

California Agricultural Land Equity Task Force Meeting Summary: May 9, 2024

Meeting Called to Order

Chair Nelson Hawkins called the meeting to order at 8:05 am, with special thanks to the public and invited guest speakers for joining the meeting.

Roll Call

Roll call was conducted by Meagan Wylie, Facilitator. Members present:

- Nelson Hawkins, Chair
- Emily Burgueno, Vice Chair
- Irene Barraicua
- Nathaniel Brown
- Ruth Dalquist-Willard
- Darlene Franco
- Lawrence Harlan
- James Nakahara
- Dorian Payán
- Thea Rittenhouse
- Doria Robinson
- Liya Schwartzman
- Qi Zhou

Welcome and Housekeeping

Meagan Wylie provided information on Zoom policies, interpretation services offered for in-person and online attendees, and the public comment process. She discussed the meeting plan and code of conduct. Slides and materials presented during the meeting are available on the Strategic Growth Council [\(SGC\) website](#).

ACTION: Approval of Summary

Approval of February 19, 2024 Meeting Summary.

Task Force Discussion:

No discussion.

Public Comment:

No public comment.

Motion passes (13-0-1*). *Marks abstention or absence from vote

STAFF REPORT

SGC staff presented the Staff Report.

Task Force Discussion:

Task Force Members welcomed newly appointed member Darlene Franco. This is her first meeting since being appointed to the Task Force on February 28, 2024.

Staff answered questions from members about the Research and Technical Assistance and Local Assistance budget lines. Staff will report back on a remaining inquiry about Local Assistance projects and land acquisition.

Public Comment:

No public comment.

SITE VISIT REPORTS: Agricultural Land Access and Tenure in the San Diego Region

Groups of one or two Task Force Members toured five different farm sites in the San Diego region on May 8th to learn from local farmers, ranchers, and tribes about agricultural land access challenges they have experienced in San Diego County, the resources and support the farms have utilized related to agricultural land access (e.g., grants, loans), and solutions they would like to see implemented moving forward. Participating Task Force Members shared photos and key takeaways from their visits.

Byron Nkhoma, Hukama Produce

Members Dalquist-Willard and Barraicua attended. They shared the following highlights:

- Hukama Produce is a family-run farm that started in 2015 on approximately six acres. His goal is to own 10 acres.
- The farm operator currently leases the land from a horse farm owner. The land was originally located by door knocking in a neighborhood.
- Developers for housing are the primary competition to purchase available land.
- Food banks are an important buyer of their produce.
- Grant application processes have been challenging for Hukama. Identified needs include technical assistance and creative and timely financing.

Following the report-out, Task Force Members noted that the ability to scale up a farm business is dependent on security of land tenure. One model of interest is that wherein one landowner has a lease for a large parcel and sublets to other farmers.

One member commented there is a need for seasonally available financing to be more in line with farmers' needs.

Andrew Madrigal, Pauma Tribal Farms

Members Franco and Payán attended. Highlights shared include:

- Pauma Band of Mission Indians is a Federally-recognized Tribal Nation. The farm is approximately 85 acres.
- Pauma Tribal Farms produces citrus and several other crops for market. Fruits and vegetables grown in "the garden" are primarily consumed by Tribal members. The need for food security and sovereignty was heightened during the pandemic. The Tribe is also considering market pathways for avocados and select other crops.
- Expansion of farming operations is relatively recent. The Tribe is successfully purchasing land back from neighbors. However, access to capital is a challenge for the Tribe. They were outbid on some parcels.
- Other issues include water supply, funding to install a well, and complexities working with the State.

Task Force Members observed that it is important to review the history of land any time land is transferred. This is especially true with consideration of cultural and sacred sites. One member identified the need to better understand the relationships of Federally- and non-Federally recognized Tribes with the State, and what types of support, if any, they desire from the State.

Diane Moss, Project New Village

Member Harlan attended. Highlights shared include:

- This is a Black-led and resident-led organization in Southeast San Diego that supports a community urban garden located on the corner of a city block.
- They seek additional land to expand farming, establish a market for produce on the site, and develop community living spaces.
- Project New Village acquired land through a short and intensive fundraising effort to purchase the land they were previously leasing from the City of San Diego. They rely on grants, which presents some challenges for long-term sustainability.
- Working with local government has also been challenging, in particular because there is no clear structure or department that focuses on community gardens or land access.

