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**SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY**

**Senator Blakespear, Chair**

**2025 - 2026 Regular**

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**Bill No:** AB 1600  
**Author:** Arambula  
**Version:** 3/17/2026  
**Urgency:** No  
**Consultant:** Alyssa Poletti

**Hearing Date:** 7/1/2026  
**Fiscal:** Yes

**SUBJECT:** Disadvantaged communities: farmworker communities

**DIGEST:** This bill requires the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA) to include farmworker communities in identifying disadvantaged communities for Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF) investment opportunities.

**ANALYSIS:**

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF), and requires all moneys collected by the California Air Resources Board (CARB) under the state's Cap-and-Invest Program to be deposited into the GGRF. (Government Code (GOV) § 16428.8)
- 2) Provides that it is the intent of the Legislature that GGRF moneys shall only be appropriated in a manner consistent with state laws governing the GGRF, including the GGRF Investment Plan and Communities Revitalization Act. (Health and Safety Code (HSC) § 39712(a)(1))
- 3) Requires the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA) to identify disadvantaged communities for GGRF investment opportunities; requires these communities to be identified based on geographic, socioeconomic, public health, and environmental hazard criteria; provides that the criteria may include, but are not limited to, either of the following:
  - a) Areas disproportionately affected by environmental pollution and other hazards that can lead to negative public health effects, exposure, or environmental degradation; and,
  - b) Areas with concentrations of people that are of low-income, high unemployment, low levels of homeownership, high rent burden, sensitive populations, or low levels of educational attainment. (HSC § 39711)

- 4) Requires that the GGRF investment plan allocate a minimum of 25% of GGRF moneys to projects located within the boundaries of, and benefiting individuals living in, disadvantaged communities identified by CalEPA, as specified:
  - a) a minimum of 5% to projects that benefit low-income households or to projects located within the boundaries of, and benefiting individuals living in, low-income communities located anywhere in the state; and
  - b) a minimum of 5% to projects that either benefit low-income households that are outside of, but within one-half mile of, disadvantaged communities, or to projects located within the boundaries of, and benefiting individuals living in, low-income communities that are outside of, but within one-half mile of, disadvantaged communities. (HSC § 39713(a-c))
- 5) Requires CARB to ensure that greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction rules, regulations, programs, mechanisms, and incentives under its jurisdiction, where applicable and to the extent feasible, direct public and private investment toward the most disadvantaged communities in California and provide an opportunity for small businesses, schools, affordable housing associations, and other community institutions to participate in and benefit from statewide efforts to reduce GHG emissions. (HSC § 38565)
- 6) Establishes the California Department of Community Services and Development (CSD) to provide services to impoverished communities, including overseeing federal block grants, funding and technical assistance to community action agencies, coordinate antipoverty efforts, and plan and evaluate long-range and short-range strategies for overcoming poverty in the state. (GOV § 12085 *et seq.*)
- 7) Requires the CSD to develop and administer the Energy Efficiency Low-Income Weatherization Program (LIWP); authorizes CSD to develop requirements, guidelines, and subgrantee contract provisions for LIWP, as specified; requires, before a subgrantee contract is executed for the provision of local service, CSD to post draft program guidelines on CSD's website and to hold a public hearing to obtain public input on the draft program guidelines, as specified. (GOV § 12087.5)
- 8) Requires that \$10 million of Proposition (Prop) 4 funds be made available, upon appropriation by the Legislature, as part of the Farmworker Housing Component of LIWP, to low-income farmworker households for no-cost energy efficiency upgrades designed to reduce GHG emissions by saving

energy; requires that these upgrades include, but are not limited to, insulation, central heating and cooling system upgrades, lighting upgrades, and window replacement. (Public Resources Code (PRC) § 93580)

This bill:

- 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 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 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.

