

# CALIFORNIA YOUNG FARMERS REPORT 2019



# California Young Farmers Report 2019

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*This report is dedicated to Xamuel Lara and Debby Ziegelbaum, two farmers who helped with farmer outreach for the listening sessions and survey. Both were dedicated to increasing farmer political representation and furthering racial and gender justice. May they rest in peace, and may this report uphold the spirit of their life's work.*

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The Abundant Table, Camarillo, CA  
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# Executive Summary

## **CALIFORNIA FARMERS POWER THE LARGEST AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY IN THE UNITED STATES—**

an extensive, complex, and diverse industry. The scale of its importance to the nation's food system cannot be overstated: more than a third of the country's vegetables and two-thirds of the country's fruits and nuts are grown in California. This vast production is the harvest of over 77,000 farms worked by farmers and ranchers with varied experiences, each shaped by diverse geographies and backgrounds.

The future of agriculture in California will depend on the next generation of farmers who are already stewarding the state's fields, ranches, and orchards. They are farm workers and beginning farmers. The 2017 Census of Agriculture found that 27% of current principal operators in the state of California are beginning farmers—farmers with 10 years or less experience managing their current operation. Ensuring these farmers can sustain their livelihoods is critical to the state of California. This is a key moment to understand the needs and challenges facing the next generation of farmers and ranchers who will sustain California agriculture.

The National Young Farmers Coalition (Young Farmers/the Coalition) recognizes that no two farms are alike. Farmers access land and resources in different ways, and they come from different backgrounds. Many farmers face significant structural barriers to equal opportunity in pursuing their

livelihoods. Before formulating recommendations, we need to understand the diverse experiences of California farmers and ranchers and how their business models, geographies, and identities influence the opportunities available to them and the challenges they face. And to best understand, we need to first listen to the farmers themselves.

In 2018, Young Farmers hired a California Organizer to address young farmer needs in the nation's largest agricultural state. Between March and May 2018, Young Farmers hosted five listening sessions with 36 participants in Merced, Fresno, and San Diego County, and conducted a statewide survey of 114 farmer participants.

Responses from the survey and the listening sessions are interwoven in this report to help generate an initial understanding of the experiences and needs of a broader spectrum of California's young farmers.

This report summarizes those findings to offer a deeper understanding of the top challenges and barriers facing California's young farmers and ranchers, particularly farmers of color because they have been underrepresented. With invaluable input from these farmers, we are drawing a roadmap for legislators, technical service providers, and partner organizations to build a brighter future with farmers in California.

## ***This Report is For You:***

***LEGISLATORS***, we hope you will gain understanding as to which policies will best support our young farmers and ranchers.

***TECHNICAL SERVICE PROVIDERS AND ORGANIZATIONAL PARTNERS***, we hope this will help you align your practices and priorities with farmers' needs.

***FARMERS***, we hope this will resonate with and represent you, and that you will work with us to take action in solving your top challenges.

*We hope to work with you, the reader, to support young farmers and the future of farming.*

# California's Young Farmers Face Significant Challenges

Over 50% of farmers who participated in the listening sessions and survey feel that they are not earning sufficient income to support their life goals, such as starting a family, owning a home, or saving for retirement. Salient challenges hindering farmer success include, in no particular order:

- ➔ Difficulty **securing quality farmland** with reliable and affordable water supply and proximity to markets
- ➔ Discrimination in farming due to **structural racism** hinders people of color from entering or equitably succeeding in farming
- ➔ Increasing seasonal variability and extreme weather due to **climate change** disrupts farming and communities
- ➔ **Insufficient financial returns** and assistance, such that farmers are not able to sell their products at prices commensurate with the cost of production, nor gain financial assistance or credit for intermediary support
- ➔ **Lack of market access**, as they face competition from large-scale producers and exclusion from consolidated markets that demand high volumes and expensive certifications
- ➔ Limited availability of **skilled labor** as few farmers stay or enter the field, and experienced workers are deported, which increases competition for remaining skilled farmers
- ➔ Lack of reliable **technical assistance** to help farmers learn about relevant, up-to-date agricultural, business, and environmental practices and implement them correctly using cost-effective means
- ➔ Underutilized **government policies and programs** due to difficult-to-attain minimum criteria for beginning farmers, and cumbersome, duplicative application processes

## Why are California's young farmers leaving the field?\*

1. Insufficient Compensation
2. Access to Affordable Housing
3. Land Security
4. Water Access
5. Health Insurance

*\*From survey respondents, starting with most significant.*

## Survey Participants:

**62%** are farm owners

.....  
Vegetable production constitutes the highest proportion of their sales.  
.....

**56%** are women

.....  
**75%** hold a post-high school degree  
.....

**47%** are people of color

.....  
**49%** identify as "sustainable farmers"  
.....

**41%** lease land and want to own their own farm in the future  
.....

.....  
Only **34%** own or manage their water rights

## Key Terms

### **Climate-smart Agriculture or Climate Agriculture**

Climate-smart agriculture or climate agriculture is agriculture that enhances ecological resilience, reduces or removes greenhouse gas emissions, and fosters the replenishment of natural resources.

### **Carbon Farming**

Carbon farming describes farming and ranching practices that increase soil carbon to capture and reduce atmospheric carbon pollution. These practices are part of climate agriculture.

### **Farmers**

This report uses the term “farmers” to encompass a wide range of agricultural producers, inclusive of all types of agricultural products, such as food and fiber, and of roles, such as owner, seasonal, or permanent employees.

### **Socially Disadvantaged Farmer or Rancher**

This report uses the definition of “socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher” as defined in California’s AB 1348 Farmer

Equity Act. A “socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher” means they are a member of a “socially disadvantaged group:” a group whose members have been subjected to racial, ethnic, or gender prejudice because of their identity as members of a group without regard to their individual qualities. These groups include:

- African Americans
- American Indian and Native American
- Alaskan Natives
- Hispanics/Latinx
- Asian-Americans
- Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders

### **Young Farmers**

We advocate for farmers who are in their early years of farming, and largely those under 40 years old.



# Methods

**This report draws from five listening sessions with 36 participants and a statewide survey of 114 participants that Young Farmers conducted between March and May 2018. We conducted outreach directly to Young Farmers members and supporters, worked with over 20 partner organizations to conduct outreach through print, radio, and online media in English and Spanish, and made direct calls to stakeholders. Qualitative and quantitative data from listening sessions and the survey were analyzed by Jesús Guzmán of Los Arroyos Consulting.**

## The Need for New Methods and Increased Outreach

The Coalition put particular emphasis on reaching farmers who have been historically, and who are currently, marginalized from political participation, technical services, or government resources. Farm services, and thus relationships with farmers, concentrate in Northern and the Central Coast of California, leaving large regions of California's agricultural landscape—such as the San Joaquin Valley and Southern California—relatively unconnected. Although these farmers comprise a substantial proportion of the workforce, they are underrepresented in access to agricultural services, policy discussions, and programming. In our commitment to include farmers and ranchers of all races, ethnicities, and backgrounds, we made concerted efforts to reach out to farmers

**YOUNG FARMERS** worked with agricultural service providers and reached out to community-based organizations and religious institutions in respective regions to conduct outreach. Outreach was conducted in English, Spanish, and Hmong.

While we relied on existing, trusted community relationships, we acknowledge that we must continue to create connections of trust in order for farmers and ranchers, particularly those who have been marginalized, to be engaged in this work. This need was demonstrated in the makeup of the listening sessions as compared to the survey. The listening sessions were attended by majority people of color—all but three identified as non-White—whereas only 42% of survey respondents were non-White. This indicates a need for increased resourcing of in-person communication with communities of color.

Read **YOUNG FARMERS'** equity statement at [youngfarmers.org/equity](http://youngfarmers.org/equity).

in under-represented, yet agriculturally intensive communities and regions. By doing so, Young Farmers hopes to contribute to California's agricultural landscape by helping to amplify often unheard voices and contribute narrative evidence that can meaningfully shape policy proposals.

## Listening Sessions

We conducted five listening sessions in Merced, Fresno, and San Diego, engaging 36 participants of whom 21 were farmers and 15 were individuals who work directly with farmers. These locations were selected because of their high agricultural output and activity, as well as their underrepresentation in farmer advocacy networks.

Of the 21 farmers who participated in the listening sessions, 20 were under 35-years-old. While fifteen were multi-generational farmers, only four of the total number of participants owned their farmland. Twenty-four participants farm on 10-50 acres, and three farm on less than ten acres. All participants produced vegetables as their only product, or as their primary product in a diversified perennial, animal, and vegetable system.

## Survey

Young Farmers circulated the California Young Farmers Survey between March and May 2018. The survey builds on Young Farmers' 2017 National Young Farmers Survey and was adapted to include questions about California-specific policies, programs, and issues. The survey was advertised in printed flyers that were distributed at food and farming events and agricultural conferences across the state; farming workshops in San Diego; and farmers markets in San Diego, Fresno, Merced, San Francisco, Santa Barbara, and Chico. Notice was promoted electronically in farming organization newsletters, crop association emails, agricultural email listservs, social media channels, agricultural universities and educational programs, and to the Young Farmers membership. There were 114 respondents to the survey.

Individual responses from the online survey were analyzed using R Statistics software. The Excel file was transformed to create over 300 unique variables with 114 values each representing the number of total survey respondents. The data was transformed into either two-way tables or data visualizations such as bar charts, including a geospatial mapping of respondents' ZIP codes using Tableau. The analysis also included a regression analysis testing for independence with water rights and demographic variables assigned as binary variables set to either "yes" or "no." The results are reported in a standard regression table with a description interpreting the results.

# Regional Context of Listening Sessions

## San Diego

San Diego County has more small farms and certified organic farms than any other county in the U.S. Within the county, agriculture is among the top five largest economic industries and contributes \$2.8 billion to the local economy annually. The average age of a San Diego County farmer, however, is 62 years old—above the state and national average. Younger farmers are largely first-time farmers.

### **YOUNG FARMERS heard from San Diego farmers that their priorities are to understand:**

1. How to find good, farmable land in San Diego—factors to consider, tools available;
2. Costs of starting up a farm and financing options—how much does it cost, what are start-up and ongoing sources of support, what are models of community-supported agricultural (CSA) financing;
3. Alternative business planning—planning for fair labor and sustainable agriculture, cooperatively owned businesses;
4. Sustainable production practices—technical assistance that’s outside the extractive paradigm; accountable technical services; climate-smart farming; and,
5. Understanding farm policy— farm bill, water policies, land use policies.

### **References:**

Agricultural Weights and Measures, Department of. 2015. Crop Statistics and Annual Report. County of San Diego. Retrieved from [http://www.sandiegocounty.gov/awm/crop\\_statistics.html](http://www.sandiegocounty.gov/awm/crop_statistics.html)

Batra Ecological Strategies March 2018 “The Opportunity of Carbon Farming in San Diego,”

## San Joaquin Valley

The top five California agricultural producing regions, by value, are in the San Joaquin Valley, including Merced and Fresno. Fresno County, which ranks third, produces \$6.18 billion in agricultural value.