A member provided an example of the City of Richmond's "public land for the public good" initiative wherein the City identifies land unsuitable for housing that can be used for other purposes. They noted that accessing unused land is often brokered with city council. Another member commented local jurisdictions will conduct land audits for identifying land for affordable housing. They suggested the identification of agricultural land be added to this audit process.

Ellee Igoe & Shelby Busó, San Pasqual Valley Agricultural Preserve

Member Shwartzman attended. Highlights shared include:

- The Preserve is 18,000 acres owned by the City of San Diego. The Preserve includes the San Diego Safari Park, San Pasqual Valley Soils, and Konyn Dairy among other operations.
- Konyn Dairy is the last remaining dairy in San Diego County and has been on a month-to-month lease with the City of San Diego for 15 years.
- Foodshed is working to establish an incubator farm on the Preserve. California FarmLink is helping to create a “farmer-friendly” lease between Foodshed and the City of San Diego.
- Site visit hosts described how municipal codes aimed at large scale agriculture have impeded small farms here from investing in land, planning for the future, and building farmworker housing.
- Other challenges described include competition for land with foreign investors and/or developers.

A member put forward an idea to establish a pre-qualification process for agricultural easements to make farmers more financially competitive with other interested parties. Another member mentioned San Diego County’s Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement (PACE) Program, which establishes conservation easements on regional agricultural land.

Erik Rodriguez, Jeannette Fainesi & Joel Kramer, Tijuana River Valley Incubator Plots

Member Rittenhouse attended. Highlights shared include:

- Erik and Jeannette both farm two quarter-acre plots at the Tijuana River Valley Incubator Plots. The garden contains 210 garden plots and seven quarter-acre plots for education and demonstration.
- The local Resource Conservation District (RCD) manages the lease with the County of San Diego.
- The Tijuana River borders the community garden. The last two years have seen major flood events that resulted in significant damage.
- A vacant lot across the street is also owned by the County of San Diego and was previously operated as an organic farm. The RCD is interested in leasing this land to allow the farmers on the incubator plots to expand. The potential uses that have been proposed by other entities include soccer field and private development.

Task Force members discussed an idea to create a State-level tool to value agricultural land and soil as precious resources. Other ideas mentioned include the Surplus Land Act, farmer and land owner matching strategies, unintended consequences of regulatory barriers, and the importance of mapping farmland.

Public Comment:

- Darlene Ruiz
- Chandra Richards

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS: Resource Landscape

Existing Resources Related to Agricultural Land Access in California

During the February 16, 2024 meeting, Task Force members requested that SGC staff compile a list of existing resources that address agricultural land equity and related issues in California. To meet this directive, SGC staff compiled a list of 53 publicly and privately administered resources in three categories: grants, financing, and technical assistance.

SGC staff offered an overview. Please refer to pages 4-16 of this meeting's [Briefing Packet](#).

Roundtable Discussion Part 1: Resource Provider Perspective

Two roundtable discussions were convened to build on the topic of existing resources. The speakers listed below were invited to discuss the challenges they have seen or experienced related to agricultural land equity, the resources they administer or have been able to access, and key gaps that remain.

Resource Provider Roundtable invited speakers included:

- Shanna Atherton-Bauer, California Department of Conservation
- Anthony Chang, Manzanita Capital Collective and People's Land Fund
- Josiah Griffin, United States Department of Agriculture Office of Tribal Relations
- Lena Ortega, Intertribal Agriculture Council

Speakers provided a self-introduction and overview of the resources their organization administers with a focus on how these programs address agricultural land access and/or equity. Following introductions, Task Force Members engaged in open dialogue with guest speakers.