## Background

- 1) *The Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund*. The GGRF was created in the 2012 budget (SB 1018, Budget Committee, Chapter 39, Statutes of 2012) to use funds collected from Cap-and-Invest auctions to further the goals in the Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006 (AB 32, Nunez, Chapter 488, Statutes of 2006). GGRF funds essential programs such as the Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities Program, the Community Air Protection Program, wildfire and forest resilience, and the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Program.<sup>1</sup>

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-

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<sup>1</sup> LAO (2025) *Overview of New Updates to The Cap-and-Invest Program*, <https://lao.ca.gov/Publications/Report/5097>

income households, which the state collectively refers to as priority populations. Priority populations include all of the following:

- a) Disadvantaged communities, comprised of:
    - i) The top 25% of census tracts experiencing disproportionate amounts of pollution, environmental degradation, and socioeconomic and public health conditions according to CalEnviroScreen (described below);
    - ii) Census tracts lacking overall scores in CalEnviroScreen due to data gaps, but receiving the highest 5% of CalEnviroScreen “Pollution Burden” composite scores;
    - iii) Census tracts identified in 2017 as disadvantaged, regardless of their CalEnviroScreen scores; and,
    - iv) Lands under the control of federally recognized Tribes.
  - b) Low-income communities and households, which have incomes either at or below 80% of the statewide median, or below a threshold designated as "low-income" by the California Department of Housing and Community Development.
- 2) *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.<sup>2</sup> 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 uses environmental, health, and socioeconomic data (compiled as “indicators”) to produce a numerical score for each census tract in the state.<sup>3</sup> Scores are intended to show relative pollution burdens among communities, with higher scores indicating greater levels of pollution burden and vulnerability. CalEnviroScreen relies on two groups of indicators:

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<sup>2</sup> OEHHA, CalEnviroScreen. <https://oehha.ca.gov/calenviroscreen>

<sup>3</sup> OEHHA, CalEnviroScreen: Indicators Overview. <https://oehha.ca.gov/calenviroscreen/indicators-overview>

- a) Pollution burden indicators: air quality (ozone and PM2.5), children's lead risk from housing, diesel particulate matter, drinking water contaminants, pesticide use, toxic releases from facilities, traffic impacts, cleanup sites, groundwater threats, hazardous waste generators and facilities, impaired water bodies, and solid waste sites and facilities.
- b) Population characteristic indicators: asthma, cardiovascular disease, low birth weight infants, educational attainment, housing burden, linguistic isolation, poverty, and unemployment.

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.<sup>4</sup>

- 3) *Farmworker communities*. California farmworkers face major challenges, including pesticide exposure, poverty, educational barriers, linguistic isolation, housing and food insecurity, difficult working conditions, and poor healthcare access. As noted above, 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.

In a 2022 study, researchers from the University of California, Riverside state that pesticides “contribute to poor health conditions among farmworkers who have considerably higher exposure to pesticides than non-agricultural workers, increasing their risk for skin disease, vision problems, and respiratory-associated illness.”<sup>5</sup>

In 2022, the United States Department of Labor released "California Findings from the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS) 2015-2019" which found that 96% of California farmworkers were Hispanic, 84% could not speak English well or at all, 35% lived in crowded dwellings, and the average income

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<sup>4</sup> OEHHA. Draft CalEnviroScreen 5.0. <https://oehha.ca.gov/calenviroscreen/report/draft-calenviroscreen-50>

<sup>5</sup> Cheney, A.M., et al. (2022) *The intersection of workplace and environmental exposure on health in Latinx farm working communities in rural inland southern California*, International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9566176/>

was less than \$25,000.<sup>6</sup> Another 2022 survey conducted by CDPH and UC Merced found that 42% of California farmworkers reported very low or low food security, more than one third reported difficulties keeping their home cool, 40 to 50% had health testing indicating pre-diabetes, diabetes, or chronic inflammatory conditions, and nearly half did not have health insurance at some point in the last 12 months.<sup>7</sup>

- 4) *The Low-Income Weatherization Program*. Funded by GGRF, LIWP reduces household energy costs and GHG emissions by funding energy efficiency upgrades and rooftop solar photovoltaic systems, at no cost to low-income households.<sup>8</sup> Since its inception in 2014, LIWP has received funding from GGRF, the state's General Fund, and, most recently, Prop 4, the Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024, which authorized the issuance of \$10 million to the Farmworker Housing Component of LIWP.

Farmworker families spend a larger share of their annual income on home energy and often cut back on other critical needs to pay their energy bills. 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.<sup>9</sup> To be eligible, a household must a) live in a single-family home or stand-alone building with two to four units; b) include a verified farmworker or farmworker family; and c) 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.<sup>9</sup> 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, including San Joaquin County and San Diego counties, among others.

