CAFF
COMMUNITY ALLIANCE
with FAMILY FARMERS

FARMER POLICY PLATFORM 2024

The challenges facing small farmers are overwhelming and make the simple act of growing food to feed local communities a nearly impossible task. The realities of the climate crisis, existing supply chain, and inequalities in the greater economy disproportionately affect California's food producers, which includes the **1 in 5 California farmers who identify as Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC)[1].** Meanwhile, California's scarce natural resources including land and water continue to be bought up by private investment companies and hedge funds at record rates. This is further exacerbated as existing government programs prioritize funds for large industrial systems and are fundamentally inaccessible to diversified farming systems operated by underserved communities.



Maceo Hart-Kapic, H&K Farms (PC: Joan Cusick Photography)

Fall Farmer Engagement Summary

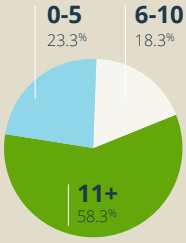
600

Roughly 600 farmers and land stewards across California engaged in our Fall listening process

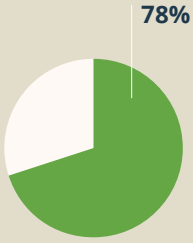
47%* Identify as Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC)

55% Identify as female, nonbinary/ non-confirming, and LGBTQ+

* Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander 0.2%; Asian/Asian-American 9%; Middle Eastern or North African 0.4%; Black, African American, or Afro Caribbean 7%; Hispanic or Latino/a/x 23.2%; Mixed race 3.6%; Native American, American Indian, Alaska Native, or Indigenous 1.8%; White / Caucasian / European 52.4%; Prefer not to say 2.3%.



Years in agriculture



78% of surveyed farmers operate on 50 acres or less

The priorities identified here are a direct result of an intensive farmer-listening process engaging nearly 600 food producers through a multilingual online survey, over a dozen regional meetings, and one-on-one conversations in fall 2023.

This process included the voices of a wide range of farmers across California from urban to rural, small and mid-sized, with a diversity of racial, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. The majority of these farmers can be identified as small-scale, beginning, and underserved food producers, many of whom manage diversified farming operations growing and selling their food locally and are essential members of our local economies and communities.

[1] Also known as: "Socially Disadvantaged" per 2020 CDFA Farmer Equity Act Report OR "Historically Underserved" per USDA-NRCS Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018

The following priorities are the most pressing issues our farmers face and need to be addressed in the coming 2024 legislative session:

2024 PRIORITIES FOR CALIFORNIA POLICYMAKERS

1 Ensure California's small-scale, beginning, & underserved farmers have equitable access to capital & infrastructure

IMPLEMENTATION

- Provide oversight in the formation of California Department of Food and Agriculture's (CDFA) Farm to Community Food Hub program and distribution of $15M (FY 23-24) in programmatic funds
- Ensure existing state grant and loan programs are inclusive of small and under-served farmers such as the CDFA's Farm to School program

ACTION

- Invest $10M in one-time funds to develop a small farm equipment sharing and cooperative development program
- Ensure any climate bond put on the ballot makes investments in capital and infrastructure that support small and underserved farmers and regional food systems.

> "There is no acknowledgment of historic disenfranchisement that makes access to baseline resources necessary for farming ventures nearly impossible for the community."
>
> **—Talia Dotson Tree People, Los Angeles**



Talia Dotson Tree People

2 Protect access to water for California's local food producers committed to sustainable water use

IMPLEMENTATION

- Continue to ensure small-scale and underserved farmers' voices are heard and are treated fairly under the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA). Through various efforts at the local level and statewide including with the Department of Water Resources (DWR) to develop programs aimed at increasing engagement and education among small farmers in the SGMA's Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs)
- Continue to work with partners in conducting dry farm education and outreach

3 Equitable access to land for California's small-scale, beginning, & underserved food producers

IMPLEMENTATION

- Provide oversight and ensure continued investment in the recently formed California Agricultural Land Equity Task Force facilitated by the California Strategic Growth Council (SGC)

ACTION

- Develop legislation to address the rapid farmland purchasing among private equity firms and hedge funds

RESEARCH

- Identify opportunities to transition land through strategies such as cooperative land use models

4 Ensure California's small and underserved food producers can survive extreme weather with accessible and ongoing emergency relief & climate resilience technical assistance

IMPLEMENTATION

- Engage in the state's investments to provide emergency storm relief to California's small food-producing farmers through CDFA's California Underserved & Small Producer (CUSP) program ($5M FY 23-24)
- Engage with CDFA's climate-smart agriculture program team to ensure programs are accessible to small and underserved farmers

ACTION

- Increase the available funds as well as expand the CDFA CUSP program to offer ongoing relief to farmers during various emergencies as they arise.

5 Ensure access to business viability technical assistance and resources as well as opportunities to uplift cooperatives as a solution to small farm stability

IMPLEMENTATION

- Provide oversight of the FY 23-24 State Budget allocation to programs including CDFA's Beginning Farmer & Farmworker Training program ($5M) and CDFA's Urban Agriculture program ($11M FY 22-23; 23-24)

ACTION

- Increase access to technical assistance for small and underserved farmers to explore forming farmer cooperatives and other collaborative structures.