In Fresno County alone, nearly half of the region’s over 4,000 family farms are operated by ethnic minorities. This is striking when compared to 2017 Census of Agriculture data, which show that approximately 95% of U.S. producers are White. More than 54% of these family operations are run by Asian and Asian-American operators, the majority of whom are refugee farmers from Southeast Asia. Additionally 1,600 farm operators are Latinx. It is, thus, essential to understand the needs of Asian, Asian-American, and Latinx farmers.

### **Farmers in Fresno expressed that their primary challenges are:**

1. Farm location and affordability—long distances between housing and farmland; increasing rental rates for housing and farmland;
2. Opaque policies regarding farm regulations and infrastructure—few means of finding out about how to influence policy; lack of representation;
3. Unstable market access—inconsistent buyers; consolidation of buyers that require large quantities;
4. Farmer over-production and competition—farmers chase common market trends, thus overproducing and flooding the market with a single crop, which lowers product prices;
5. Disparity between cost of production of cost of goods—market prices haven’t gone up with cost of production and,
6. Shortage of skilled labor.

### **References:**

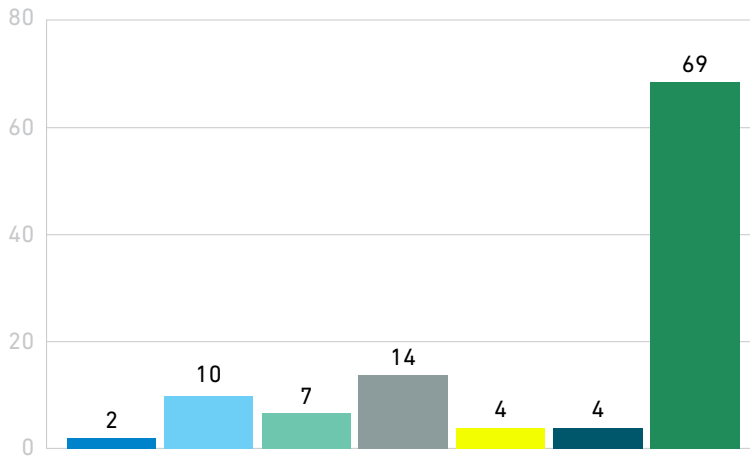
California County Agricultural Commissioners’ reports Crop Year 2015-2016  
2012 Ag Census Fresno County Race, Ethnicity and Gender Profiles



# Who Are California's Young Farmers?

Demographic data is from 114 survey respondents from across California. Respondents largely had fewer than 10 years of farming experience and operate between 1 and 3,500 acres, with a median of 14.5 acres and a mean of 256 acres.

## Race/Ethnicity:



### Legend

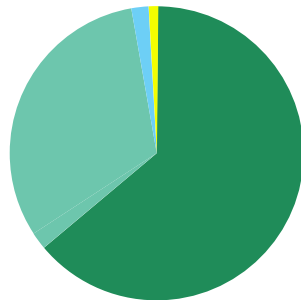
- American Indian
- Asian/Asian-American
- Black/African-American
- Hispanic/Latinx
- Other Race
- Two Major Races
- White

Sixty percent of survey participants identified as White, while 32% of participants identified as non-White.

*N/A responses indicate that participants did not mark an answer.*

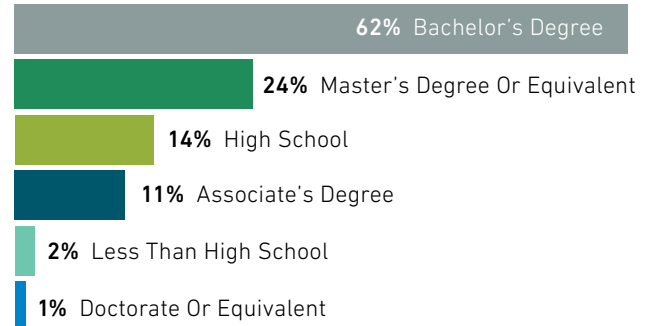
## Gender:

- Female **73%**
- Male **36%**
- Gender Non-binary **2%**
- Transgender **1%**



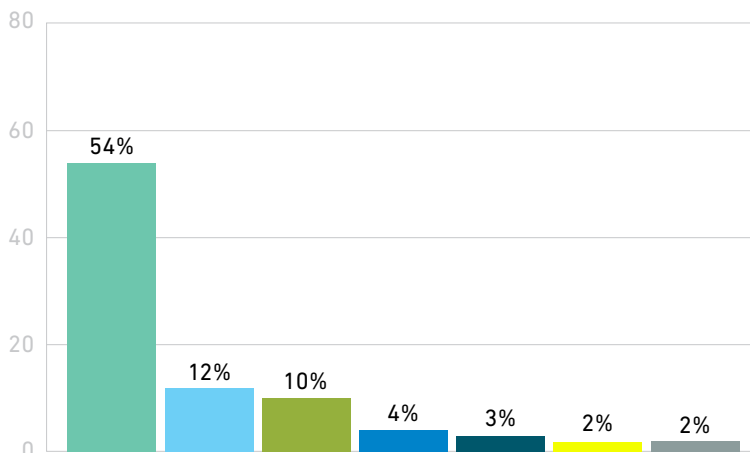
The majority of participants (73%) identify as female, and their numbers are more than double the next highest gender category (male).

## Education:



More than half of participants obtained Bachelor's degrees as their highest education.

## Farm Role:



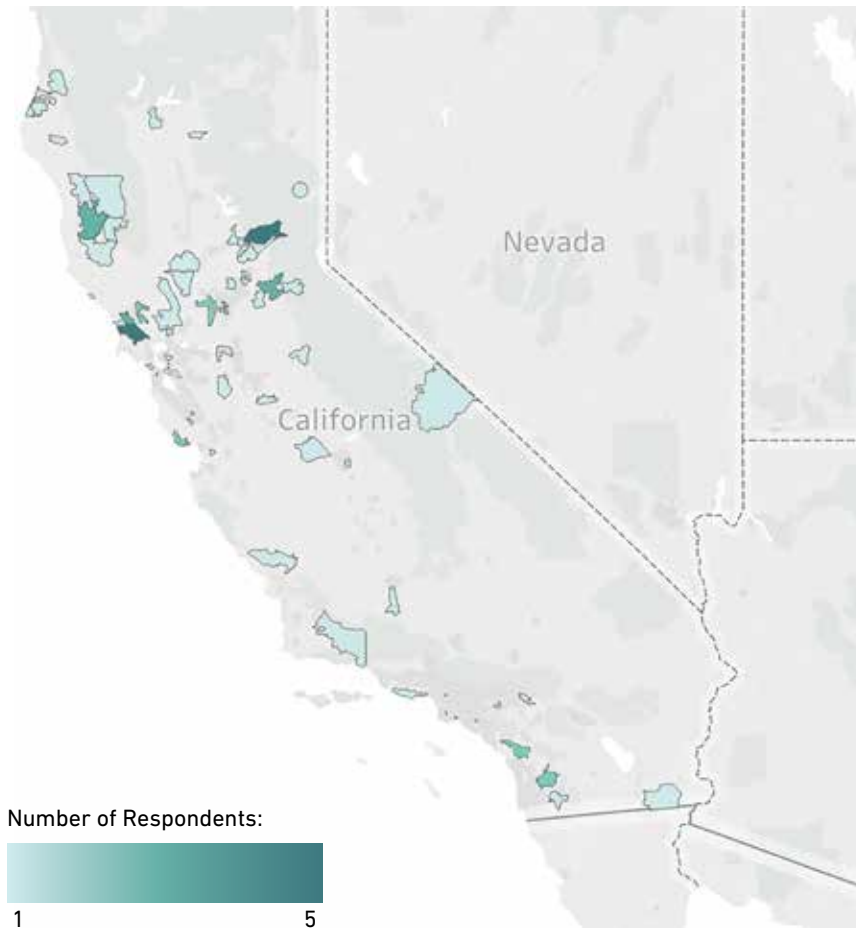
### Legend

- Farm Owner
- Farm Manager
- Farm Worker
- Family Member
- Other
- Intern/Apprentice
- Farm Owner and Work at Other Farm

Nearly half of respondents are farm business owners, and the next largest groups were farm managers and farm workers.

# Who Are California's Young Farmers? *Continued*

## Residential Distribution by ZIP Code of Survey Respondents:



## Farm Production by Type:

- 66.2% Vegetables
- 54.5% Fruit and Nuts
- 53.2% Flowers
- 20.8% Other
- 19.5% Nursery, Floriculture
- 16.9% Small Grains
- 13% Poultry
- 13% Seeds
- 10.4% Honey
- 9.1% Hogs
- 9.1% Sheep
- 7.8% Dairy: Cows, Sheep, or Goats
- 6.5% Beef Cattle
- 6.5% Field Crops (i.e. Corn, Soybeans)
- 6.5% Other Livestock
- 2.6% Cannabis
- 2.6% Forest Products

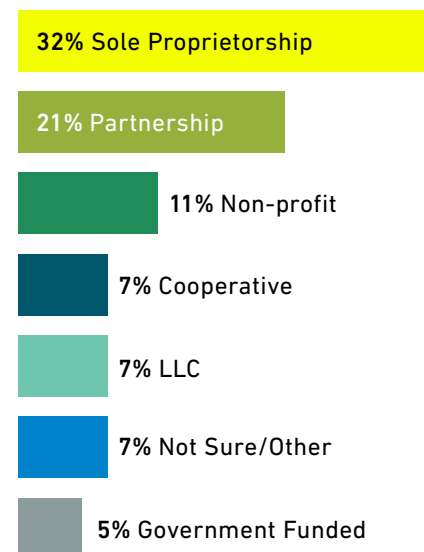
Vegetables are the most common farm product and also represented the highest portion of farm sales for 49.8% of respondents.

## Farming Background and Current Business:

WHERE DID RESPONDENTS LEARN TO FARM	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Working on a farm	50	61%
Apprenticeship or internship program	41	50%
Volunteering	29	35%
Community gardening	23	28%
College/University/Community College program	19	23%
Other	19	23%
College farm	16	20%
Growing up on a farm	13	16%
Non-degree training course	8	10%
Incubator farm	2	3%

*Percentages based on 82 responses. Percentages have been rounded and sum to more than 100% because respondents were allowed to choose multiple options.*

## Farm Business Structures:



# Challenges

Farming is a remarkably challenging career. Even those farmers with the skills and dedication to be successful face staggering challenges to supporting themselves and their families on a farm income. For this reason, many of California's young farmers have left the field.