Initial discussion centered around the role of the state in facilitating land transactions between willing sellers and farmers. A member suggested state involvement could help farmers avoid losing public funds to intermediaries. Guest speakers proposed alternative approaches. Guest speaker Chang advocated for a sharper racial equity focus in administering state funds and supporting local capacity building, while guest speaker Atherton-Bauer emphasized legislative fixes at local and state levels rather than centralizing the process for brokering land transitions. Guest speaker Griffin suggested loans can be used to develop succession plans.

A member asked guests to share specific examples of how their organizations have helped with land acquisition, and to describe any challenges faced. Examples from ongoing projects, such as the Trinidad Rancheria acquisition, North Fork Mono Tribe acquisition project, and the Tribal Homelands Initiative, highlight challenges like funding shortages and restrictions (i.e., some resources can only be used to purchase land that would otherwise be within the reservation), determining the most appropriate entity and legal structure for long term land holding, and the need for culturally sensitive approaches to land acquisition.

Concerns were raised about the impact of land acquisitions on tribal sovereignty and preservation of ecosystems, with suggestions for amplifying tribal control and community-based agriculture. Members and guest speakers underscored the importance of empowering tribal governments in decision-making and resource allocation, supporting innovative solutions, and increasing collaboration among involved parties.

Roundtable Discussion Part 2: Farmer Perspective

Farmer Roundtable invited speakers included:

- Idzai Mubaiwa and Ruby Mubaiwa, African Sisters Produce
- Mai Nguyen, Farmer Mai
- Essence Oyos, Golden Eagle Farm

Each speaker introduced themselves and offered an overview of their farm and their history with the land.

Guest speaker Mubaiwa shared how she leases a 30- by -40-foot garden plot from New Roots Farm in downtown San Diego though the International Rescue Committee (IRC). This is land the City of San Diego previously deemed undevelopable due to proximity to a creek. However, the new organization managing the land now seeks to develop it, and the tenant farmers currently do not have access to their plots.

Guest speaker Nguyen grows non-patented, climate-adapted varieties of heirloom grain in Sebastopol, California. They discussed their experiences securing land without government resources, emphasizing the importance of community support, farmer health and well-being, and innovative financing solutions. They shared a number of personal stories that illustrate the numerous challenges farmers face when renting land. Nguyen supports other farmers through political organizing, policy advocacy, cooperative business development, land acquisition, mentorship, and multi-sector collaborations.

Guest speaker Oyos described the relatively recent expansion of Golden Eagle Farm driven by the pandemic and the Mesa Grande Tribe's need to advance food sovereignty and economic development through agrotourism. Funding for Golden Eagle is primarily via grants. The farm faces barriers such as aging and deteriorating infrastructure and equipment, workforce development, and limited access to funding due to the land's Williamson Act and fee-to-trust transfer status.

Guest speaker Nguyen underscored the broader conversation on land equity and infrastructure needs, emphasizing the importance of racial justice in land access. Discussions touched upon challenges like tenant rights, the need for accessible information on land and grants, and tools like agricultural easements to make land more affordable for farmers.

Participants also discussed ideas for policy recommendations, including the need for a universal basic income for farmers and protections for cultural practices like controlled burns. Concerns were raised about the impact of policies like the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) on tenant farmers and the potential of climate bonds to incentivize land fallowing.

Public Comment:

Darlene Ruiz

PROPOSED ACTION: Subcommittee Formation

SGC staff recommended the creation of a Subcommittee to examine existing grant programs and provide information that may be incorporated into the Task Force's final recommendations.

Task Force Discussion:

Task Force Members asked for clarification related to subcommittee formation logistics. There is no minimum or maximum number of subcommittee participants. Meetings are currently expected to be virtual. The duration and format of the meetings are flexible and driven by the agenda and members' availability. All subcommittee meetings are considered public and will be agendized as such pursuant to Bagley-Keene requirements. Subcommittees are considered advisory to the full Task Force. Staff will provide the same level of support to all subcommittees as it currently provides to the full Task Force.

Members expressed strong interest in forming a subcommittee to examine the resource landscape. Action was postponed following the work planning discussion to assess the establishment of additional subcommittees.

