



CAFF
COMMUNITY ALLIANCE
with **FAMILY FARMERS**

2025

FARMER POLICY PLATFORM



Oliveview Farm | Photo credit: Sadie Morris

Family farmers are grappling with a multitude of crises, from the devastating effects of climate change to the overwhelming consolidation of land and markets. These pressures are driving out local small businesses, making it increasingly difficult for family farmers to sustain their livelihoods and plan for extreme weather as the cost of production continues to rise. **Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) represents over 8,000 family-scale farmers across California, working to support small and underserved farmers through our programs, resources, and policy advocacy.** Our organization seeks to uplift the perspectives of all the farmers: rural and urban, small and mid-sized, beginning and multigenerational, and coming from a diversity of cultural and ethnic backgrounds and experiences.

CORE POLICY PRIORITIES



Just Economies for Family Farmers



Equitable Access to Land



Access to Water



Climate Resiliency and Disaster Relief

87%

of surveyed farmers operate on 50 acres or less

61%

of farmers identify as female, genderqueer, gender non-conforming, or nonbinary

42%

of respondents to the survey and attendees at listening sessions identified as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

Through our annual listening process, we hear loud and clear that California's family farmers are struggling to make ends meet. This feedback is reflected in the work CAFF does to actively support farmers and ranchers with market access, ecological farming, and services like regulatory compliance and grant support. **California's farmers ensure food security, responsibly steward our land and water resources, and contribute to thriving local economies.**

California's farmers make up the rich fabric of California's food and agriculture identity. This past fall we engaged nearly 500 farmers and land stewards for direct input on their most pressing challenges - through regional meetings, a multilingual online survey, and one-on-one conversations. Our state's family farm's profit margins grow thin as small farmers fight investment firms for affordable land, adapt to shifting water access, struggle to find equipment appropriate to their scale, and swing between extreme heat, drought, and flood conditions.

The following priorities are the most pressing issues our farmers face and need to be addressed in the coming 2025 legislative session:

2025 PRIORITIES FOR CALIFORNIA POLICYMAKERS

1 Invest in a just agricultural economy for family farmers



Photo Credit: Whitney Hopkins



Our costs, including insurance, utilities, labor, and property taxes, continue to rise, while our income is not rising.

— Whitney Hopkins
Hopkins River Ranch

ACTION

- Support legislation that aims to increase insurance opportunities, particularly for farmers who are experiencing skyrocketing insurance costs or who have never had access
- Safeguard the appropriation of funds from Prop 4 (Climate Bond) for family farmers. Such as investments in urban agriculture, food hubs, equipment sharing, land access, and farmer cooperatives
- Advance new policy framework for coordinated regional and statewide technical assistance in California

IMPLEMENTATION

- Provide oversight of CA Department of Food and Agriculture's (CDFA) Farm to Community Food Hub program's distribution of \$15M (FY 24-25) in programmatic funds, and ensure other existing programs are inclusive of small and underserved farmers

RESEARCH

- Identify opportunities to engage in broader coalitions to address foundational health and equity issues such as insurance and housing for farmers and farmworkers

2 Enable equitable access to land for California's small-scale, beginning, & underserved food producers



ACTION

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

IMPLEMENTATION

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



RESEARCH

- Identify opportunities to transition land through strategies such as cooperative land use models
- Investigate and develop solutions to mitigate the rapid and ongoing purchase of farmland among private equity firms and hedge funds

Juvenal Cruz, Rancho Las Palmas | Photo Credit: Christine La Photography

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



ACTION

- Ensure equitable legal representation by developing legislation mandating class counsel for small-scale farmers in groundwater basins where adjudication is occurring

IMPLEMENTATION

- Ensure Prop 4 money for Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) goes to technical assistance providers helping farmers to understand and adapt to new groundwater rules. Support strong engagement, outreach, and education to farmers most impacted by rules established by their Groundwater Sustainability Agency

4 Bolster climate resiliency and disaster relief for California's small and underserved food producers



ACTION

- Ensure reauthorization of Cap-and-Trade funding prioritizes the critical needs of small and underserved farmers who lead regenerative agricultural practices that both reduce carbon emissions and increase biodiversity. This includes climate-smart agriculture practices, land access, infrastructural investments, and more

IMPLEMENTATION

- Provide oversight of climate adaptation and mitigation programs such as CDFA's California Underserved & Small Producer to ensure existing programs are inclusive of small and underserved farmers



BACKGROUND ON TOP CHALLENGES

1 Just Economies for Family Farmers

Farmers around the US are struggling to make ends meet, and this is especially true in California.

