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# SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES AND WATER

Senator Monique Limón, Chair  
2025 - 2026 Regular

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<b>Bill No:</b>	AB 524	<b>Hearing Date:</b>	June 24, 2025
<b>Author:</b>	Wilson		
<b>Version:</b>	April 22, 2025 Amended		
<b>Urgency:</b>	No	<b>Fiscal:</b>	Yes
<b>Consultant:</b>	Genevieve Wong		

**Subject:** Farmland Access and Conservation for Thriving Communities Act

## SUMMARY

This bill would establish the Farmland Access and Conservation for Thriving Communities Program to provide financial and technical assistance to support land acquisition and protection by providing financial assistance to nonprofit organizations, public agencies, farmer cooperatives, tribal governments and tribal entities, agricultural land trusts, and community land trusts, and providing long-term leases to beginning farmers or ranchers or socially disadvantaged farmers or ranches.

## BACKGROUND AND EXISTING LAW

***Department of Conservation, Division of Land Resource Protection.*** According to its mission statement, the DOC “balances today’s needs with tomorrow’s challenges and fosters intelligent, sustainable, and efficient use of California’s energy, land, and mineral resources.” Its mission is “a safe, sustainable environment for all Californians.

The DOC’s Division of Land Resource Protection (DLRP) serves as the state’s leader in conserving California’s agricultural lands. DLRP provides information, as well as technical and financial assistance, to partners to protect California’s agricultural land and promote sustainable growth. Some of the grant programs administered by DLRP include:

- *Agricultural Land Mitigation Program* which provides funding for the purchase of agricultural conservation easements on farmland within Fresno, Madera, Merced, Kern, Kings, or Tulare counties.
- *California Farmland Conservancy Program* (CFCP) is a statewide grant program that supports local efforts to establish agricultural conservation easements and land improvement projects for the purpose of preserving important agricultural land resources and enhancing sustainable agricultural uses. The CFCP was created to:
  - Encourage voluntary, long-term private stewardship of agricultural lands.
  - Protect farming and ranching operations in agricultural areas from nonfarm or nonranch land uses that may hinder or curtail such operations.
  - Encourage long-term conservation of productive agricultural lands to protect the agricultural economy of rural communities, as well as that of the state, for future generations of Californians.

- Encourage local land use planning for orderly and efficient urban growth and conservation of agricultural land.
- Encourage local land use planning decisions that are consistent with the state's agricultural land conservation policies.
- Encourage improvements to enhance long-term sustainable agricultural uses.
- *Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program* which supports agricultural land conservation, economic growth, and sustainable development by providing grants for:
  - Land Use Planning grants that support the development of local and regional land use policies and economic development strategies to protect critical agricultural land.
  - Agricultural Conservation Acquisition grants to permanently protect croplands, rangelands, and lands utilized for the cultivation of traditional resources from conservation to non-agricultural uses.
  - Capacity and Project Development grants to expand organizational capacity to develop agricultural conservation acquisition projects.

**California Agricultural Land Equity Task Force.** In 2022, in order to address the historical challenges facing socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers in California, the Legislature authorized the Strategic Growth Council to establish the California Agricultural Land Equity Task Force (Task Force). AB 179 (Ting, Chapter 249, Statutes of 2022) requires the Task Force to develop recommendations to equitably increase access to agricultural land for food production and traditional tribal agricultural uses. The Task Force consists of a regionally diverse group of individuals, up to 13 members, including native and tribal liaisons, a land trust representative, individuals with expertise on issues affecting socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers, an individual with expertise in agricultural land acquisition and finance, a State Board of Food and Agriculture member, a farmworker representative, a beginning farmer, the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) Farm Equity Advisor, and an individual from the CDFA Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) Producer Advisory Committee. The task force meets quarterly and is required to deliver a full report of recommendations to the Legislature and Governor by January 1, 2026.

**The Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024 (Proposition 4).** The Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024 (SB 867 (Allen, Chapter 83, Statutes of 2024)) (Act) authorized a \$10 billion bond to be placed before the state's voters for approval. The Act became Proposition 4 on the November 5, 2024 statewide ballot and passed with a vote of 9,055,116 to 6,086,414 (59.8% to 40.2%).

Proposition 4, upon appropriation by the Legislature, provides \$3.8 billion for safe drinking water, drought, flood, and water resilience programs; \$1.5 billion for wildfire and forest resilience programs; \$1.2 billion for coastal resilience programs; \$450 million for extreme heat mitigation programs; \$1.2 billion for biodiversity protection and nature-based climate solution programs; \$300 million for climate-smart, sustainable, and

resilient farms, ranches, and working lands programs; \$700 million for park creation and outdoor access programs; and \$850 million for clean energy programs.