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<sup>6</sup> US Department of Labor (2022) *California Findings from the National Agricultural Workers Survey*. <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/research/publications/findings-national-agricultural-workers-survey-naws-2015-2019>

<sup>7</sup> UC Merced (2023) *Community and Labor Center's New Study Highlights Farmworkers' Health Challenges*. <https://news.ucmerced.edu/news/2023/community-and-labor-centers-new-study-highlights-farmworkers-health-challenges>

<sup>8</sup> CSD, *Low-Income Weatherization Program*. <https://www.csd.ca.gov/Pages/Low-Income-Weatherization-Program.aspx>

<sup>9</sup> CSD, *Farmworker Housing Energy Efficiency and Solar PV*. <https://www.csd.ca.gov/Pages/Farmworker-Housing-Component.aspx>

## Comments

- 1) *Purpose of Bill.* According to the author, “Farmworkers make essential contributions to California and our economy. Their efforts help to feed the state, nation, and the world, while their contributions have made California’s agricultural sector a \$49 billion dollar industry that generates \$100 billion dollars in related economic activity. Even as farmworkers actively contribute so much to our state, they simultaneously confront the compounding burdens of extreme heat, pesticide exposure, substandard housing, and environmental degradation.

“California’s climate investment framework specifically exists to support communities that face such challenges, and the disadvantaged communities designation (DAC) was implemented to prioritize their ability to receive funding from the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF). However, under the current framework, many rural and unincorporated farmworker communities consistently fall outside the eligibility boundaries this tool identifies, even though it is well documented that these communities face multifaceted socioeconomic and environmental burdens. AB 1600 resolves this gap by expressly designating farmworker communities as DACs, giving them access to vital funding to improve infrastructure and the quality of life.”

- 2) *Current representation of farmworkers in CalEnviroScreen.* Several indicators used by CalEnviroScreen to identify disadvantaged communities overlap with the difficulties faced by farmworker communities: pesticide use, asthma, educational attainment, housing burden, linguistic isolation, and poverty. However, most of these indicators fall under “Population characteristic indicators” whereas pesticide use is just one consideration under “Pollution burden indicators.” Therefore, it’s possible that communities with substantial exposure to pesticide use, in the absence of other forms of pollution, may not be designated as a disadvantaged community. Additionally, farmworker communities are further at risk due to lack of access to healthcare,<sup>7</sup> extreme heat exposure,<sup>10</sup> energy burden,<sup>7</sup> and immigration status.<sup>11</sup> These data points are not currently considered under CalEnviroScreen. Understanding that the agricultural industry is essential for California’s food security and economy, farmworker communities deserve additional support, as this bill provides.

## Related/Prior Legislation

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<sup>10</sup> Borunda, A (2026) *A California study has lessons for efforts to protect workers from excessive heat*, NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2026/01/01/nx-s1-5660893/california-study-protect-workers-from-excessive-heat>

<sup>11</sup> Valenzuela, L. (2025) *‘They still need care’: Why California migrant workers are avoiding medical clinics*, CalMatters. <https://calmatters.org/economy/2025/12/immigrant-farmworker-medical-clinic/>

SB 867 (Allen, Chapter 83, Statutes of 2024) enacted the Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024, which, once approved by voters (via Prop 4), authorized the issuance of bonds in the amount of \$10 billion, including \$10 million for the Farmworker Housing Component of the LIWP.

AB 1232 (Gloria, Chapter 754, Statutes of 2019) directed the Department of Community Services and Development (CSD), by January 1, 2021, to provide an action plan that, among other things, ensures greater cross-referral between public health agencies, CDPH's Office of Health Equity, and the LIWP for comprehensive energy and healthy home improvements for low-income multifamily residents in disadvantaged communities.

AB 2715 (E. Garcia, 2016) would have directed CSD to develop and administer an Agricultural Working Poor Energy Efficient Housing Program to improve energy efficiency in farmworker-owned housing. This bill died on the suspense file in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

AB 862 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review, Chapter 36, Statutes of 2014) required CSD to develop and administer LIWP.

AB 32 (Núñez, Chapter 488, Statutes of 2006) requires, among other things, that CARB ensure that greenhouse gas emission reduction rules, regulations, programs, mechanisms, and incentives under its jurisdiction direct public and private investment toward the most disadvantaged communities in California and provide an opportunity for small businesses, schools, affordable housing associations, and other community institutions to participate in and benefit from statewide efforts to reduce emissions.

**SOURCE:** La Cooperativa de Campesina

**SUPPORT:**

California Human Development  
Center for Employment Training  
Central Valley Opportunity Center (CVOC)  
LA Cooperativa Campesina De California  
Los Amigos De LA Comunidad, INC.  
Proteus INC.

**OPPOSITION:**

None received

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