

## ASSEMBLY THIRD READING

AB 1600 (Arambula)

As Amended March 17, 2026

Majority vote

**SUMMARY**

Authorizes the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA) to include farmworker communities, as specified, in its criteria for identifying disadvantaged communities for Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF) investment opportunities.

**Major Provisions**

- 1) Adds to existing state law that requires CalEPA to identify disadvantaged communities for GGRF investment opportunities based on specified criteria—an authorization for CalEPA to include, in its criteria, farmworker communities that meet both of the following:
  - a) The communities are located in geographic areas with a significant presence of agricultural workers, particularly those engaged in seasonal or migrant labor; and,
  - b) Residents in the communities are disproportionately exposed to environmental pollutants related to agricultural or industrial operations.
- 2) Requires CalEPA, in consultation with the California Department of Community Services and Development (CSD) and the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), to revise applicable screening tools and guidance documents, to ensure the inclusion of farmworker communities as disadvantaged communities in all relevant program eligibility determinations and benefit calculations.

**COMMENTS**

*California Climate Investments, GGRF, and investments in priority populations:* Since 2014, the Legislature has appropriated billions of dollars in California Climate Investments—funded by auction proceeds from the state's Cap-and-Invest Program, deposited into the GGRF—to fund projects that reduce harmful emissions, protect public health, strengthen local economies, and support natural environments.

State law established under SB 535 (De León, Chapter 830, Statutes of 2012) and AB 1550 (Gomez, Chapter 369, Statutes of 2016) targets a portion of these investments to frontline communities, by requiring CalEPA to identify disadvantaged communities and mandating the allocation of 35% of GGRF dollars to disadvantaged communities, low-income communities, and low-income households, which the state collectively refers to as priority populations. Disadvantaged communities are comprised of:

- 1) The top 25% of census tracts experiencing disproportionate amounts of pollution, environmental degradation, and socioeconomic and public health conditions according to CalEnviroScreen (described below);
- 2) Census tracts lacking overall scores in CalEnviroScreen due to data gaps, but receiving the highest 5% of CalEnviroScreen "Pollution Burden" composite scores;

- 3) Census tracts identified in 2017 as disadvantaged, regardless of their CalEnviroScreen scores; and,
- 4) Lands under the control of federally recognized Tribes.

*CalEnviroScreen:* CalEnviroScreen is a science-based mapping tool developed by the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) and CalEPA, to help identify California communities that are most affected by multiple sources of pollution, as well as communities that may be especially vulnerable to pollution's effects. Among other things, the state uses the tool to identify California's most environmentally burdened and vulnerable communities; assist CalEPA's boards and departments with decisions involving grant allocations and prioritization of resources and cleanup activities; and target GGRF dollars to disadvantaged communities.

CalEnviroScreen 4.0, released in October 2021, is the most current version of the tool, although OEHHA announced in January 2026 the release of a draft CalEnviroScreen 5.0 update. According to OEHHA, the draft incorporates recent census tract and data updates, refined methodologies, and input from community-based organizations. In addition, the draft 5.0 update introduces two new indicators—diabetes prevalence and small air toxic sites—and, pursuant to requirements in AB 1059 (Garcia, Chapter 584, Statutes of 2015), brings in information to incorporate pollution concerns from the California-Mexico border region.

*Farmworkers face multiple socioeconomic and environmental burdens:* Surveys of California's farmworkers reveal that they face major challenges, including pesticide exposure, poverty, educational barriers, linguistic isolation, housing and food insecurity, difficult working conditions, and poor healthcare access. A number of these factors are captured as indicators in CalEnviroScreen, suggesting that farmworker communities may be at the nexus of many of the pollution and socioeconomic indicators that the state uses to identify disadvantaged communities.

*Investments in farmworker households via the Low-Income Weatherization Program (LIWP):* One of the California Climate Investments, LIWP reduces household energy costs and greenhouse gas emissions by funding energy efficiency upgrades and rooftop solar photovoltaic systems, at no cost to low-income households.

Launched in 2019, the LIWP Farmworker Housing Component provides services to low-income farmworker households and is administered by La Cooperativa Campesina de California, which collaborates with a team of partner organizations to enroll eligible farmworker households and install energy saving and solar measures in single-family dwellings and buildings of 2-4 units. To be eligible, a household must 1) live in a single-family home or stand-alone building with two to four units; 2) include a verified farmworker or farmworker family; and 3) meet the definition of a low-income household (i.e., a household that does not exceed the higher of either 80% of the Area Median Income for its county, or 80% of the State Median Income), or have verified enrollment in certain public assistance programs. According to CSD, LIWP does not use CalEnviroScreen to determine project or household eligibility.

