative to complex tax laws.

Staff then reviewed the Financing Working Group, noting that its Google Doc contains questions regarding David Mancera's presentation. Staff asked if the working group could also explore philanthropy; members agreed and suggested considering public-private partnerships as well.

Next, staff reviewed the Grant Program Outcomes Working Group, recommending engagement with staff once grant program research is complete. Staff clarified that the research focused on programs with data on acres involved, funds invested, and demographics, noting that recommendations will depend on the quality of information available.

At the subcommittee's request, staff agreed to support working groups in mapping an ideal funding landscape.

Facilitator Wylie summarized action items and next steps, including scheduling the next subcommittee meeting in early March, and highlighted upcoming meetings.

### **Public Comment:**

None

### **General Public Comment:**

None

The meeting adjourned at 2:48 p.m.