Each year the USDA Agricultural Census shows increasing consolidation of farmland and businesses, and a decrease in family farms. While **88% of California farms are small and mid-sized operations** under 500 acres, between 2017 and 2022, we lost 7,494 small and mid-sized farm businesses for an **average of 5 farms lost per day**¹. While the average age of California's farmers continues to increase (59.9 years old in 2022), beginning farmers are burning out at alarming rates². CAFF's Farm to Market Team supports family farmers trying to access markets, but often the price earned for what farmers grow doesn't cover the true cost of production.

88%

FARMERS IN CALIFORNIA OPERATE UNDER 500 ACRES



We operate on such a razor thin budget with crop production."

—Christiana Laughlin
Sea to Sky Farm

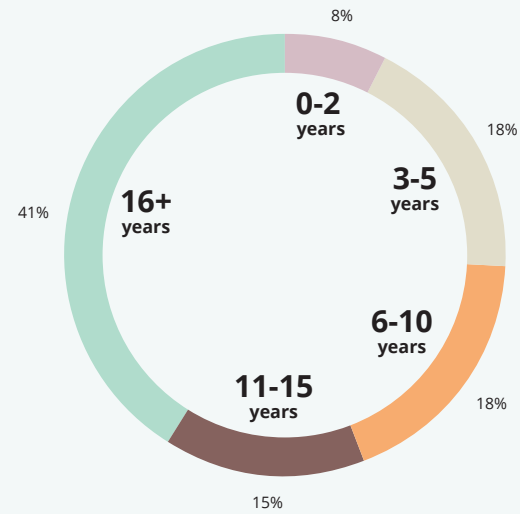
Entwined housing and insurance crises, which impact many Californians, are especially felt by farming businesses who struggle to find affordable insurance options and housing for themselves and their workers. To address these widespread issues, CAFF encourages the appropriation of funds from Prop 4 (Climate Bond) be directed to family farmers who greatly need economic support. This includes investments such as urban agriculture, food hubs, equipment sharing, and farmer cooperatives, since our farmers know the only way farms will survive is to work together.

¹ USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service (2022), Census of Agriculture - State Data. Accessed: https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2022/Full_Report/Volume_1_Chapter_1_State_Level/California/st06_1_001_001.pdf

² Milio, Eliza (2024), America's Young Farmers Are Burning Out. I Quit, Too. Time Magazine, Accessed: <https://time.com/6966324/america-young-farmers-exhaustion-essay/>



Photo Credit: Emily Ayala



Years in Agriculture of Surveyed Farmers



Photo Credit: Christiana Laughlin



Yes, we have insurance. Now we have 16 policies; one for each building, one for sales, DIC [difference in conditions] coverage, etc. It is horribly confusing and three times more costly than it was 10 years ago for half the coverage. It is terrible!"

—Emily Ayala Friend's Ranches



Photo Credit: Helen McGrath



The hyper consolidation of land [is] making it impossible for new farmers to enter the field and [pushing] generational operations out."

—Helen McGrath Flying M Ranch



5%

OF ALL LANDOWNERS OWN OVER HALF OF CALIFORNIA'S CROPLAND



37%

CROPLAND IS OWNED BY NON-FARMERS AND RENTED OR LEASED

³ Macaulay, L., & Butsic, V. (2017). Ownership characteristics and crop selection in California cropland. California Agriculture, 71(4), 221-230. Accessed: <https://doi.org/10.3733/ca.2017a0041>



I have worked for other farms for well over a decade, but obtaining my own land feels financially far out of reach. Even with the farm I work on, being a small diversified farm among monocultures I struggle to find supplies, equipment, and information that are appropriate to our scale and organic model locally."

—Anna Hazen Farm Employee



Rancho Las Palmas | Photo Credit: Christine La Photography



BACKGROUND ON TOP CHALLENGES

3 Access to Water

Access to water is a key element for the success of any farm business, and many farmers operate on land that has marginal water access, given the resulting affordability of that land. CAFF will continue to fight for equitable access to water infrastructure and planning that supports the needs of family farmers. CAFF strongly supports the need for forward-thinking groundwater management through the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), which seeks to balance groundwater use with the actual capacity of our groundwater basins.