CSD's guidelines specify that LIWP's service delivery area is made up of the following 18 counties, selected to target resources to areas of the state with the highest populations of farmworkers: Sonoma, Napa, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare, Monterey, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz, Kern, Ventura, Riverside, San Diego, and Imperial counties. Altogether, these counties represent 80% of California's farmworker

population. From 2017-2025, cumulative LIWP investments in these counties ranged from \$745,318 (Napa County) to \$7.4 million (Riverside County).

*This bill:* AB 1600 authorizes CalEPA to include farmworker communities in its criteria for identifying disadvantaged communities for GGRF investment opportunities. In addition, AB 1600 requires CalEPA to revise applicable screening tools to ensure the inclusion of farmworker communities as disadvantaged communities in program eligibility and benefit determinations. Proponents of the bill state that, among other things, AB 1600 would expand farmworkers' access to California Climate Investments by ensuring that the multiple pollution and socioeconomic burdens farmworkers face are taken into consideration in CalEnviroScreen and its use as a tool for identifying disadvantaged communities. As AB 1600 moves forward, it may be worth considering how this bill might expand farmworkers' access to programs such as LIWP, which allocates funds to priority populations based on low-income status, rather than their designation as disadvantaged communities.

### **According to the Author**

"Farmworkers should be treated with dignity and respect reflective of the essential contribution they make to California's agricultural economy and local communities. Every day, they face the compounding burdens of extreme heat, pesticide exposure, substandard housing, and environmental degradation, conditions that are only worsening as climate change intensifies. These are the workers who sustain California's over \$100 billion agricultural economy, yet they remain structurally excluded from some of the very climate programs designed to help communities like theirs.

For example, California's climate investment framework prioritizes disadvantaged communities (DACs) for funding through the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF). However, because DAC designation is tied to CalEnviroScreen scoring thresholds, many rural and unincorporated farmworker communities fall outside eligibility boundaries, even when facing clear environmental and socioeconomic vulnerability. This bill addresses this deficiency in state law by expressly designating farmworker housing as DACs, making them eligible for funding that can be used to improve their communities."

### **Arguments in Support**

According to a coalition writing in support:

"While CalEnviroScreen was built to capture urban pollution burdens, it was not designed to reflect the realities of farmworker life: agricultural labor concentration, rural pesticide exposure, substandard housing in unincorporated areas, and extreme heat vulnerability. As a result, many farmworker dense communities in counties such as Monterey, Napa, Sonoma, and Mendocino do not score high enough to qualify for the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF) benefits they deserve.

AB 1600 does not replace or dismantle CalEnviroScreen; instead, it corrects a structural gap by explicitly including farmworker communities in the statutory definition of [disadvantaged communities]. This simple but powerful change would:

- 1) Expand access to the Low-Income Weatherization Program and other energy efficiency investments that reduce utility costs for farmworker families;

- 2) Improve eligibility for climate resilience programs in rural agricultural regions experiencing rising temperatures and prolonged fire seasons;
- 3) Increase access to clean transportation options that reduce both emissions and financial burden for farmworkers;
- 4) Strengthen water infrastructure for communities relying on small water systems vulnerable to contamination and drought."

**Arguments in Opposition**

None on file.

**FISCAL COMMENTS**

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee, CalEPA expects to work through the California Air Resources Board (CARB) to implement this bill. CARB estimates ongoing annual costs of \$779,000. In addition, OEHHA estimates ongoing annual costs of \$205,000 and a one-time contracting cost of \$300,000; CSD anticipates minor and absorbable costs; and CDPH anticipates unknown, but likely minor costs.

**VOTES****ASM ENVIRONMENTAL SAFETY AND TOXIC MATERIALS: 5-1-1**

**YES:** Connolly, Bauer-Kahan, Lee, McKinnor, Papan

**NO:** Ellis

**ABS, ABST OR NV:** Castillo

**ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 11-4-0**

**YES:** Wicks, Aguiar-Curry, Calderon, Caloza, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache

**NO:** Hoover, Dixon, Ta, Tangipa

**UPDATED**

VERSION: March 17, 2026

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