Our survey asked about major structural challenges facing young farmers. The following emerged as the top challenges;

**INSUFFICIENT COMPENSATION:** Seventy percent of survey respondents who reported they were no longer farming cited insufficient compensation as the primary reason they left the field.

**LACK OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND LAND ACCESS:** Though often considered separate problems, California farmers revealed the interconnection between affordable housing and access to quality farmland. "Rent kept going up for where I lived and where I farmed. I couldn't afford both rent and the commute, so I got a job that simply pays the bills," said a Fresno County former farmer.

**WATER ACCESS:** Water access and scarcity ranked as a significant challenge for 40% of respondents who are no longer farming. "My well was drying up, then the place next to me sold to a housing developer who was going to put 300 homes on the property. I knew my well would never replenish," said a former San Diego farmer.

**HEALTH INSURANCE:** While respondents who continue to farm indicated that the Affordable Care Act has been an important program to their success, health insurance remains expensive for farmers with middle incomes.

Our listening sessions provided necessary context to the survey to reveal the scale of these barriers as well as the complex dynamics involved in these systems challenges. The list below—elaborated on in the following sections—illustrates the themes that participants highlighted when asked about the main challenges they face:

**SECURING LAND TENURE** of quality farmland with reliable and affordable water supply and proximity to markets;

**STRUCTURAL RACISM** hinders young people of color from entering or succeeding in farming;

**CLIMATE CHANGE** increases seasonal variability and extreme weather conditions that disrupt farming and communities;

**INSUFFICIENT FINANCIAL RETURNS AND ASSISTANCE** such that farmers are not able to sell their products at prices commensurate with the cost of production, nor gain financial assistance and credit for intermediary support;

**MARKET ACCESS** as they face competition from large-scale producers and exclusion from consolidated markets that demand high volumes and expensive certifications;

**LIMITED AVAILABILITY OF SKILLED LABOR** as few farmers stay or enter the field and experienced workers are deported, which increases competition for remaining skilled farmers;

**RELIABLE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE** that helps farmers learn about relevant, up-to-date agricultural, business, and environmental practices and implement them correctly using cost-effective means; and,

**GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND PROGRAMS** are difficult to make use of because of difficult-to-attain minimum criteria for beginning farmers and cumbersome, duplicative application processes.

## Reasons for Not Entering the Field

During the listening sessions, aforementioned matters of land security, high capital costs, insufficient compensation, and water scarcity factored into reasons for not entering farming. Several farmers in listening sessions pointed to historical race-based exploitation, oppression, and inequality as additional reasons young people do not enter into farming:

**“Latinx folks are not encouraged to go into farming because of the negative connotations that come with farming. Youth are very dismissive about the work their parents do and have no connection with the food they eat everyday.”**

–Latinx Participant

**“When we talk to kids about farming, they say that ‘It’s slave’s work. Why should we do it?’”**

–Member Of The African-American Farmers Association

**“The younger [Hmong-American] generation sees that it’s a lot of work and not good pay. They don’t want to work as hard as their parents did.”**

–Second-generation Hmong-American Farmer

## Structural Racism

Due to the systemic pervasiveness of racism, manifestations of structural racism are presented within each section. In turn, suggestions for addressing racial equity and justice through policy are embedded in the Recommendations.

**Despite these challenges, farmers can persevere and even thrive with the help of effective farmer services and supportive agricultural policy. Each of the following sections presents potential policy changes—often already trialed and proven in other states—that may be enacted in California to support the next generation of farmers.**



Listening Session, San Diego, CA

# Securing Land Tenure

## Introduction

Reliable farmland tenure is the foundation of a successful farm business. It is essential for farmers to be able to invest in the health of their businesses, families, and ecosystems. Without land security, the risk of increasing financial investment in infrastructure or environmental stewardship can be greater than a young farmer can afford.

While 62% of respondents were farm business owners, only 27% of total respondents were land owners. Of the 41% of respondents who were renters, many reported not feeling secure on their land. Of renters, the largest proportion (48%) had one-to-five-year leases which are often too short a period for building healthy soil, reaping perennial crops, and investing in critical infrastructure. Twenty-eight percent of renters have had to move one to three times over the course of their farming careers.

We asked farmers about their greatest barriers to securing farmland. The top barriers reported include rising land prices, appropriateness of potential lands, distance of available land to key markets, lack of affordable housing, and the additional challenges that face farmers of color.

**“After 9 years, I may be close to shutting down my farm. I have no water on one parcel (my family land) and no security on the other. I have student loans and I live in one of the most expensive states in the country.”**

**—Survey Respondent**

## Rising Prices and Pressure for Land

Sixty-eight percent of participating farmers reported that land costs more to purchase than the value of what they can reasonably produce from agricultural production.

Renters have seen lease rates rapidly increasing. “Rent has gone from \$400/acre to \$800/acre in eight years. The cost of everything has gone up, except food,” said a Fresno farmer, indicating that while farmland rates have increased, farm revenues have not kept pace with farm expenses and specifically land expenses.

Many farmers in listening sessions reported identifying a piece of land they hoped to purchase only to be out-bid by developers or

non-farmer owners. “I was outbid by someone who lives in New York and wanted a vacation home,” said a Sonoma County farmer. While retiring farmers may want to see their land continue as a farm, farmers who were prospective buyers reported that the retiring farmer may still opt to sell to a higher-bidding developer. “I talked with an older farmer for a long time about taking over his farm because he had no kids interested in farming and he wanted to see his land passed to another farmer. I could afford his price, but in the end, he sold it to a developer who offered way more than I could afford,” said a San Diego farmer.

Farmers are seeing commercial and residential development pressure increase around them. A Fresno farmer shared, “A housing developer bought the orchard on both sides of us, and they offered us \$500,000 for our seven acres [with a house]. They’re waiting until more development comes here and will build houses over this farmland, and we’re in the way.” Surrounding development can lead to negative impacts on the farm, such as runoff of household and vehicle toxins into



soil, reduced groundwater recharge, increased flooding due to pavement, and increased heat because of decreased vegetation. Aside from ecological factors, non-farm neighbors may not be sympathetic to farm practices such as manure application, tillage, or other activities they might find disruptive. The farmer also faces a diminished farming community to lean on for assistance or camaraderie.

### Land Appropriateness

One hundred percent of land-owning farmers said they struggle to find additional farmland that does not have poor soil, has not been overgrazed, is not on a steep slope, and that has sufficient water. For farmers in the Fresno region, they reported that it's difficult to find farmland that still has sufficient nutrients and tilth after being overgrazed or managed intensively with tillage and chemicals, yet it is all they can immediately afford. "We could only afford non-traditional farmland (on a steep slope, bad soil, overgrazed)," said a survey respondent.

Lack of sufficient, reliable, good-quality water frequently arose as the primary missing resource on available farmland. "When my friends and I look for land, the first thing we ask is whether there's water. It's not a given around here," said a Fresno farmer.

### Distance to Markets

Farmers expressed that finding affordable farmland close to markets can be challenging and that they must choose between land security and market access. "I'm very close to the Bay Area and have great customers who care about farming and the food I grow, but I'm on a lease by a non-profit that keeps threatening

to shut down. I'm always worried that I'll suddenly have to move, and nothing around here is affordable. ...I'd have to move far away for anything I can afford, but I'd be far from my customers," said a vegetable farmer.

One farmer commented that while they are content with their farm property, "the cost of fuel and repairs for my refrigerated truck to deliver to customers is a significant part of my operating expenses."

Urban growth puts an increasing amount of unprotected farmland at the urban-rural interface in the same market as residential and commercial development. This substantially increases the value of the land making it unaffordable to young farmers. Farmland at that interface needs to be protected from development in order for farmers to easily access markets and customers. For farmers who are further from their markets, there needs to be reliable and affordable storage and distribution infrastructure.

### Affordable Housing

Farmers are in need of on-farm housing or affordable options near farms. Thirty-two percent of respondents said that they can't find land with housing or in an area with nearby housing. The combined costs of farmland and housing create a financially daunting scenario for respondents. "When I'm not dealing with the cost of land going up, I'm dealing with [housing] rent going up. It's all too much," said a second generation Fresno farmer.

Sometimes operating on good quality farmland necessitates a long commute. "It's hard to live far from the farm, but it's so hard to find a good piece of land, that it's worth the travel," said a farmer who travels three hours daily to and from the farm property they lease.

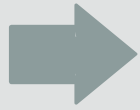
### Race and Land Access

While respondents who identified as White pointed to the cost of land as their greatest challenge, farmers of color defined additional challenges to accessing land.

The majority of African-American and Hispanic/Latinx farmers indicated that their greatest challenges pertained to knowledge of resources to help them look for land or to develop a lease. "My family has farmed for generations and I grew up in the city. I don't know how to start looking for land and who to ask for help," said an African-American farmer during a listening session, and other farmers across races agreed. They also voiced that they are unclear about reasonable rates for farmland in their areas, as well as how to negotiate lease agreements.

The majority of Asian-American farmers ranked being outbid by non-farmers and being unable to find well-resourced land as their top challenges. An ongoing challenge for a majority of American Indian respondents is the cost of housing on or near farmland.





# RECOMMENDATIONS

***California must do more to ensure that its farmers can access land for production. Farmers expressed that this challenge is multi-faceted and that the state can develop various solutions to address these complex barriers to land access. While many of these challenges result from California-specific circumstances, there are many precedents for state policy changes that can better support the next generation of farmers.***

- 1. Use state resources to purchase land and resell to beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers at affordable prices.** In Rhode Island, the voluntary Farmland Access Program enables the state to purchase farmland threatened with development, protect it with a permanent conservation easement, and affordably sell it to young and beginning farmers looking for land. Fund to implement the program came from a 2014 voter-approved bond referendum.
- 2. Reduce competition for farmland from non-agricultural buyers.** Vermont, Massachusetts, and New York have adopted farmland protection programs that support working farm easements designed to protect the land and the farmer through use of farmer ownership and affordability provisions. Anti-corporate farming laws can also serve to restrict the involvement of certain corporations in agricultural production. The specific provisions of these laws vary by state, but have been adopted in Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. A common provision in many of these laws is to prohibit, or set limits on the size of, corporations' agricultural landholdings.
- 3. Develop incentives for farmland and infrastructure transition to beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers.** The 2017 Minnesota Beginning Farmer Tax Credit, for example, provides an income and franchise tax credit for the sale or rental of farm land or assets (including land, livestock, buildings, and machinery) to beginning farmers. Since it was signed into law in 2017, this program has granted over \$2 million in tax credits to more than 400 asset owners.
- 4. Fund agricultural conservation easements** and allow for prioritization of projects that benefit beginning, socially disadvantaged, and small-scale farmers. California's current Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation (SALC) Program uses AB 32 cap and trade funding to support conservation easements. Expanding funding for SALC and prioritizing funding for projects that benefit beginning, socially disadvantaged, and small-scale farmers will ensure that California's farmland remains protected and affordable to these farmers now and for generations to come.
- 5. Support farmer tenants' rights.** Expanding Just Cause Eviction to support farmer tenants will provide this population with similar protections as the elderly and disabled by increasing eviction standards.
- 6. Make affordable, quality farmer housing available near or on farms.** The California Institute for Rural Studies coordinated the "Farmworker Housing Study and Action Plan for Salinas Valley and Pajaro Valley," which evaluated current farmworker housing conditions and needs, and offered regionally-relevant recommendations to reduce barriers and create farmworker housing. In New York State, a farmworker housing loan program provides low-interest loans to build farmworker housing.
- 7. Introduce an equity framework for land transfer and agricultural policies and programs.** California's 2017 Farmer Equity Act provides a model for institutionalizing equity checks for agricultural policy, such as mechanisms for ensuring delivery of resources and reach of programs to socially disadvantaged farmers.