Of these funds, Proposition 4 allocates \$30 million to the DOC, in consultation with the Task Force, to improve land access and tenure for socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers, tribal producers, and beginning farmers and ranchers. Proposition 4 authorizes the DOC to make low-interest loans to qualified entities, which shall include land trusts, nonprofit organizations, public agencies, farmer cooperatives, tribal governments, or tribal entities, for the purpose of acquiring agricultural lands to transfer or provide long-term leases to socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers and beginning farmers and ranchers.

The 2025-26 State budget, as proposed by SB 101 (Wiener) and enrolled on June 13, 2025, does not appear to appropriate any moneys, including Proposition 4 moneys, for the improvement of land access and tenure for socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers, tribal producers, and beginning farmers and ranchers.

***Existing law:***

- 1) Establishes the DOC within the California Natural Resources Agency and vests with DOC duties, powers, responsibilities, and jurisdiction of forestry, mines and geology, oil and gas, and soil conservation. (Public Resources Code (PRC) §§600 *et seq.*)
- 2) Establishes, within the DOC, the California Farmland Conservancy Program (CFCP) which offers financial assistance, including grants or contracts, for projects and activities on agricultural lands, as defined, which support agricultural conservation and sustainable land management. (PRC §§10200 *et seq.*)
- 3) Establishes the Farmer Equity Act of 2017 which requires the Department of Food and Agriculture to ensure the inclusion of socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers in the development, adoption, implementation, and enforcement of food and agriculture laws, regulations, and policies and programs. Defines “socially disadvantaged group” to mean a group whose members have been subjected to racial, ethnic, or gender prejudice because of their identify as members of a group without regard to their individual qualities and includes African Americans, Native Indians, Alaskan Natives, Hispanics, Asian Americans, and Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders. (Food and Agricultural Code (FAC) §§510 *et seq.*)

**PROPOSED LAW**

This bill would:

- 1) Enact the Farmland Access and Conservation for Thriving Communities Act (FACT CA).
- 2) Require DOC, in collaboration with the Task Force, to establish the Farmland Access and Conservation for Thriving Communities Program (Program) in the DOC to provide financial and technical assistance to support agricultural and land acquisition.

- 3) Require DOC, through the Program, to provide financial assistance to “qualified entities” for the purpose of acquiring agricultural lands to transfer or provide long-term leases to “qualified farmer participants.”
  - a) Define “qualified entity” to mean (1) a nonprofit organization with tax-exempt status, as specified; (2) a public agency; (3) a farmer cooperative; (4) a tribal government; (5) a tribal entity; (6) an agricultural land trust, the primary purpose of which is the preservation, protection, or enhancement of land in its natural, scenic, historical, agricultural, forested, or open-space condition or use; or (7) a community land trust.
  - b) Define “qualified farmer participant” as a farm enterprise whose beneficial owners are beginning farmers or ranchers, or socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers, and that commits to using practices, methodologies, and techniques that improve soil health, biodiversity, conservation, and long-term sustainability in the production of agricultural crops to be sold in commerce or distributed.
  - c) Define “socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher” as having the same meaning as the existing definition for “socially disadvantaged group” under FAC §512. That section defines “socially disadvantaged group” as 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. The groups include (1) African Americans, (2) Native Indians, (3) Alaskan Natives, (4) Hispanics, (5) Asian Americans, and (6) Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders.
- 4) Specify that activities eligible for funding through the Program include, but are not limited to:
  - a) Acquisition planning and development, including support to assist with land identification, determining zoning and land-use restrictions and verifying water rights and access to irrigation, inspecting soil quality, amongst others.
  - b) Purchase of fee title to agricultural land.
  - c) Purchase of easements such as conservation easements, reserved interest conservation easements, and cultural access easements.
  - d) Technical assistance, including retaining services of various professionals such as attorneys, real estate brokers, and farmer cooperative management consultants.
  - e) Land improvements that will directly benefit the lands and the individuals managing the land and their commitment to conservation and sustainable land use including, but not limited to, farmer and farmworker housing, on-farm infrastructure improvements, and space for cultural practice.
- 5) Require DOC, in providing financial assistance pursuant to the Program to:
  - a) Prioritize financial assistance for activities that benefit socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers and activities that primarily benefit farms or ranches that are 500 acres or less.