However, many small-scale and underserved farmers around the state have not been included in their local planning conversations, and are not yet aware of forthcoming changes since SGMA implementation began in 2024. [With our partners](#), we will continue **working to ensure that 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. With the rise in adjudications in

“SGMA is the biggest impact moving forward, and so many family farmers still don't know about it”

—Chris Fields, African American Farmers of California

relation to SGMA, CAFF will fight for policy that ensures that this legal process does not override the public process enacted by the last ten years of SGMA planning and preparation. In cases where there are active adjudications, we will work to support family farmers to have a voice in the legal process, since this costly, time-intensive, and long process disadvantages small-scale and underserved farmers.



Nathaniel Brown, Brown Sugar Farm | photo credit Jason Ellas Photography

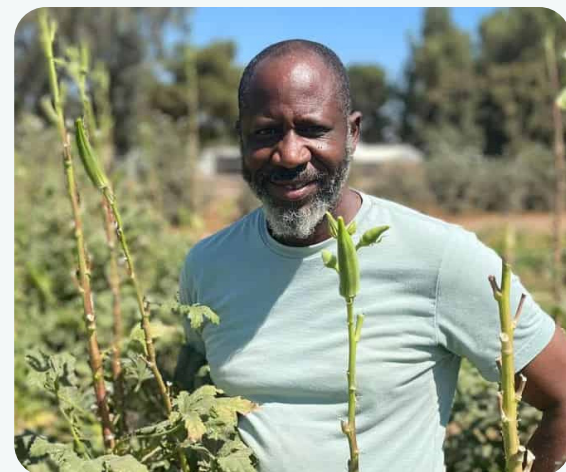


Photo Credit: Chris Fields

4 Climate Resiliency and Disaster Relief

California swings between climatic extremes of drought and flood, both of which we have seen devastate small and underserved farms in recent years. We are increasingly seeing new extremes, brought forward by climate change: devastating wildfires, smoke damage, and extreme heat. **Of the farmers who completed our 2024 survey, 70% said that their biggest barrier to farming success was financial hardship due to the climate crisis (e.g. wildfire, floods, & drought).**

In the near term, CAFF continues to fight for family farmers to access the California Underserved and Small Producer (CUSP) Program, to alleviate the hard-felt impacts of climate chaos and support disaster relief. In the long term, CAFF supports policy for climate-friendly farming practices, which is often enacted through CAFF's Ecological Farming Team. The farmers that CAFF represents are land stewards who work to ensure their farming practices support soil health and water conservation.



Saúl Yáñez, Yáñez Farms | Photo Credit: Monika Kost

Of the farmers who completed our survey, 93% identified their practices as certified organic, organic but not certified (often a cost consideration), regenerative, agroecological, or tribal foodways using traditional tribal agricultural practices. With the reauthorization of California's Cap and Trade Program, increased funding should be prioritized for the critical needs of small and underserved farmers who are the leaders of regenerative agricultural practices that both reduce carbon emissions and increase biodiversity. This includes climate-smart agriculture practices, land access, and infrastructural investments.

“Climate is forcing us to reckon with our practices. Small farmers, ranchers and land stewards, including people of color and immigrants in agriculture, are most vulnerable. We do not have the financial tolerance and capacity to adapt in ways that we know will help us to do right by the land, water and sky.”

—Heather Bernikoff
PolliNative Project at Taawim Bwiapo Ranch



Photo Credit: Elizabeth Kaiser

“Climate chaos is a tremendous threat and we need more resilience”

—Elizabeth Kaiser
Singing Frogs Farm

70%

OF FARMERS SURVEYED STRUGGLE WITH FINANCIAL HARDSHIPS AS A RESULT OF CLIMATE CHANGE

93%

IDENTIFIED THEIR PRACTICES AS ORGANIC, REGENERATIVE, AGROECOLOGICAL, OR TRIBAL FOODWAYS USING TRADITIONAL TRIBAL AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES



Photo Credit: Heather Bernikoff





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.

CONTACT

Jamie Fanous | Policy Director
jamie@caff.org

Catherine Van Dyke | Deputy Director of Water Policy
catherine@caff.org

Keely Cervantes | Policy and Organizing Manager
keely@caff.org

P.O. Box 363, Davis, CA 95617-0363
www.caff.org

