

GOVERNOR'S VETO
AB 524 (Wilson)
As Enrolled September 12, 2025
2/3 vote

SUMMARY

This bill would require the Department of Conservation (DOC), in collaboration with the California Agricultural Land Equity Task Force (CALETF), to establish the Farmland Access and Conservation for Thriving Communities (FACT-CA) Program, within the DOC to provide financial and technical assistance to support agricultural land acquisition and protection.

Senate Amendments

- 1) Deletes lease-to-own provision and replaces with right of first refusal.
- 2) Make the provisions of the bill contingent upon an appropriation.

Governor's Veto Message

I am returning Assembly Bill 524 without my signature.

This bill would require the Department of Conservation, in collaboration with the California Agricultural Land Equity Task Force, to establish the Farmland Access and Conservation for Thriving Communities Program to improve land access and tenure for socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers, tribal producers, and beginning farmers and ranchers.

Land access is a critical issue for beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, and I support the intention of this bill to assist those groups. While this bill would authorize the program to receive funds from Proposition 4 - The Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024 - recent budget action by the Legislature did not explicitly appropriate funding to support this program and there is no sustained funding to support the ongoing cost pressure this program would create.

In partnership with the Legislature this year, my Administration has enacted a balanced budget that recognizes the challenging fiscal landscape our state faces while maintaining our commitment to working families and our most vulnerable communities. With significant fiscal pressures and the federal government's hostile economic policies, it is vital that we remain disciplined when considering bills with significant fiscal implications that are not included in the budget, such as this measure.

COMMENTS

In recent years, the State of California has enacted several policies and programs intended to improve land access for the State's socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers (SDFR), beginning farmers and ranchers (BFR) and limited resource farmers and ranchers. Stable and secure land tenure is vital in achieving long-term prosperity for California's farmers, a robust food system, and healthy natural and working lands. Like much of the United States, however, California's history has been characterized by inequitable access to land, especially for Indigenous communities who have been dispossessed of their traditional territory and others experiencing marginalization around the intersection of race, class, gender, and other identities.

In recent years, actions by the State of California work address land access and equity in the agricultural sector. Policies such as The Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation (SALC) Program, the Farmer Equity Act AB 1348(Aguiar-Curry) Chapter 620, Statutes of 2017, the 30x30 California initiative, and the California Agricultural Land Equity Task Force are working to expand land access. Recently Proposition 4 of 2024 set aside 30 million dollars (\$30,000,000) for land access/tenure programs.

Land tenure has never been more challenging as we see rapid rates of land loss and soaring land prices. According to the USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service, in 2024, the average price of an acre of farmland in California was \$13,400—among the highest in the country. Today, the cost of land is worsening because of competition from hedge funds and warehouse developers for agricultural land. In California, 50% of cropland is owned by 5% of the total landowners, and 37% of cropland is owned by non-farmers and rented or leased, demonstrating how hard it is for community-scale farmers to break into owning farmland.

According to the Author

Building off of the success of Proposition 4, this bill 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 Support

There is no state-level program dedicated to providing financial or technical resources to support farmers with land tenure. This bill is a bold step to fill this gap, creating the first statewide program in California dedicated to land security. Administered by the DOC, in consultation with the Agricultural Land Equity Task Force, this program aims to provide financial resources to various entities including beginning and underserved farmer cooperatives, SDFR-serving non-profit organizations, community land trusts, Tribal governments, Tribal entities, and land trusts to purchase land with the overall purpose of providing long-term leases or transferring land to farmers and Tribal communities directly. This program will also include funding essential technical assistance and infrastructural needs to ensure the long-term viability and success of these future farmers and land stewards. This bill is a critical bill that offers an opportunity to address a fundamental challenge facing our communities.

Arguments in Opposition

None on file.

FISCAL COMMENTS

- 1) DOC reports its costs associated with establishing and administering the Program will ultimately depend on the amount of funding allocated to the Program. As an example, for a \$20 million appropriation, DOC would incur administrative costs of approximately \$575,000 in year one and \$500,000 ongoing annually thereafter for three staff positions (General Fund, special fund, or bond funds).

- 2) The Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation, which houses CALETF, estimates costs of approximately \$525,000 annually for two years to hire two limited-term staff to coordinate with DOC and facilitate CALETF meetings (General Fund, special fund, or bond funds).
- 3) Ongoing cost pressure of an unknown but significant amount, potentially in the tens of millions of dollars, to provide funding for financial and technical assistance to support agricultural land acquisition and protection (General Fund, special fund, or bond funds).

The Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024 (Proposition 4) authorizes \$10 billion for various programs and priorities, including \$30 million to DOC, in consultation with CALETF, to improve land access and tenure for socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers, tribal producers, and beginning farmers and ranchers. The Governor's proposed Proposition 4 implementation plan does not yet include an appropriation timeline for this funding. The Legislative Analyst's Office reports the administration has requested that the Legislature provide more guidance around its vision for this allocation – which this bill is intending to do.

The bond provides that of 7% or \$20 million of the funds allocated for a grant program, whichever is less, may be used to pay for the administrative costs of that program.

VOTES

ASM AGRICULTURE: 8-0-0

YES: Soria, Alanis, Aguiar-Curry, Connolly, Jeff Gonzalez, Hadwick, Irwin, Ransom

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 14-0-1

YES: Wicks, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Dixon, Elhawary, Fong, Mark González, Hart, Pacheco, Pellerin, Solache, Ta, Tangipa

ABS, ABST OR NV: Sanchez

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 76-0-3

YES: 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

ABS, ABST OR NV: Ellis, Macedo, Sanchez

SENATE FLOOR: 31-5-4

YES: Allen, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Cortese, Dahle, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Hurtado, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Padilla, Pérez, Reyes, Richardson, Rubio, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Umberg, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener

NO: Choi, Niello, Ochoa Bogh, Seyarto, Strickland

ABS, ABST OR NV: Alvarado-Gil, Grove, Jones, Valladares

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 77-0-3

YES: 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, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Gallagher, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, 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, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

ABS, ABST OR NV: Johnson, Sanchez, Tangipa

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VERSION: September 12, 2025

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