# Climate Change

## Introduction

Farmers and ranchers are on the front lines of experiencing the effects of climate change. Fires, extreme heat, and drought dramatically affect when and what farmers can plant, how many animals can be kept and under what conditions, and the human, environmental, and economic health of farming communities. Climate change presents new challenges, yet many farmers see agriculture as part of the solution.

## Fire, Heat, and Extreme Weather

Californians have experienced record-breaking fires and heat waves not only year-after-year, but also within a single year. Unprecedented storms cause flooding and erosion that destabilize soil, farms, and communities. These extreme conditions jeopardize farmer lives and livelihoods. This is what farmers are reporting from the fields:



**“We are surrounded by fires every year. The peak of growing season is interrupted by evacuating neighbors, and once the fires are over, no one wants to come here. We lose farmers and customers.”**

– Mendocino County Farmer

**“Farmers’ market sales dropped 25-50% for months after the Tubbs Fire because air quality and tourism was low as people avoided going outside or visiting the area.”**

– Sonoma County Farmer

**“It’s hotter each year, and we lose more and more of our crops from the extreme heat. We lost all 100 of our laying hens when temperatures suddenly reached 120 degrees.”**

– San Diego Farmer

**“The smoke [from fires] darkened the skies when my starts were in a photo-sensitive period. Many yellowed and withered. You can’t unblock the sun.”**

– Yolo County Vegetable Farmer

**“It’s painful to harvest—my eyes sting [from smoke] and I can hardly breathe. But I have to harvest to make a living.”**

– Sonoma County Farmer

**“I didn’t make any money in the spring because of the storms. I’m not sure from year-to-year if I’ll be able to get my crops in the ground at the right time. It’s unpredictable.”**

– Marin County Farmer



## Water Scarcity

California farmers know well the fundamental importance of water. They also know, 12 years into a crippling drought, that water is not an element to be taken for granted.

Farmers from our listening sessions and survey report significant barriers to accessing water, including the financial barriers of purchasing expensive surface water rights, drilling deeper wells to chase retreating groundwater, and municipal fees for irrigation. "I have no irrigation at my home farm, the well collapsed, and I cannot afford to dig a new well," said a survey respondent.

Thirty-nine percent of respondents rely on municipal tap water, which they say can be difficult to afford. "Municipal water is very expensive, and we have to pay commercial rates because the city does not have an agricultural rate," said a survey respondent. Some farmers believe that urban users who share the tap with agricultural producers are not pushed to conserve water, while farmers must reduce their water use as prices increase. "The cost of water went up with the drought, but urban users expect water on demand. So, water prices went up, but we're the ones who really feel it hitting our businesses," said a San Diego farmer.

Water scarcity threatens not only the immediate farm property, but also surrounding ecosystems. Some farmers felt they must choose between growing their crops or depleting a water supply essential to their environs. "We don't have enough water for our crops, so we pump from the well, which we know takes a toll on our surroundings. With the big fires around us each year, we can't help but feel connected and some guilt for using this precious water," said a Lake County farmer.

### Percentage of respondents accessing each source of water as primary source:

**51% Groundwater**

**39% Municipal Tap**

**23% Direct Surface Water**

**17% Other**

**13% Shares Through Water Entity**

*Percentages based on 71 responses.*

*Percentages may not add up due to rounding.*



**Percentage of respondents engaged in each listed water program:**

PROGRAM	YES	NO
<p><b>Integrated Regional Water Management Planning:</b> a regulatory process that promotes bringing together and prioritizing water-related efforts in the region.</p>	6%	30%
<p><b>Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program:</b> regulates discharges from irrigated agricultural lands.</p>	10%	30%
<p><b>State Water Efficiency and Enhancement Program (SWEET):</b> provides grants to implement irrigation systems that reduce greenhouse gases and save water on California agricultural operations.</p>	4%	31%
<p><b>Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA):</b> regulatory mechanism for groundwater use; formed groundwater sustainability agencies (GSAs) from local and regional authorities</p>	13%	27%

**How Farmers Are Addressing Climate Change**

Many listening session and survey respondents see agriculture as part of the solution to addressing climate change. Farmers are already implementing a diversity of on-farm practices to increase farm resilience to extreme weather events. For example, one survey respondent reported, “[I have a] huge focus on cultivating drought-tolerant and perennial [crops],” and another said, “We practice planned grazing with lots of restoration practices like careful riparian protection, grazing, and tree planting.” Below are other climate agriculture practices that survey participants reported implementing:

FARM PRACTICE:	PERCENTAGE:
Cover Crops .....	60%
Mulching .....	60%
Building Soil Organic Matter .....	60%
Crop Rotation .....	56%
Water Conservation .....	52%
Integrated Pest Management .....	50%
On-Farm Composting .....	44%
Reduced or No Tillage .....	44%
Animal Rotation .....	27%

Some farmers from socially disadvantaged groups voiced that elements of their cultural farming practices are now seen as important tools for mitigating climate change, yet they were pressured to abandon those practices. This pressure came either directly from farm advisors, or indirectly through market pressure to produce high yields. “We always rotated our fields with animals and other crops, but we were told [in the U.S.] that we have to produce more, otherwise we are not good farmers,” said a farmer who immigrated to California from Southeast Asia. The high cost and low security of land also hinders implementation of these practices. “I can’t afford to leave land fallow in rotations,” said one Fresno farmer. Another who previously farmed in Thailand added, “I can only get leases for a few years at a time, which isn’t enough to leave any fallow or rotate like I would have back home.”

Agriculture can be used to fight climate change by engaging these farmers who have existing knowledge of land and ecologically-sustainable philosophies. By ensuring their farm security and sustainability, rewarding their practices, and compensating them to propagate their knowledge, we can have a large-scale impact on mitigating climate change.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

*Farmers and ranchers collectively manage substantial stretches of our ecosystems, and must be included in designing and implementing climate-smart agriculture solutions for the future. “We work the land, and the land has a huge potential to store carbon,” said a Yolo County farmer. In particular, farmers who hold knowledge of ecological management outside of mainstream industrial agriculture conventions should be engaged so that alternative models for stewarding farm ecosystems may be implemented.*

*The core recommendation for the State of California is to include farmers in creating and implementing regional Climate Action Plan (CAP) strategies.*

- 1. Reward existing carbon sequestering, greenhouse gas-limiting, and ecologically beneficial practices.** California can create state funding for farmers already engaged in ecological and climate-smart agriculture to support and expand their sustainable practices. Likewise, there is a need to compensate innovation, and the state should fund farmers with knowledge and experience in ecological and climate-smart agriculture for work as peer-to-peer advisors.
- 2. Expand mitigation funds or carbon offset mechanisms to finance on-farm practices and technical assistance for climate-smart agriculture.** The current Healthy Soils Initiative, funded by AB 32 Cap and Trade, is a nation-leading example of mitigation funds. Farmers participating in the initiative report a need for increased technical assistance for implementation.
- 3. Ensure technical assistance for climate-smart agriculture reaches and is culturally appropriate for young and socially disadvantaged farmers.** The California Department of Food and Agriculture has funding through AB 2377 for technical assistance for its climate-smart agriculture program. California should ensure that technical assistance and training is available in multiple languages, presented in relevant pedagogies, and reaches beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers. These strategies should be further incorporated into any new climate initiatives or networks.
- 4. Reduce program fees and increase set-aside funding for socially disadvantaged farmers.** California SB 535 directs 25% of the proceeds from the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund to projects that provide a benefit to disadvantaged communities. This set-aside enables socially disadvantaged communities to gain financial resources to help address historic inequities and injustices.
- 5. Provide disaster management planning for farms of all sizes.** California’s farms are at risk from natural disasters such as wildfire, earthquakes, and flooding. The state should seek to provide adequate resources to annual regional disaster management planning and to create safe evacuation plans for farmers and farm workers in the event of natural disaster.

# Insufficient Financial Returns and Assistance

## Introduction

Despite their hard work and productivity, California farmers report difficulty gaining sufficient financial returns to make their farm careers viable. The combined challenges of unaffordable land and climate change, as well as a shortage of skilled labor, and increased domestic and global competition, has meant higher production costs while food prices have remained relatively level.

“The costs of everything has gone up: labor, land, water, fuel. Everything except food. My costs for production have doubled in a few years, especially since the minimum wage laws, but I’m getting paid the same for my tomatoes. How do they expect us to make a living?” said a Hmong-American farmer in Fresno.

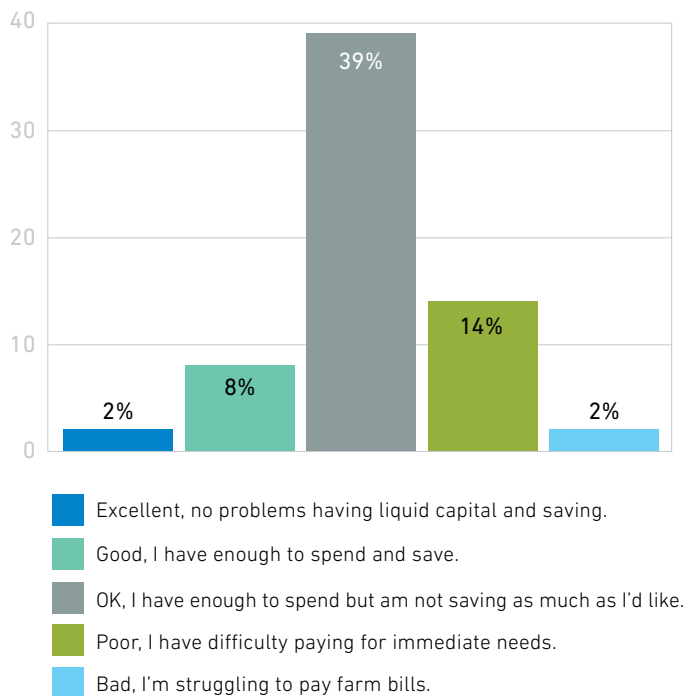
**“You can’t make that much money, so the kids are leaving and we don’t have a farming community of people who know how to farm.”**

**—Hmong-American farmer in Fresno**

Only 51.43% of survey respondents who are currently farming feel that their current income will support their life goals, such as starting a family, owning a home, or saving for retirement. Of farmers who left the field, sufficient compensation was the top reason for leaving.