- b) Prioritize financial assistance to qualified entities who have clearly demonstrated experience working with socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers.
  - c) Prioritize technical and financial assistance to tribal governments and tribal entities to secure agricultural land or reclaim ancestral lands for sustainable food production and stewardship of cultural resources.
  - d) Provide reasonable per diem and resources to members of the Task Force to ensure proper oversight over the development of the Program.
  - e) Ensure that the proceeds of future resale of land continue to be used for purposes of the Program.
  - f) Ensure that no more than 15 percent of financial assistance awarded under the Program is used for the land improvements described above in paragraph 4).
  - g) Allocate at least 33 percent of financial assistance awarded under the Program during each grant cycle to tribal governments and tribal entities.
- 6) Require a qualified entity that receives a grant under the Program to do either of the following within five years of acquiring agricultural land:
- a) Transfer the agricultural land to a qualified farmer participant, as specified.
  - b) Enter into a long-term lease of the agricultural land with a qualified farmer participant, as specified.
- 7) Establish the Farmland Access Fund (Fund), to be continuously appropriated to the DOC for Program expenditures. Require the following moneys to be deposited into the Fund:
- a) Moneys that may be appropriated by the Legislature pursuant to Proposition 4, as specified.
  - b) Any gifts, grants, or endowments from private sources or the federal government received by the DOC for purposes of the Program.
  - c) Any moneys collected by DOC as proceeds from repayments of loans issued under the program.
- 8) Authorize DOC to contract with nonprofit organizations to administer the Program if the DOC:
- a) Determines that each nonprofit organization that it selects is a qualified entity that has demonstrated substantial experience serving socially disadvantaged farmers or ranches.
  - b) Consults with the Task Force to select each nonprofit organization to administer the Program.
- 9) Makes various findings and declarations regarding various challenges faced by small scale, beginning, and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers and tribal communities and the need to support them in accessing land for farming.

**ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT**

According to the author, “[b]uilding off of the success of Proposition 4, AB 524 is meant to create a new land access program to address one of the largest challenges California’s beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers face: land tenure. This program would open up opportunities for farmers who have the greatest need for land security while simultaneously supporting agricultural land conservation in California. Farmers have limited stability on the land they rent, which leads to an inability to invest in sustainable agriculture and conservation practices or apply for many existing government programs. This program will increase land tenure, protect it from sprawl development, and create new opportunities to support sustainable agricultural practices and land stewardship.”

**ARGUMENTS IN OPPOSITION**

None received

**COMMENTS**

***This bill is double-referred.*** This bill is double referred with the Senate Agriculture Committee, with this committee being the committee of first referral. Elements of this bill under the jurisdiction of the Senate Agriculture Committee are included here for context and completeness only and will be discussed before that Committee.

***Different from the rest.*** The DOC’s DLRP already administers a number of programs aimed at the conservation of agricultural lands. However, FACT CA may be the first that prioritizes beginning farmers or ranchers and socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers and providing these groups with access to farmland. Many beginning farmers or ranchers and socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers are “tenant farmers” and do not own the land they work. As such, they are also not eligible for many of the state’s existing conservation programs. FACT CA appears to provide these groups with the needed tools and support to acquire agricultural lands.

***Proposition 4 Implementation.*** While this bill does not directly appropriate Proposition 4 moneys, it does identify Proposition 4 moneys as a potential source of funding.

In his January budget, Governor Newsom proposed the Legislature start appropriating Proposition 4 moneys in Fiscal Year 2025/2026. Although the Legislature sent the Governor a budget on June 13, 2025, negotiations continue through the Legislative budget process to appropriate Proposition 4 moneys.

**SUPPORT**

Community Alliance With Family  
Farmers (CAFF) (sponsor)  
40 Acre Conservation League  
Acterra: Action for a Healthy Planet  
African American Farmers of California  
Agricultural Institute of Marin  
Agriculture & Land Based Training  
Association  
Alameda County Community Food Bank  
Alchemist CDC

Allensworth Progressive Association  
American Farmland Trust  
App's Photography  
Apple Creek Vineyard Farm  
Aqua Crop LLC  
Asian Pacific Islander Forward  
Movement  
Association for Farmers Rights Defense  
Asyrs Bridge LLC  
Bianchi Ranches

