



CAFF
COMMUNITY ALLIANCE
with FAMILY FARMERS

2023

FARMER POLICY PRIORITIES

In California more than **84% of farms operate on less than 180 acres and nearly three-fourths operate on less than \$100,000 in annual sales**¹ (per United States Department of Agriculture these farms are considered small-scale). Unfortunately, California is losing at least four small farms a day, the challenges facing small farmers are overwhelming and make the simple act of growing food to feed local communities a nearly impossible task. The realities of the climate crisis, existing supply chain, and food system disproportionately affect people who make a livelihood growing food, which includes the 1 in 5 California farmers who identify as Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC)². This is exacerbated as existing government programs prioritize funds for large industrial systems and are fundamentally inaccessible to diversified farming systems operated by underserved communities.



operate on less than
180 acres



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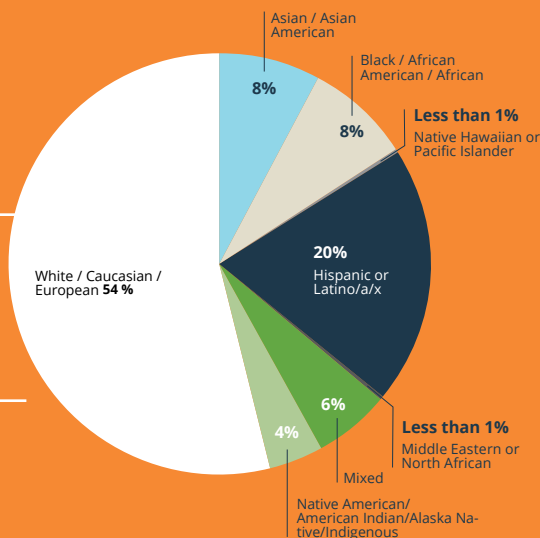
¹ United States Department of Agriculture(USDA) - Small Farms, Big Differences: [link](#)
² Also known as: "Socially Disadvantaged" per [2020 CDEA Farmer Equity Act Report](#) OR "Historically Underserved" per [USDA-NRCS Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018](#)

WHO

Distribution of farmers by self-identified race

Average farm size of less than 20 acres

60% of surveyed farmers identify as female, nonbinary and LGBTQ+



The priorities identified here are a direct result of an intensive farmer-listening process engaging 550 farmers and land stewards, through a multilingual online survey, over a dozen regional meetings, and one-on-one conversations in Fall 2022. This process included the voices of a wide range of farmers across California from urban to rural, small and mid-sized, with a diversity of racial, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. The majority of these farmers can be identified as small-scale, beginning, and underserved food producers, many of whom manage diversified farming operations growing and selling their food in California and are essential members of our local economies and communities. Due to CAFF's success last year securing state funding for new state programs, many priorities are focused on program implementation to ensure state programs provide maximum benefits for small-scale, beginning, and underserved food producers.



Hope Sippola, Fiery Ginger
PC: Monika Elena Photo

99%

of farmers indicate they practice one or more of the following systems: regenerative, sustainable, organic, ecological, agroecological, tribal foodways, and/or traditional tribal agricultural uses

PRIMARY CHALLENGES



1 Access to Water



Over **70%** of surveyed farmers reported to have been **negatively** impacted by the drought.

Water access was ranked the most critical issue facing farmers. Many rural farmers are suffering from the drought and have had their well dry up or their surface water completely cut off. Urban farmers continue to struggle with high municipal water bills, in many cases made worse by the drought.

“We need to dramatically shift how we think about land as we envision a more equitable food system. Land can no longer be thought of as a commodity that can be bought and sold and traded by private investment firms or large corporations. In order to reduce barriers for BIPOC farmers and land stewards we need to center land stewardship frameworks that operate as commons and are stewarded at a family-scale.”

—**Kwayera Wilson**
Director of Programs & Operations
Black Urban Growers

Gemoua Farm
PC: Monika Elena Photo



Gemoua Farm
PC: Monika Elena Photo

2 Access to Land

Land access and security is a fundamental challenge for California’s small-scale, beginning, and underserved farmers. The combination of skyrocketing land prices, corporate investment firms buying up any available land, and warehouse development, these farmers have no other choice but to lease or stop farming altogether.



At least 40% of surveyed farmers indicated they lease the land they cultivate, which limits their ability to invest in land they are on and feel secure in their businesses.

3 Access to Capital & Infrastructure

Most of our farmers have been left out of any government grant opportunities that award many farmers the financial capital to invest in their farm infrastructure and sustainability.



64% of farmers believe current state and federal grants and programs are not supporting BIPOC & low income farmers



62% of farmers have never benefited from any government grant programs.

Additional Challenges Facing Farmers:

(See page 4 for details)

4 Climate Change & Uncertainty

5 Ecological Agriculture Resources & Training

6 Business Viability



The following priorities are the most pressing issues our farmers face and need to be addressed in the coming 2023 legislative session:

Recommendations for California Policymakers



Ensure California's local food producers have **access to water, financial relief, and education**

2023 CAFF State-Level Policy Priorities & Actions

IMPLEMENTATION

- Engage in the state's \$10M investment to the Department of Water Resources (DWR) support small food-producing farmers to participate in [SGMA's](#) Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs)
- Engage in the state's \$2M investment to the DWR to support dry farming education
- Engage in the state's investments to provide drought relief to California's small food-producing farmers through California Department of Food and Agriculture's (CDFA) [CUSP program](#) (\$25M) as well as the [Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development](#) (\$18.75M).