Public Comment:

None

DISCUSSION: Work Planning

Meagan Wylie reviewed the timeline of upcoming meetings. She asked the Task Force to reflect on discussions from this meeting and the prior February 16, 2024, meeting and consider:

- Which topics are rising to priority?
- Which topics warrant subcommittees?
- Which topics should be discussed at the next Task Force meeting?
- What questions are key to answer to further the development of recommendations?

Task Force Discussion:

Each Task Force Member shared their priority topics. Please see the Appendix for a comprehensive list. Members then reflected on this list and considered the formation of subcommittees to advance topical discussions.

Members voted by majority to establish three subcommittees: grants and resource landscape, community outreach, and sustaining natural and cultural resources. Subcommittee composition includes voluntary participation by the following members:

Grants and Resource Landscape Subcommittee:

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

Community Outreach Subcommittee

- Emily Burgueno
- Darlene Franco
- Nelson Hawkins
- Qi Zhou

Sustaining Natural and Cultural Resources

- Emily Burgueno
- Darlene Franco
- Lawrence Harlan

Task Force Members requested staff explore scheduling options for an additional full Task Force meeting in June or July with the primary purpose to conduct additional work planning.

Members were reminded that regular Task Force meetings require a quorum of members to join in-person. Therefore, a likely meeting location is Sacramento.

Public Comment:

Darlene Ruiz

General Public Comment

The Task Force received public comment from:

- Darlene Ruiz
- Sona Desai

Meeting Adjournment

Meagan Wylie confirmed action items for Staff and Task Force members:

- Staff to determine whether Local Assistance funds can be applied to land acquisition projects.
- Staff to distribute approved February 16, 2024 meeting summary.
- Staff to re-distribute link to required State Ethics Training to Members.
- Staff and Members to explore options for June or July full Task Force meeting.
- Staff to schedule subcommittee meetings in advance of August Task Force meeting.
- Staff to post Josiah Griffin's slide deck to project website.
- Task Force Members to share additional photos and/or write ups of site visits with Staff.

The next meeting is scheduled for August 15, 2024, in the Sacramento or Central Valley region, with an option to join remotely.

Chair Hawkins and Vice Chair Burgueno provided closing comments. Chair Hawkins adjourned the meeting at 4:30pm.

NOTE: These are notes of the meeting taken by support staff and do not constitute formal approved summaries of the meeting.

Appendix

Task Force Members' list of priority topics for work planning and subcommittee formation. The list is shorthand and sorted alphabetically. It is provided for reference purposes only.

- Acquisition opportunity and mechanisms to for timely response; ways to replenish and sustain funds
- Capacity
- Capacity for non-profits and community-based organizations to assist farmers, especially immigrant farmers (e.g., with language access)
- Challenge in broader conversation about Tribal Nations' land access or other communities
- Condense from February topics into "resources", include others e.g., healthcare
- Easements and covenants
- Educating on value of farming, respecting farmers
- Education of non-native population about Tribal traditions and government
- Existing programs, capacity-building as pathway forward
- Farmer health to do work on the land
- Farmer tenant rights
- Goal to have equitable outcomes
- Grass-roots organizing/networking for safe space
- Housing, challenges with immigration status
- How those with financial resources can support greater public
- Immigrant experiences, exclusions, opportunities
- Improve connections between land seekers and landowners
- Information gaps, knowledge about opportunities, ways information is communicated
- Insurance
- Land access
- Land improvement (infrastructure, etc.)
- Land tenure
- Language barriers, ways to share opportunities widely
- Legal framework that supports needs of land stewards
- Living on the land, especially in relation to easements
- Lot size adjustment, carveouts, zoning and permitting
- New farmers, incentive for farming, livable wage, wellbeing
- Notifications of land availability
- Outreach to individuals and citizens

- Ownership, having a stake in the land, autonomy
- Public dollars to land stewards
- Racism in land sales, succession
- Regulations
- Respect for land, honoring sacred sites
- Solving for farmers and Tribal Nations
- Stakeholders: operating and non-operating landholders, public landholders, conservation institutions and community landholders
- Technology for farming, workforce
- Tenant farmers – protections, whether policies incentivize or disincentivize tenant farmers (e.g., SGMA)
- Trainings and outreach
- Trust and fee land
- Zoning and housing on land