Big Pine Paiute Tribe  
 Black Thumb Farm  
 Bless'd Blossom Garden  
 Blossom Bluff Orchards  
 Br Beef LLC  
 Brisa Ranch  
 Brown Sugar Farm  
 Brunner Family Farm LLC  
 Butte County Local Food Network  
 California Agricultural Land Equity Task  
     Force AB 524 Subcommittee  
 California Center for Cooperative  
 Development  
 California Climate & Agricultural  
     Network (CALCAN)  
 California Community Land Trust  
     Network  
 California Farm Bureau Federation  
 California Farmer Justice Collaborative  
 California Farmlink  
 California Food and Farming Network  
 Captain Vineyards  
 Carbon Cycle Institute  
 Center for Land-based Learning  
 Central California Environmental Justice  
     Network  
 Central Coast Alliance United for a  
     Sustainable Economy  
 Ceres Community Project  
 Chiatry De Laguna Farm  
 Chávez Lamb  
 Coastside Farmers' Markets  
 Condor's Hope Ranch  
 County of Solano  
 Crop Swap LA  
 Cultural Roots Nursery  
 Deep Roots Farm  
 Devil's Gulch Ranch  
 Dinner Bell Farm  
 Dolly Farms Vacaville  
 Earthseed Laboratories  
 Edible Ecology INC.  
 Eggman Family Honey Farms  
 Endangered Habitats League  
 Entangled Stewardship  
 Estrella Farm  
 Everyone's Harvest  
 Facts Families Advocating for Chemical  
     and Toxics Safety  
 Farm2people

Feral Heart Farm  
 First Mother Farms  
 Fogdog Farm  
 Food Access LA  
 Foodwise  
 Fresh Approach  
 Fresno BIPOC Produce INC.  
 Friends Center for National Legislation  
 Frog Hollow Farm  
 Fruition Farm & Fiber  
 Future Roots Farm  
 Golden Nectar Farm  
 Grazing School of the West  
 Green Foothills  
 Green Hill Farms  
 Grow Eco Farm  
 Gt Florists & Herbs  
 Hen and Harvest Farm  
 Huitla Co Farm  
 Hummingbird Agrotek, LLC  
 Inecui Flowers  
 Integrity Alpacas's & Fiber  
 Interfaith Sustainable Food  
     Collaborative  
 Jaide Conservation Collective, LLC  
 Kitchel Family Organics  
 Kitchen Table Advisors  
 Ladyhawke Farm  
 Laura's Apples  
 Littorai Wines  
 Los Angeles Climate Reality Project  
 Los Angeles Ecovillage  
 Los Angeles Food Policy Council  
 Los Prismas Organic Farms  
 Lost Sierra Food Project  
 Magpie  
 Marin Food Policy Council  
 Mariposa Habitat Nursery  
 Mcgrath Family Farm  
 Medium Farm LLC  
 Merriman Properties LLC  
 Mixteco/indigena Community Organizing  
     Project (MICOP)  
 Nextgen California  
 Oasis Group  
 Oasis.build  
 Occidental Community Farmers Market  
 Ocean Street Farm  
 Olivia Tincani & Co., LLC  
 Orange Home Grown Foundation Inc.

Our Global Family Farm  
Papa Joe Farm  
Peninsula Open Space Trust  
Pesticide Action & Agroecology Network  
Piano Farm  
Pie Ranch  
Plowshares Alliance  
Plurinational Land Reform in CA  
Working Group  
Prairie Companion Company  
Prevention Institute  
Project New Village  
Punjabi American Growers Group  
Red DOT Ranch  
Red H Farm  
River Dip Farm  
Riverdance Farms  
Rootdown LA  
Roots of Change  
Saba Community Food Alliance  
San Diego Food System Alliance  
Santa Barbara County Food Action  
Network  
Santa Clara Valley Open Space  
Authority  
Shepherd App's  
Sierra Harvest

Sierra Orchards  
Singing Frogs Farm  
Slow Food East Bay  
Socal Double D Farm  
Sonoma County Agriculture and Open  
Space  
Sonoma County Farm Trails  
Spring Hill Farmstead Goat Cheese LLC  
Square One Foundation  
Sustainable Systems Research  
Foundation  
The Farmer and the Cook  
The Hens Toast  
The Hungry Gardens  
Three Feathers Farm  
Tierra De Esperanza Organic Farm  
Tokoro Seeds  
Topete Family Farm  
Tree People  
Union of Concerned Scientists  
Val Verde Unified School District  
Veggielution  
West Marin Food Systems Group  
What We All Deserve (WWAD)  
Wisteria Springs Farm  
World Be Well Organization  
Wormley Orchards

**OPPOSITION**

None Received

**-- END --**