Their financial challenges are not only long-term, but also urgent. Farmers in the listening sessions and the survey reported challenges with monthly cash flow. Sixty-percent of respondents reported having enough to spend but not being able to save, and 21.5% described their monthly cash flow as “poor” and reported only being able to pay for immediate needs. “We are just living day by day,” said a farmer in the Fresno listening session.

How do respondents feel about their monthly cash flow?:



According to farmers in listening sessions, some farmers compensate for insufficient farm income with off-farm jobs. One survey respondent said that the key to their ability to farm is having “adequate financial resources available from paid employment that [is] used to subsidize farming activities.” While this may be an option for some farmers, a farmer in San Diego suggested that this configuration may not be tenable for all farmers. “A lot [of farmers] have off-farm jobs, that’s the only way they can manage; it makes it more stable but it’s not a very attractive situation to take over. Stable within one generation only, kids are more likely to sell land because it is valuable but production is not,” said a farmer in San Diego.

In some situations it may be a farmer’s life partner or family member that supplements farm income. A San Diego farmer said, “My wife has a nine-to-five job that provides us a stable income and health care. She wants to change jobs, though, and it’d be far from the farm. We’re trying to figure that out.” That farmer’s situation was not uncommon, and also relates to the issues of finding affordable farmland near urban centers that offer more job opportunities than in rural settings.

**Limited Financing Opportunities**

The seasonal nature of farm production, and thus farm income, means that many farmers rely on lines of credit to pay for seed, repairs, cultivation, and improvements between harvests. Acquiring additional land and appropriate equipment to grow a farm business can also be too costly to purchase upfront, and may require financing support. Farmers in the listening sessions and survey reported that they are limited in their financing options.

Of the 74 respondents who found credit access to be a challenge, knowing their loan options was the top difficulty (36% of respondents). The other two high-ranking challenges for respondents were lack of credit history or having bad credit, and needing assistance with loan management.

In survey responses, farmers stated that they would like policy changes that would increase their financial opportunities:

**“I think we need more funding resources that don't put us into a hole later on, [and] more grants in particular to finance startups.”** said a survey respondent.

**“[We should be] ensuring that young farmers are subsidized, and that there are more incentives to farm, such as loan forgiveness,”** wrote another survey respondent.

In addition to increased access to funds, farmers said that they want clarity on what documentation will be expected of them.

**“New programs and regulations come around and suddenly demand years of records in the past. How would I know I was supposed to keep it for a new policy in the future? Do they think we have time machines?”** said a Fresno farmer.

**Percentage of respondents who struggle with each of the listed credit-related challenges:**

CREDIT ACCESS PROBLEM	PERCENTAGE
I don't know my loan options .....	36%
I lack credit history or have bad credit .....	23%
I need assistance with loan management .....	18%
I was denied credit by a bank because the loan officer did not understand my farm practices or business model .....	8%
I was denied credit by a bank because I don't have the required farming experience .....	4%
I was denied credit by the USDA because the FSA agent did not understand my farm practices or business model .....	4%
I qualified for a loan but it was too little money .....	3%
I was denied credit by USDA because I don't have the required farming experience .....	1%
I was denied credit by USDA because I was told by USDA that there was no loan funds available right now .....	1%
Language differences .....	1%

# ➔ RECOMMENDATIONS

*Creating accessible grants and low-interest loans along with loan management education and support can help farmers gain financial stability, but these programs should be coupled with efforts to ensure that the price a farmer receives matches the cost of food production.*

1. **Expand grant opportunities that directly fund farmers.** In Mendocino County, the Good Farm Fund has a simple process for farmers to apply for direct, upfront grants with a maximum request of \$5,000.
2. **Increase farmers' ability to sell to all consumers by ensuring all farmers markets have equipment and capacity to accept EBT and WIC credit, along with matching funds programs.** Through AB 1321, \$5 million was approved for nutrition incentive programs such as Market Match, which doubles EBT dollars at farmers markets. The efficacy of this bill relies on support for farmers markets to operate EBT machines and reimburse farmers for EBT and matching program sales.



# Market Access

## Introduction

Farmers in listening sessions and representatives from wholesale buying companies reported that entities along the commodity chain are consolidating within and across sectors. This consolidation results in a decrease in potential buyers and prices paid out to farmers, as well as an increase in required certifications.

The dominance of large and consolidated companies has also led to a decrease in independent businesses and jobs. Diminished opportunities for stable, quality rural jobs has, according to farmers, been a motivation for people to move to cities. This movement decreases the local client base for on-farm and direct sales. Those engaged in or trying to enter direct marketing, such as community supported agriculture (CSA) and farmers markets, find that those channels are increasingly competitive as other farmers are pushed out of wholesale options, and as large-scale farms enter these channels.

## Consolidation of Wholesale Markets

Farmers in listening sessions reported that they have difficulty starting or continuing to sell in wholesale markets because their farms' small scale cannot provide enough product to meet the minimum volume demands of increasingly consolidated and large buyers. "We used to sell consistently to more than 10 buyers, and now there are maybe two," said a Fresno farmer. Other farmers agreed that they noticed this decrease in wholesale distribution customers. They said that they see the merging or exit of buyers in one sector, such as those who purchase at farm gate, as well as merging companies across sectors of the commodity chain—such as buyers, distributors, and retailers. Farmers said that this has resulted in larger minimum quantities requirements that they cannot meet because of skilled labor shortages and high costs of water and land.

Participants recalled that buyers used to have field agents who would establish supportive relationships with farmers. One farmer said, "They'd come out and say, 'Those peppers look good, keep growing those, but watch out because they're getting popular and other people will grow them, too.' They would tell us what the market prices were, trends, and projected demand. They kind of had your back. Now, these big companies...if you don't have what they want, in the quality, quantity, and price, they go somewhere else. There's no guarantee and no commitment." Another farmer in the same listening session added, "We are always replaceable. They negotiate and try to tell you someone else will sell for less so you will take less. Usually, there is always someone else willing to take less money who can undercut you."

Now, according to farmers, buyers do not invest in relationships with farmers to inform them of trends, nor to understand their practices. Relationships have been replaced by regulations, such as on food safety and produce handling, and demands for certifications such as organic and other third-party-generated evaluations, which come with costs that farmers find difficult to afford without commensurate premiums for their sales.

In addition to the costs, farmers say they can hardly afford the time to complete cumbersome applications, compliance forms, and to keep abreast of new regulations and certification options. "We are the farm operator, the farm worker, the truck driver, and everything in between. We're out there all day and take very little breaks, besides to eat," said a Fresno farmer, "I don't have time for all that paperwork." The multiple timelines and regulatory entities—who certify, regulate, and enforce—are mysteries to many of the farmers we spoke with. They expressed that there's insufficient outreach to farmers when new regulations are introduced.

Unable to sell to reliable wholesale channels, farmers who continue to produce at volume end up selling to cash buyers. "They show up with their van and they give you cash for what you have. I don't know where it goes, though," said a Fresno farmer. Other farmers agreed that these buyers are not the ideal customers because they are not regular or reliable, yet they have the benefit of receiving cash immediately. When asked about the storage conditions, the farmers said that the vans are unrefrigerated and unmarked. The consolidation of markets harm farmers and may lead to food safety risks for consumers.

## Direct Marketing Challenges

Some farmers sought alternatives to wholesale market channels because of the aforementioned issues, while some wanted to build relationships with their customers. As a result, many of the listening session participants engage in direct rather than wholesale marketing, such as community supported agriculture (CSA) and farmers markets.

Of the farmers in listening sessions who manage CSA shares, they said that they've seen a decline in clientele as large farms diversify their markets by creating 'farm boxes.' These farm boxes may be customized by the week or month, or sourced from multiple farms, such that a single farm has difficulty competing with this diversified, on-demand option. "They're not real CSAs because customers aren't sharing in the risk of the farm. They get what they want, and that's more appealing than getting surprised with a box of just cabbage when our farm is hit with pests or



something,” said a San Diego farmer. Thus, the competition from large producers with similarly named direct marketing models has jeopardized small to midsize farms’ CSA stability.

Farmers markets offer farmers another direct marketing channel. Thirty-four percent of survey respondents said that farmers markets have been helpful to their operations. Additionally, a few farmers in listening sessions reported that local food incentive programs, such as those funded by the USDA’s Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program (FMLFPP) increased their farmers market clientele and sales. “Our rural area is very poor, and many people rely on SNAP, including me! The market match program boosts our sales and we see more people at market,” said a San Diego farmer.

While farmers markets have been helpful for some, getting a stall space can be difficult because of competition. “We’re new, and there’s a long waiting list to get into the good markets,” said a San Diego farmer referring to farmers markets with high traffic and sales. A Fresno farmer’s account corroborates that the large markets are desirable, but difficult to enter. “Since the big guys won’t buy from me, I sell to the farmers markets, but it’s so hard to get into the big ones with lots of customers and big spenders.” Farmers may be able to get ahead of the wait list if they have a unique product, but farmers reported that the attempt to follow customer demand drives farmers to produce the same crops. “One year we heard Shishito peppers were popular, so everyone started growing them. You want to grow what’s profitable, but then everyone grows it and you’re no different,” said a Fresno vegetable farmer.

Some farmers have difficulty accessing farmers markets because of their location. One of the Fresno farmers reported,

“The ones with big spenders are also far away, so even if you get in you have to haul all this stuff for hours that may not get sold.” This issue of market accessibility relates to the location of available farmland and whether one can find arable land near customers.

Though a farmer of color may be able to sell at a farmers market, they may face discrimination that hinders their success at these open venues. A Mexican-American farmer reported, “It can be a challenge to sell due to assumptions and bias about how we farm.” He added that people assume that he does not sell his own products, or that he uses synthetic chemical sprays. Similarly, a Hmong-American vegetable farmer said, “People think that Asian growers are not organic and assume that they should question the safety of my produce even though I farm without chemicals.”

### Exploring Alternatives

Farmers are acting on a perceived lack of control over distribution mechanisms and pricing by exploring alternatives to the predominant business models. Some farmers shared that members of their community have explored producer cooperatives as a means to own sales mechanisms and to retain control down the production chain. One farmer reflected that “members need continued education on running a co-op and on co-op principles, decision-making, and responsibilities. Without that education, they lay back or blame other people.” Another said, “It depends on education. People need to understand how to participate in the co-op and that we’re in it together.” Expanding federal programs and establishing of state funds and resources for cooperative development could help farmers gain additional market access and competitiveness.





