
THIRD READING

Bill No: AB 524
Author: Wilson (D), et al.
Amended: 8/29/25 in Senate
Vote: 21

SENATE NATURAL RES. & WATER COMMITTEE: 6-1, 6/24/25
AYES: Limón, Allen, Grove, Hurtado, Laird, Stern
NOES: Seyarto

SENATE AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE: 4-0, 7/15/25
AYES: Hurtado, Cortese, McNerney, Padilla
NO VOTE RECORDED: Alvarado-Gil

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: 6-1, 8/29/25
AYES: Caballero, Cabaldon, Dahle, Grayson, Richardson, Wahab
NOES: Seyarto

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 76-0, 6/2/25 - See last page for vote

SUBJECT: Farmland Access and Conservation for Thriving Communities Act

SOURCE: Community Alliance With Family Farmers

DIGEST: This bill establishes, upon appropriation, 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.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes the Department of Conservation (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 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. (Food and Agricultural Code (FAC) §§ 510 *et seq.*)

This bill:

- 1) Enacts, contingent upon appropriation, the Farmland Access and Conservation for Thriving Communities Act.
- 2) Requires DOC, in collaboration with the California Agricultural Land Equity Task Force (Task Force), to establish the Farmland Access and Conservation for Thriving Communities Program (Program) to provide financial and technical assistance to support agricultural and land acquisition.
- 3) Requires 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.” Defines these terms for purposes of this bill.
- 4) Specifies 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 the 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) Requires DOC, in providing financial assistance pursuant to the Program to, among other things:
- 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 for qualified entities that have 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) Ensure that the proceeds of future resale of land continue to be used for purposes of the Program.
 - e) Allocate at least 33 percent of financial assistance awarded under the Program during each grant cycle to tribal governments and tribal entities.
- 6) Requires 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) Establishes the Farmland Access Fund (Fund) and makes moneys in the Fund available upon appropriation. Requires 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) 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.

Background

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. DLRP administers various grant programs including the Agricultural Land Mitigation Program, the California Farmland Conservancy Program, and the Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program.

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 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.

See the Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee analysis for additional background information.

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: Yes Local: No

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee,

- “The Department of Conservation (DOC) notes that the fiscal impact would be dependent on the amount of funding allocated to the program. Assuming an appropriation of \$20 million in local assistance for the purposes of this bill, DOC estimates ongoing costs of \$537,267 in the first year and \$500,514 annually thereafter (General Fund, Proposition 4 bond funds, or other special fund) for state operations costs of standing up a new program. DOC notes that it may require additional resources to implement and manage the program.
- “The Governor’s Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation (LCI) estimates limited-term costs of approximately \$525,000 per year for two years (General Fund, Proposition 4 bond funds, or other special fund) for staffing, potential outside facilitator costs, and meeting facilitation costs to support the Task Force for the two years it anticipates the work would take to complete.
- “Ongoing cost pressures of an unknown but significant amount, likely in the tens of millions of dollars (General Fund, Proposition 4 bond funds, or other special fund) to provide funding for the new program that would be created by this bill.”

SUPPORT: (Verified 8/29/25)

Community Alliance With Family Farmers (Source)

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 Center for Cooperative Development
California Climate & Agricultural Network
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
Chiatri De Laguna Farm
Chávez Lamb
Coastside Farmers' Markets
Condor's Hope Ranch
County of Santa Clara
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
Lideres Campesinas
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
NextGen California
Oasis.build, Oasis Group
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 and 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
Wisteria Springs Farm
World Be Well Organization
Wormley Orchards

OPPOSITION: (Verified 8/29/25)

California Department of Finance

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: According to the California Department of Finance, this bill “will likely create significant ongoing General Fund cost pressures to either implement the intended program, if Proposition 4 bond fundings

is not available, or to continue it after Proposition 4 bond funding is no longer available.”

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 76-0, 6/2/25

AYES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Chen, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Elhawary, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Gallagher, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

NO VOTE RECORDED: Ellis, Macedo, Sanchez

Prepared by: Genevieve Wong / N.R. & W. / (916) 651-4116
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