RESEARCH

- Identify existing programs, resources, and gaps for cooperative development to support regional small farms cooperative models such as land, markets, equipment, etc.

BACKGROUND ON TOP CHALLENGES

57%

OF SURVEYED PRODUCERS HAVE NEVER BENEFITED FROM ANY GOVERNMENT PROGRAM, GRANT RESOURCES, OR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

70%

OF SURVEYED BIPOC PRODUCERS DO NOT BELIEVE THAT CURRENT STATE OR FEDERAL PROGRAMS ARE ACCESSIBLE OR EMPOWERING

1 Access to Capital & Infrastructure

Regional farmer infrastructure has been drained of resources as a result of the rapid consolidation of our food supply chains by large corporations, leaving our small, local food producers with little to no infrastructural support. The purchase of farm equipment and infrastructure is the second largest capital investment (after land) and is inaccessible for small, underserved, and beginning farmers with limited cash flow for major purchases. Furthermore, our farmers come from a wide range of ethnic, cultural, and generational backgrounds, most of whom have been left out of existing technical assistance (TA) programs or government grant resources. Most of our farmers have been left out of any government grant opportunities that award many farmers the financial capital to invest in their farm infrastructure, supply chain, and overall sustainability. In order to rebuild, small and underserved farmers need equitable access to appropriate TA, government resources, and education. These investments will support farmers to form stronger partnerships and become more competitive in the marketplace.

2 Access to Water

Water in California is a scarce resource. With fluctuating drought years and the implementation of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) there has been an increase in the number of filed groundwater basin adjudication lawsuits. Today, hundreds of small-scale farmers are at risk of losing their water rights and this will continue to rise as water resources become more scarce. SGMA was enacted to develop a long-term solution to drought but has left local, small-scale, and underserved food-producing farmers out of the conversation. Using 2022 state-level investments we will work to ensure small-scale and underserved farmers' voices are heard and are treated fairly under SGMA in addition to working collaboratively with the Department of Water Resources (DWR) to develop programs aimed at increasing engagement and education among small farmers in the SGMA's Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs).

MANY RURAL FARMERS HAVE SUFFERED FROM PREVIOUS DROUGHT YEARS. IN OUR 2022 SURVEY,

70%

OF SURVEYED FARMERS REPORTED TO HAVE BEEN NEGATIVELY IMPACTED BY THE DROUGHT

"Water is a constant concern for farmers like us. We have to go deeper and deeper each year in order to maintain the same access to water to irrigate our vegetable crops; our well is over 600 feet deep now and has to feed our crops and our family because our domestic well is too shallow. Policymakers need to ensure ongoing water access for farms like ours in order to sustain local food producers."

—Javier Cruz Cruz Martinez Farm, Madera County



Javier Cruz, Cruz Martinez Farm, Madera County

"Natural resources such as land belong to the common good. As we watch land grabs by billionaires and hedge funds unfold, what we are witnessing is the removal of land from food production that is gutting our local economies, and transferring those dollars into private portfolios for the few. In many ways this is more than a land grab, it's a power grab, jeopardizing our food security and unraveling the rich fabric of our local communities."

—Alexis Koefoed Soul Food Farm, Solano County



Alexis Koefoed Soul Food Farm, Solano County



5%

OF ALL LANDOWNERS OWN OVER HALF OF CALIFORNIA'S CROPLAND



85%

OF THE SMALLEST PROPERTIES ACCOUNT FOR ONLY 25% OF CROP-LAND [3]



43%

OVER 43% OF SURVEYED FARMERS INDICATED THEY LEASE THE LAND THEY CULTIVATE, WHICH LIMITS THEIR ABILITY TO INVEST IN THE LAND THEY ARE ON AND FEEL SECURE IN THEIR BUSINESSES

3 Access to Land

Land access and security is a fundamental challenge for California's small-scale, beginning, and underserved farmers. With the combination of skyrocketing land prices, rapid corporate investment hedge funds buying up any available land, and warehouse development, these farmers have no other choice but to lease or stop farming altogether. In California, 50% of cropland is owned by 5% of the total landowners and 37% of cropland is owned by non-farmers and rented or leased, it is becoming increasingly evident that the far majority of our agricultural lands are not owned by individuals in our communities but rather by hedge funds and non-farmer investors.[2]

Over 43% of surveyed farmers indicated they lease the land they cultivate which limits their ability to invest in sustainable land stewardship practices given the risk of being removed from the land they are on. Many of our farmers have expressed deep concerns and fear around the increased pressures by nearby farms owned by corporate investment firms, small farms frequently being purchased and consolidated, as well as the rapid development of agricultural lands into warehouses.