# RECOMMENDATIONS

**Farmers need to get their products to ever more competitive and distant markets. There is a need for diversified, expanded, and secure market access through development of marketing and infrastructure for small and midsize farms that is created through robust consultation with farmers.**

- 1. Fund scale-appropriate infrastructure for small, midsize, and non-commodity farms to access markets.** Currently, USDA Rural Development grants and the Value Added Producer Grant (VAPG) program assist farmers in building marketing, aggregation, distribution, and storage systems. We recommend that USDA create a micro VAPG with a streamlined application for small grant requests.
- 2. Foster farmer-owned or -governed means of sales and distribution.** Expanding funds for the Rural Cooperative Development Grant would enable more farmers to receive training on producer cooperatives. These funds are currently limited to rural applicants, so we recommend that state or cooperative development grants be created and made available to urban producers.
- 3. Secure small to midsize farms' ability to sell into wholesale market channels.** This can be achieved by incorporating small farms in farm-to-institution initiatives and by training service providers to provide resources on developing forward contracts.

## Cannabis: An Example of a Changing Agricultural Industry

Northern California respondents from small-scale, family farms with diversified vegetable and cannabis production reported that their regional agricultural economies are changing as a result of the legalization and large-scale production of cannabis. A Mendocino farmer said:

*"[Cannabis farms] used to be mostly family-run, and we were a community. Now we see not just bigger growers from elsewhere, people from the city [San Francisco] set up stores so their friends can come. All the money is getting cycled out of our area. Our home is a backdrop, and we are the disposable cast of characters."*

They see that the expansion of the cannabis industry is taking money out of the local economy.

Meanwhile, some cannabis farmers see themselves and fellow cultivators as important contributors to rural economies that also need support. One survey respondent said:

*Where I live in Humboldt County, our main crop is cannabis, which should be considered an agricultural product, especially with legalization. Most young farmers I know are cannabis cultivators. We do have a robust network of small farms with diverse crops who sell their produce at farmers markets and to local stores, or just on the side of the road at farm stands. I imagine they need help with scale and exporting outside of the county.*

# Limited Availability of Skilled Labor

## Introduction

Young farmers in the listening sessions said that they are observing shrinking rural and farming populations, confirming national census data. Many farmers said that they are not surprised that young people are not entering into agricultural careers because of the low compensation with little ability to rise in title and compensation, or to save enough to start one's own farm. Meanwhile, farm owners reported in the survey that affording labor is challenging.

Some farmers attribute the reluctance to farm to historic and ongoing labor abuses, especially of socially disadvantaged groups. Immigration policies and decisions have increased deportations, thereby diminishing the population of skilled farmers in California and across the country.

Human labor remains important in agriculture because of the required skills and knowledge. A vegetable farmer said, "We need skilled labor, like they need to know exactly the right time to pick long beans of a certain size so your customers are happy and the plant stays alive. It takes skill." Some farmers rely on human labor because they cannot afford mechanization. "We rely on manual labor because farming requires attention to detail, judgment, and smarts. Any machine that can match a farmer is too expensive for us," said a Fresno farmer. With a shortage of skilled labor, farmers must compete with other farmers and industries with high-value crops, like cannabis, to retain employees.



## Labor Challenges

### Percentage of respondents who rated the listed labor challenges as very challenging and/or prohibitive to farm viability:

CHALLENGE	PROHIBITIVE TO FARM VIABILITY	VERY CHALLENGING	SLIGHT CHALLENGE	NOT A PROBLEM
Affordability of Labor	13%	43%	17%	13%
Availability of Skilled Labor	10%	24%	33%	17%
Labor Regulations	16%	21%	24%	18%

#### Other:

- “Difficult to compete with cannabis farm wages.”
- “Volunteers would like to work, but labor laws don’t let them.”
- “Anti-immigration policies are killing us.”
- “All employees are part time, seasonal.”
- “Workman’s comp and insurance is killer.”

Forty-three percent of survey respondents indicated that affordability of labor is very challenging—more so than availability of skilled labor and labor regulations. California’s minimum wage has increased, and farmers said during the listening sessions that the new minimum is too costly for them. “The new law says we must pay \$15 per hour, up from \$12 per hour. Multiply that by the hours, people, and it’s a lot of money. But people aren’t paying us more for what we produce,” said a Fresno farmer.

For those challenged by the limited availability of skilled labor, many farmers in the listening session ascribed the difficulty to their small scale compared to other farms. “Another challenge is that labor contractors don’t always want to work with small farmers. We will call asking for help and they only want to come out if we have at least 100 acres before they bring their guys out,” said a Fresno farmer. Other farmers in that session shared similar experiences wherein they are passed over for larger operations.

### Competition for Labor

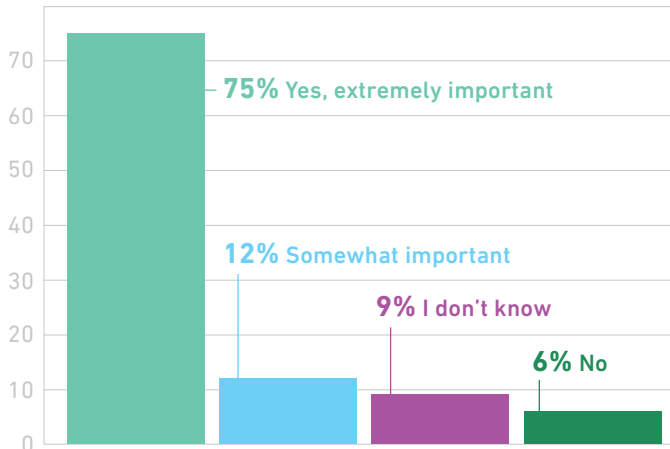
Due to the limited availability of skilled labor, farmers in listening sessions reported frequent “worker theft.” “A farmer will come around and offer a little more, like 50 cents to a dollar more per hour, than what the workers are making,” explained a farmer. Then, the farmer who first hired the crew is left without labor and with unharvested crops.

While farmers may move to another farm because they are offered better wages, several farmers in the listening session also report seasonal attrition as high-value crops, such as cannabis, are ready for harvest. “For the past few years, there was no one to pick tomatoes. They all went north to trim cannabis, and our fields were full of crops that needed to be picked. They just rotted on the vine,” said a vegetable farmer, which other farmers reported noticing as well. A survey respondent commented, “[It’s] difficult to compete with cannabis farm wages.”

One Hmong-American farmer said that coordinating workers has been a tactic for dealing with the shortage. “We find labor mostly by word of mouth through our family and relatives. Many farmers have to share workers to survive.”

## Immigration

### Percentage of Respondents Who Support Immigration Reform:



Percentages based on 67 responses.

Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Many second-generation farmers in the listening sessions noted a decline in the number of immigrant farmers over the past 15 years, who they see as the primary population of skilled workers. In the listening sessions, all Hmong-American farmers agreed on the need for immigration reform to provide safe work environments for farm workers. Within the survey, the groups with the highest proportion per race that indicated immigration reform was extremely important were Asian and Asian-Americans at 100%. Also, 100% of farm interns, apprentices, and owners who also work at another farm said that this is extremely important.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

*Farming must be made an economically viable and respected career in order to attract and retain more young people in the sector. This will require addressing historical and current racist policies, programs, and systems that contribute to the justification of poor work conditions and low wages. The precedence of food as a low-cost industry producing low-cost items hinders farmers from selling products at prices sufficient to compensate skilled labor at minimum and living wages. The cost of food must adjust to reflect the true value of human labor and production.*

- 1. Create pathways to citizenship for immigrant workers.** To retain existing farm labor, federal immigration policies need to create pathways for farmers who are undocumented, yet have worked in the U.S., to gain legal protections.
- 2. Enhance farm worker abilities to organize labor as unions and/or cooperatives.**
- 3. Enact universal health care so that we are not losing farmers to injury.**
- 4. Increase duration and ensure the use of paid family leave time so that farmers can take care of family and be able to return to work.**
- 5. Establish sanctuary spaces in farming areas to prevent and protect workers from deportation.**
- 6. Establish state funding for farmer training and incubation programs.**

# Reliable Technical Assistance

## Introduction

Farmers, particularly first-generation farmers, rely on technical assistance from government agencies, non-profit service providers, and other farmers to help them learn best practices. Farmers reported, however, that the current state of technical assistance is limited in availability, scope, and cultural relevance.

## Limited Availability

“Our [extension] office has shrunk by 66% in 10 years,” said a UC Cooperative Extension employee. The decreasing number of cooperative extension agents has made it difficult for farmers to receive initial or ongoing assistance. One Fresno farmer said, “They’ve helped me a lot, but there aren’t many of them. I hear other farmers say, ‘Oh, I don’t want to bother them. They’re so busy.’ I think they’d ask for help if there were more advisors.” The limited staffing may also make it difficult for farm advisors to return to farms and ensure proper implementation and achievement of desired effects. “They don’t come back to check on progress. They give advice, but don’t make sure it’s done correctly,” said one San Diego farmer.

## Limited Scope

Farmers noted that the farm advisors they have worked with, particularly cooperative extension agents, with hold a narrow

area of expertise, which was perhaps relevant at the time they were hired but needs to be updated. Additionally, farmers noted that the prioritization of research experience over field experience for hiring farm advisors meant that they might not have practical advice. “We grow in an area with few vegetable farms. It’s mostly avocados and citrus. Advisors in this area don’t know how to grow vegetables here, and they gave us advice that didn’t make sense at all. They suggested we flood irrigate cover crop on sand—what a waste of water! We need more advisors who know about different crops and who will actually touch the soil,” said one San Diego farmer.

While farmers are facing the effects of climate change, and also see farming as a means of mitigating climate change, those in listening sessions felt that there are few local resources to help them adapt to and fight climate change. They reported seeking resources and guidance on climate-smart agriculture without success. “...I have to look elsewhere for resources, and have spent time traveling to other states to find people. There might be people here who know, but they’re not easy to find,” said a San Diego farmer. Meanwhile, as mentioned in the Climate Change section of this report, farmers who use cultural practices (some of which are now considered climate-smart agriculture) are deterred by advisors from using these traditional farming methods.



Farmers also often find financial guidance from many advisors to be impractical for their businesses. "They can't answer practical questions about cost, where to get supplies, product comparisons, and information that would help me improve my farming. They prescribe without knowing what it'll take to implement," said a San Diego farmer. Other farmers weighed in to say that advisors' lack of knowledge about the cost of implementation makes farmers reticent to adopt their advice.

### Types of Assistance

Just a fraction of California young farmers are receiving technical assistance in areas such as soil management, business planning, crop planning, and pest management.

The top areas that farm-owning survey respondents reported wanting more assistance on were: marketing (19%), financial management and bookkeeping (17%), and irrigation and water management (17%). Within listening sessions, farmers expressed great interest in climate-smart agriculture practices and means of financing implementation.

Regarding types of assistance, farmers reported through survey responses that they found one-on-one assistance, farm visits, and learning from other farmers as peers or mentors most effective.



#### Percentage of respondents who have received the following technical assistance:

- 18% Soil Management**
- 16% Business Planning**
- 16% Crop Planning**
- 16% Pest Management**
- 15% Irrigation and Water Management**
- 12% Financial Management or Bookkeeping**
- 12% Land Access or Lease Development**
- 11% Business Entity Choice**
- 10.5% Marketing**
- 10.5% Regulatory Navigation**
- 10% Succession Planning**
- 9% Policy Advocacy**
- 6% Credit Planning**

*Percentages based on 114 total survey respondents.*

## Business Entity Options

Legal business entity status is the foundation of how a farm operates. Who can invest, govern, build equity within, and profit from the farm is dictated by its entity type.

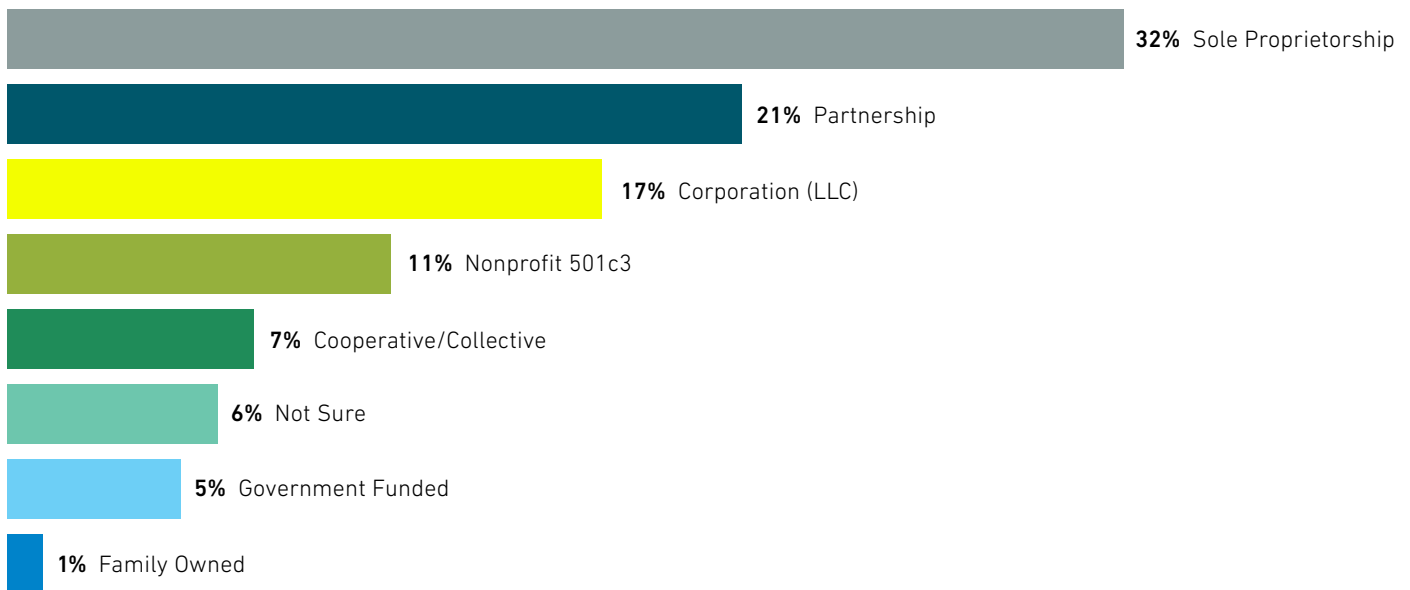
Based on survey results, most farmers (32%) are currently incorporated as sole proprietors.

In the listening sessions, many farmers who reported being sole proprietors said that they chose this because it was the easiest way to start a business, but feel that the model may not work as they try to expand. Several farm owners said that they would like to know of business models that account for fair compensation. "I've been to a lot of farm business trainings. They say the same thing and tell us to do the same thing as old farmers. I want to pay myself and make sure other people get paid, and that's not the same thing as the old way," said a farmer during the San Diego listening session.

Trainings on business entity choice can be valuable opportunities to introduce alternatives to sole proprietorship. Of the alternative models, cooperatives arose as an area of interest that needs to be supported with additional educational resources. "I'm interested in learning about how farmers can own their business together—we all share the risks, we should also share the rewards," said a Yolo County farmer. A San Diego farmer said, "I learned that the cooperative model can help my customers support the farm as investors without undermining the farmers' control. I wish there was more information about cooperatives."



## Farm/Business Structure:



87 responses. Percentages are rounded.

### Linguistic and Cultural Competence

Another set of barriers preventing all farmers from receiving technical assistance stem from linguistic and cultural differences. Some cooperative extension offices have recognized the need to hire staff with linguistic and cultural knowledge and ability to working with new American farmers, which many farmers have appreciated. “The older generation won’t ask for help because they don’t think their English is good [enough]. Having an advisor who is fluent in Hmong is really helpful,” said a Hmong-American farmer from Fresno.

Farmers in the listening sessions identified the need for advisors with both linguistic and cultural competence, and that language alone is not sufficient for working with new American farmers. “Knowing the language is a big deal, but knowing our culture—how we communicate and *how* we interact—that’s really key for building trust and getting things done,” said a Korean-American farmer. They shared instances when service providers brought language interpreters, but the pedagogical approach was not adjusted to be culturally-relevant and effective.

Culture is not only tied to ethnicity, and with young farmers coming from many backgrounds including that of environmental science college graduates, social justice advocates, and those concerned about ecology and society, technical assistance needs to be relevant to these cultural values that are salient issues of our times.

### Racial Distribution of Assistance

In an examination of the racial distribution of assistance, White respondents reported that they had no gaps in resources (i.e. White respondents had received assistance in each category), while American Indian respondents received none of the listed resources.

Other respondents who identified as non-White reported that they did not receive assistance in the areas of business entity choice, credit lending, land access and lease development, marketing, policy advocacy, and regulatory navigation.







# RECOMMENDATIONS

*Young farmers can benefit from a wide spectrum of technical, financial, and production assistance.*

*There is a need for a greater number of technical service providers with crop, climate, and culturally-relevant perspectives to provide consistent one-on-one, on-farm assistance.*

- 1. Establish funded mentorship or farmer-to-farmer learning programs.** Colorado's Agricultural Workforce Bill provides qualifying farm businesses with financial reimbursement for hiring qualified interns to gain skills for a career in farming.
- 2. Expand number of cooperative extension agents and technical service providers to enable capacity for one-on-one assistance.** Advice and services should be able to address farming, financial planning, business planning, market development, and distribution infrastructure.
- 3. Support farm service non-profits led by socially disadvantaged groups, reduce program fees, and increase set-aside funding for socially disadvantaged farmers.** AB 2377, the Climate Smart Agriculture Bill signed into law in 2018, allocates 25% of grant program outreach funds for technical assistance to socially disadvantaged groups. This is a small set-aside, but an important first use of California's SDFR definition.
- 4. Ensure each region has farm advisors with knowledge of diverse crops and farming practices.** Provide professional development for farm advisors and service providers to be updated on the latest agricultural science and innovation, particularly for climate-smart agriculture.
- 5. Include cultural intelligence among criteria for hiring farm advisors, and prioritize hiring those with fluency in multiple languages.** Create pathways for farm workers and farmers to become farm advisors. Train existing farm advisors to work with a culturally-diverse range of farmers and farmworkers.
- 6. Increase education about all business entity options, including worker-ownership.** Ensure that the federal 2018 Main Street Employment Ownership Act (H.R. 5236) is implemented in California.

# Government Regulations and Programs

## Introduction

We heard from farmers that there is insufficient outreach about existing and new program regulations, and that penalties are leveraged with little notice or without opportunities for correction.

Government agricultural programs may be intended to help farmers, but farmers communicated that they often do not apply for these programs because they cannot meet narrow eligibility requirements, or because the extensive application and compliance paperwork is too complicated, daunting, or takes more time than is commensurate with the rewards.

## Insufficient Outreach About Government Regulations

Participating farmers reported having limited information about the development and implementation of agricultural regulations: “We find out about new policies from extension agents, but they can’t talk about politics, so we don’t find out until after a new regulation is created,” said one Fresno farmer. They said that they get the news afterwards and do not know of conduits to affect policy, or of advocates to support their political engagement. “We don’t know who is representing us or how to find out,” said a farmer in the Fresno listening session. Insufficient information about development and implementation of new regulations may be related to whether a person is a first-generation farmer without family or mentors for guidance, or if they are a new American who is unfamiliar with the many disconnected government divisions and their respective expectations, and/or with the technical language used in agricultural policies.



The cost of not knowing about regulations can be hefty fines. A Fresno farmer spoke of the difficulty of managing a farm while keeping abreast of regulations, “I’m the owner, operator, harvester, distributor, marketer, bookkeeper, and equipment repair guy. I don’t have the time to find out [about a new requirement], and when I do it’s when I’m getting fined. There should be multiple opportunities to connect before we are fined.” Others in the same listening session agreed that they become aware of regulations when they are enforced, and that the penalties may be the same for farms in varied circumstances. “They made it one-size-fits-all. They should ask us small guys if that fine is going to break the bank,” suggested a farmer who pointed to opportunities and examples for penalties tiered for different farm size or revenue, such as in the Food Safety Modernization Act and Irrigated Lands Program.

Some farmers also recommended tiered costs and fines for socially disadvantaged groups. A farmer shared during a listening session that they believe “socially disadvantaged farmers should have funding to help cover costs of increased fees and regulations, or we should simply not have the same costs. There should be a decreased cost for smaller farms, both based on the acreage and the amount of income.” Fellow farmers in the listening sessions agreed that fees should be lower for those who have been historically discriminated against.

## Difficulty Accessing Government Programs

Farmers in both the listening sessions and the survey who have wanted to take advantage of agricultural assistance programs expressed frustration with eligibility requirements, cumbersome paperwork, and deadlines set during busy times of the farm season. Linguistic differences and negative experiences with government program officers were additional barriers to accessing agricultural programs.

Some forms of being unqualified for agricultural assistance programs are the lack of land security and inability to fulfill acreage minimums. One farmer said regarding land security, “[I] don’t own my land, [I’m] small scale, the money at my scale usually doesn’t seem worth the bureaucracy, though I could be convinced otherwise and fully support all the programs.” Another succinctly summarized the issue: “I have a short-term lease, so I can’t get assistance.”

Acreage minimums can hinder farmers from receiving assistance in critical times. "During the drought I asked about receiving some relief because our walnut trees were stressed and production dropped off. I was told I wasn't 'large enough.' I have 20 acres, over 70 trees," said one farmer.