[2,3] Macaulay, L., & Butsic, V. (2017). Ownership characteristics and crop selection in California cropland. California Agriculture, link

BACKGROUND ON TOP CHALLENGES

4 Climate Resiliency & Emergency Relief

The past decade's record-setting droughts, fires, flooding events, and heat waves, have had disastrous effects on the health, landscape, and economic stability of our farmers. Our farmers are leaders in land stewardship, **99% of surveyed farmers in 2022 indicated they practice one or more of the following agricultural systems: regenerative, sustainable, organic, ecological, agroecological, tribal foodways and/or traditional tribal agricultural uses. These systems are important models to ensure the future stability of our climate and our food system.**

However, more TA, training, and importantly peer-to-peer farmer networks are needed to ensure farmers continue to implement these agricultural systems. Investments in TA and peer-to-peer programs like CDFA's Biologically Integrated Farming Systems Program (BIFS) are essential to provide these farmers with the necessary resources to develop more resilient farms. Importantly, as increasing weather events continue to adversely impact farms like the past 2023 Winter floods, continued emergency relief funds will be essential to maintain on an annual basis to prepare for continued disasters from drought, flood, extreme heat, and so on.

> "Small farmers like us often don't know where to go or can't access resources when we most need them. During the winter storms, we lost more than a quarter of our produce and had about 80 sheep that died due to heavy storms. Direct and rapid emergency relief is essential when a crisis strikes, especially with climate change this will happen more frequently and readily available relief will be essential to keep us small farms in business."
>
> **— Maria Diaz Rancho Las Palmas, Santa Cruz County**



Rancho Las Palmas, Santa Cruz County

5 Business Viability & Farmer Cooperatives

In California, we are losing at least four small farms a day, and the challenges facing small farmers are overwhelming. With rapid consolidation and major market competition, our farmers know the only way they will survive in the future is to work together - sharing equipment, land, processing, bookkeeping, and crop planning together. For example, several farmers have their own informal sharing of one or two tools, but unfortunately, the lack of funds limits farmers' access to more capital-intensive tools. Either via farmer-led or supported by TA programs like the UC ANR Small Farms program - cooperatively managed equipment sharing and technical assistance can help address these infrastructure barriers and increase farm viability and local food economies.

Furthermore, regional farmer training centers provide culturally relevant assistance for beginning farmers as well as continuing education for more established farmers. Investing in the development of new and existing training programs will support the growth of food systems jobs and the local farming economy. Investing in programs like CDFA's Beginning Farmer and Farmworker Training Program, as well as developing new cooperative development and equipment sharing programs will directly contribute to the creation of thriving regional food ecosystems where small and BIPOC farmers and land stewards can begin to build strength.

75%

NEARLY 75 PERCENT OF FARMS OPERATE ON LESS THAN $100,000 IN ANNUAL GROSS SALES [4]

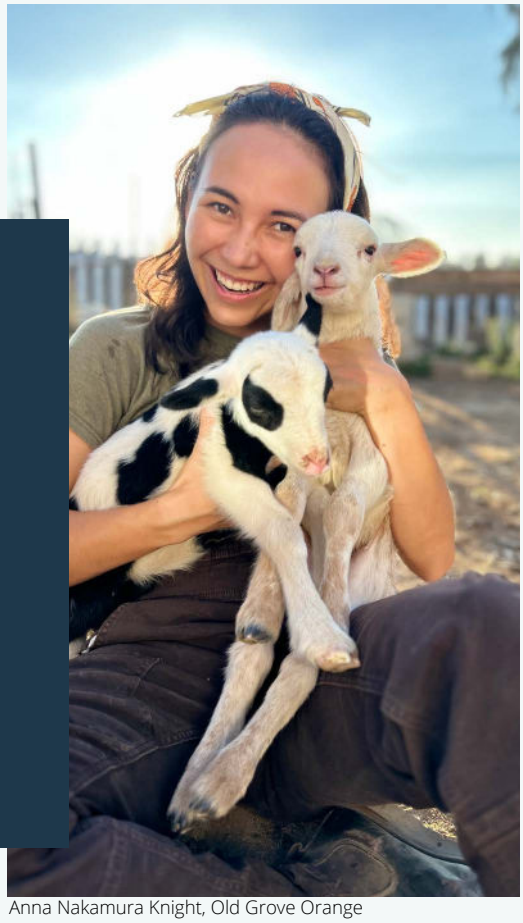
80%

OVER 80% OF FARMS OPERATE ON LESS THAN 180 ACRES [5]

[4,5] United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)— Small Farms, Big Differences: link

"Food hubs like Old Grove serve as key supply chain infrastructure for small farms - they're what connects small farmers to big eaters! Having a space for collective aggregation, investing in a shared pick/pack crew, and maintaining a unified distribution and invoicing system help establish successful, more resilient farm economies. The Farm to Community Food Hub Program is how we can all invest in the infrastructure that links your communities to your farmers!"

—Anna Nakamura Knight Old Grove Orange, San Bernardino County



Anna Nakamura Knight, Old Grove Orange



ABOUT CAFF

Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) currently represents over 8,000 small and mid-scale family farmers in California and have worked for over 45 years to preserve family-scale agriculture and promote environmental sustainability. We work to build sustainable food and farming systems through policy, advocacy and on-the-ground programs that create more resilient family farms, communities, and ecosystems.

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