For new Americans, linguistic differences pose an additional challenge to applying for programs. "The biggest challenges that limit our participation are language barriers and limited capacity," one farmer reported, indicating a need for translation or interpretation, as well as assistance in identifying, maintaining, and completing forms.

The effect of negative experiences with government employees, be they historic or recent, can deter farmers from reapplying. A farmer of color expressed distrust in government entities, recalling, "My parents were treated poorly by the FSA office, but it's just that their English isn't very good. I heard from other farmers that they weren't treated well, either, so I don't bother with the government." One survey respondent wrote, "I applied for an NRCS grant for non-organic growers (I'm beyond, but not certified) several years ago and didn't receive funding. I found the NRCS [representative] to be untrustworthy, unclear, and not very helpful. I hear the folks there now are much better, but it's not worth the effort for a couple thousand dollars."



**Program application and compliance forms are seen as cumbersome not only by English-limited farmers. Multiple farmers expressed frustration with complicated paperwork that requires more time or timeliness during busy parts of the farm season:**

"I have thought about the first time farmer program to purchase land and the micro-loan but the process is quite cumbersome."

...

"[I] considered applying for an educational grant with Healthy Soils, but the timing was terrible on a busy season level and having no grant experience. I quickly got overwhelmed and dropped it."

...

"I was pretty excited about Healthy Soils, but found the (a) complexity of the application and (b) size of the payment for practices to not be worth it, in the balance. For example, with compost application to pastures, I would like to see that covered at more than 50% of cost, for me to bother with the program application and participation. As with the EQIP offerings, my decision about whether to participate, hinges on how difficult/expensive it will be, since it does not have a clear financial benefit and does have a cost. It would be different if I had employees to help implement the practices, but as it is I farm 12 hours/day."

...

"I have heard a lot about these programs and feel that I could be eligible for funding, yet have not had the capacity or missed deadlines because of hearing about them too late, or not knowing how best to frame my work for the particular funds available."

### Farmer awareness and use of California Programs:

RESPONSES	APPLIED, RECEIVED	APPLIED, DIDN'T RECEIVE	HEARD OF IT, DIDN'T APPLY	NEVER HEARD OF IT
Alternative Manure Management Practices Program CA	0%	0%	11%	89%
Farmland Conservancy Program	0%	2%	39%	59%
CA Williamson Act	14%	2%	45%	39%
Certified Farmers Market Program	38%	0%	40%	22%
Healthy Soils Program	4%	2%	47%	47%
Specialty Crops Program	0%	2%	44%	54%
Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation	2%	0%	28%	70%

51 responses. Percentages are rounded and may not add to 100%.

### Farmer Awareness and Use of Federal Programs:

RESPONSES	APPLIED, RECEIVED	APPLIED, DIDN'T RECEIVE	HEARD OF IT, DIDN'T APPLY	DON'T KNOW THIS PROGRAM
FSA Commodity Program	0%	0%	36%	64%
FSA Farm Facility Storage Loans	0%	0%	22%	78%
FSA Microloans	2%	2%	59%	37%
FSA Farm Operating Loans	0%	4%	56%	40%
FSA Farm Ownership Loans	0%	2%	49%	49%
FSA Non-insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP)	0%	0%	39%	61%
Local Food Promotion Program	0%	0%	23%	77%
NRCS Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA)	0%	2%	45%	53%
NRCS Conservation Reserve	0%	2%	47%	51%
NRCS Conservation Stewardship	2%	2%	47%	49%
NRCS High Tunnel Assistance	6%	0%	55%	39%
NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)	12%	2%	41%	45%
NRCS Transitions Incentive Program	0%	0%	27%	71%
Organic Certification Cost-Share Assistance	8%	0%	55%	37%
Crop Insurance	0%	0%	27%	73%
Rural Cooperatives Development Grant	0%	0%	36%	64%
Rural Energy for America Program	0%	0%	22%	78%
Socially Disadvantaged Group Grant	0%	0%	29%	71%
Value-Added Producer Grants	0%	5%	41%	55%

49 responses. Percentages are rounded and may not add to 100%.

## Low Political Representation and Opportunities for Participation

Currently, farmers feel that their representatives do not understand farmers' conditions. "Policymakers need to spend time on the farm. They already want to come out for the photo shoot, but they can come to learn from our experiences, too," said a Hmong-American farmer about his experiences with elected officials. Many farmers also reported that they are not consulted about agricultural policy and program development, such that the results are not applicable or are adverse to their operations. A second-generation farmer spoke to this point saying, "We don't get to help decide. We just hear about it after the fact." Farmers may have a greater chance of knowing about and affecting regulations, policies, and program criteria if they had accountable representation, or opportunities to meaningfully participate in shaping the laws that affect them.

## Helpful Programs and Policies

The top four most helpful programs and policies identified by survey respondents were:

- 1. Apprenticeships or internships (on-farm):** Policies that legalize and foster on-farm learning can develop a larger and stronger young farmer workforce.
- 2. Affordable Care Act:** The challenges of manual labor, life-long dependency on a healthy body, and the specific mental health challenges of farming make affordable health care a high priority for farmers and ranchers.
- 3. Business trainings:** While business trainings have been helpful, farmers of color have received less assistance in this area than White respondents.
- 4. Local/regional food marketing:** Local and regional food marketing supports young farmers' bottom line. Respondents ranked farmers markets as a top ten helpful program, indicating a need to protect the Farmers Markets and Local Food Promotion Program (FMLFPP).

### Policies and Programs Rated by Very Helpful, Somewhat Helpful, Not Helpful, or N/A:

RESPONSES	VERY HELPFUL	SOMEWHAT HELPFUL	NOT HELPFUL	N/A
Apprenticeships or Internships	49%	28%	10%	12%
Affordable Care Act (Obamacare or Health Insurance Exchanges)	44%	19%	25%	12%
Business Trainings	41%	30%	9%	20%
Local/regional Food Marketing	40%	30%	12%	18%
Farmers Markets	34%	28%	15%	22%
Training Programs	34%	29%	14%	23%
Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)	31%	25%	19%	24%
Cooperative Extension	28%	40%	15%	16%
Family and/or Cultural Knowledge	26%	26%	15%	32%
Student Loan Forgiveness	24%	6%	20%	50%
SNAP (Formally Known As Food Stamps)	22%	33%	15%	30%
Technical Assistance Providers	20%	29%	20%	32%
Organic Certification	19%	25%	18%	37%
State Grants	18%	20%	23%	39%
Land Trusts	17%	23%	20%	41%
Land Linking Programs	16%	19%	19%	45%
Women, Infants, and Children Program (WIC)	15%	12%	24%	49%
Farm to School Programs	12%	27%	18%	42%
USDA Farm Loan Programs	11%	9%	29%	52%
USDA Conservation Programs	11%	20%	26%	44%
Culturally and/or Linguistically-relevant Assistance	8%	9%	24%	59%
Farm Credit	8%	5%	30%	58%
Guest Worker Programs (H2A)	8%	3%	24%	65%
Crop Insurance	6%	5%	41%	49%



# RECOMMENDATIONS

*Fostering farmer political literacy, capacity-building, and engagement would help California's young farmers to take advantage of existing programs, and to shape existing and potential programs to be applicable to a diversity of farms. Meanwhile, coordinating government programs, streamlining application processes, reevaluating eligibility criteria, and correlating deadlines with seasonal lulls can increase farmer participation in helpful programs. Regulations and programs need to be communicated in languages relevant to farming populations, with opportunities for ensuring understanding and compliance, especially before any penalties are leveraged.*

- 1. Augment programs to include tiers of access, designed to improve access for small farmers to scale-appropriate resources.** The California Irrigated Lands Program has multiple levels of fees and schedules of deadlines for farmers operating at different production scales. We encourage the creation of tiered programming and regulations to enable access and compliance by farmers of all scales.
- 2. Streamline application processes across multiple programs.** Bills such as AB 1862 seek to streamline registration and application processes. Currently, producers needed to register as organic producers with the California Department of Food and Agriculture after they attain third-party organic certification. AB 1862 proposed that producers become automatically registered with the state when they attain certification. AB 1862 did not pass, but would be a useful means of saving time and money for farmers and bureaucrats.
- 3. Expand federal and create local/regional food marketing programs.** California Department of Food and Agriculture Specialty Crop Block Grant provides funding opportunities for farmers to gain support for research and/or production. We recommend expanding the Specialty Crop Block Grant to have small grant opportunities and to cover unconventional varieties of what is currently considered commodity crops.
- 4. Assess loss of, and disparities in, resources based on racial and ethnic identities.** The Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act calls for a congressional study of slavery and its remaining effects, along with recommendations for "appropriate remedies." We recommend passing this federal bill and forming commissions for additional races and ethnic groups.
- 5. Increase engagement, consultation, and equitable resourcing for socially disadvantaged farmers.** We recommend ensuring implementation and resourcing of the California Farmer Equity Act; creating an advisory committee of socially disadvantaged farmers to shape California Department of Food and Agriculture policies, programming, and research; and properly enforcing language requirements for state government resources.

# Conclusion

California farmers face a great deal of risk, which threatens our food security and society. Farmers steward our land, produce the food we eat, and undergird urban and rural economies. California farmers have a particularly large impact as they grow more than a third of our country's fresh vegetables, yet, California farmers have little control over their livelihoods. They do not control how they will be compensated by an increasingly competitive, opaque, and consolidated market. Land is prohibitively expensive in the state, and many farm owners do not own the land they steward and are subject to lease rate increases, competition from land developers, speculative investors, and wealthy second-home owners. They face regulations enacted with little prior input from farmers, particularly those of small to midsize scale and farmers of color. Large-scale systems of climate change and structural racism affect all aspects of farming on an everyday basis.

Despite these challenges, young people are still entering into careers in agriculture—putting their backs into an uncertain future because they understand the value of a thriving food system. Their dedication and perseverance give us hope that California will continue to be an agriculturally rich state into the

future. We call on the State of California to embrace farmer-led policy solutions and to ensure the efforts of young, beginning farmers are matched with tangible public support.

This report reminds us that the challenges that put farmers at risk of losing their crops and businesses are largely structural and that they can be mitigated by listening to farmers, consulting with them, and working for and with them to create lasting solutions. You have in your hand a series of practical policy recommendations on which we can take immediate action to reduce, and perhaps even eliminate, many of these challenges. Doing so will require effort at all level of politics, the formal and personal, and we are hopeful our leaders are prepared to rise to the call.

Our next step is to work with young farmers to create a policy platform and identify campaigns to make structural change. We look forward to continued conversation and action with agriculturalists, legislators, advisors, and advocates to address the complex problems facing young farmers and ranchers as we work toward a sustainable and just agricultural future.