ACTION

- Identify policy solutions to address high water costs for California's urban farmers



Improve **access to land** for California's small-scale, beginning, & underserved food producers

IMPLEMENTATION

- Provide oversight and ensure continued investment in the - to be formed- [California Agricultural Land Equity Task Force](#) facilitated by the California [Strategic Growth Council](#) (SGC)

ACTION

- Inform existing and new state programs such as the SGC's [Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation \(SALC\)](#) program & Department of Conservation's [CA Farmland Conservancy Program](#) about how to better serve farmer needs
- Investigate the rapid farmland consolidation, warehouse development, and private-equity investments in California's agricultural lands
- Identify opportunities to transition land through strategies such as cooperative land use models



Ensure California's small-scale, beginning, & underserved farmers have **equitable access to capital & infrastructure**

ACTION

- Invest \$10M in one-time funds to develop a small farm tool sharing program for on-farm tools and processing infrastructure
- Invest \$5M in technical assistance (TA) to support farmers with cooperative development and business viability
- Continue investments in TA for University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources (UCANR) Small Farms Advisors
- Ensure existing grant and loan programs are inclusive of small and underserved farmers
- Identify opportunities to increase energy efficiency investments on farms such as solar water-pumps and solar installation on existing infrastructure



Additional State-Level Priorities & Policy Recommendations:

The following continue to be persistent challenges identified by farmers.



PC: Monika Elena Photo

Ecological Agriculture Resources & Training

Our farmers are leaders in land stewardship, in this year's survey 99% of farmers indicated they practice one or more of the following agricultural systems: regenerative, sustainable, organic, ecological, agroecological, tribal foodways and/or traditional tribal agricultural uses. These systems are important models to ensure the future stability of our climate and our food system. However, more TA, training, and importantly peer-to-peer networks are needed to ensure our farmers continue to implement these agricultural systems. We recommend the following policy interventions:

- Investments in TA and peer-to-peer programs like CDFA's Biologically Integrated Farming Systems Program ([BIFS](#)) to provide these farmers with the necessary resources to manage pests more sustainably
- Maintain and expand CDFA's climate smart agriculture program portfolio to fund more systems level practices rather than singular practices as well as essential TA needed to train and support farmers

Climate Change & Uncertainty

The past decade's record-setting droughts, fires, precipitation events, and heat waves, have had disastrous effects on the health, landscape, and economic stability of our farmers. We recommend the following policy interventions:

- Invest in technical assistance (TA), and farm insurance, to support farmers manage the continued climate emergencies to come
- Invest in appropriate on-farm research, tools, and TA to support farmers managing uncertain weather conditions such as extreme heat, soil salinity, unpredictable frost, and increased pest pressure

PC: Monika Elena Photo



Business Viability

Regional farmer training centers provide culturally relevant assistance for beginning farmers as well as continuing education for more established farmers. Investing in the development of new and existing training programs will support the growth of food systems jobs and the local farming economy. We recommend the following policy interventions:

- Continue to invest in [CDFA's Beginning Farmer and Farmworker Training Program](#) to ensure these farmers have the tools to succeed
- Investment in programs that support farmers to develop their businesses such as TA with bookkeeping, managing staff, and more

"It is essential for our small and underserved farmers to have access to infrastructure—such as tool sharing or collective aggregation—in order to grow and sell cooperatively, form stronger partnerships, as well as become more competitive in the marketplace. These farmers are the foundation of our food system and have historically been drastically underfunded."

—**Monica Lin**
Foodshed Small Farm Distro Coordinator &
CAFF Policy Committee Member



Background on Top Challenges:

1 Access to Water

Farmers across California have been severely impacted by the drought, many have experienced a complete loss of water, damaged-wells, and drastic increases in water costs. The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) was enacted to develop a long-term solution to drought, but has left [local, small-scale and underserved food producing farmers out of the conversation](#). With important 2022 state-level investments to support small, food-producing farmer engagement in SGMA's Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs), dry farming education, and emergency drought relief it is imperative that these resources are appropriately allocated to those who need it most. Furthermore, many of our urban food producing farmers experience overwhelming water bills, it is important to identify pathways to reduce these high costs and ensure the sustainability of these urban agricultural systems.



Maceo Hart-Kapic, H&K Farms
PC: Joan Cusick Photography

"Without water, we can't function...It's a vulnerable feeling."

—Annie Main *Good Humus*
[Civil Eats article](#)

2 Access to Land

The history of land in California is fraught with theft, displacement, and discrimination from and towards BIPOC communities of farmers, stewards, and gatherers. This deeply inequitable history has resulted in our current landscape such that [98 percent](#) of farmland owners in the United States identify as white. In California, 50% of cropland is owned by 5% of the total landowners, and 37% of land owned by non-farmers and rented or leased, it is becoming increasingly evident that the far majority of our agricultural lands are not owned by individuals in our communities but rather by large companies and non-farmer investors. Leasing land limits a farmer's ability to invest in sustainable land stewardship practices given the risk of being removed from the land they are on. Many of our farmers have expressed deep concerns and fear around the increased pressures by nearby farms owned by corporate investment firms, small farms frequently being purchased and consolidated, as well as the rapid development of agricultural lands into warehouses.

3 Access to Capital & Infrastructure

Regional farmer infrastructure has been drained of resources as a result of the rapid consolidation of our food supply chains by large corporations, leaving our small, local food producers with little to no infrastructural support. The purchase of farm equipment and infrastructure is the second largest capital investment (after land) and is inaccessible for small, underserved and beginning farmers with limited cash flow for major purchases. Furthermore, our farmers come from a wide range of ethnic, cultural, and generational backgrounds, most of whom have been left out of existing technical assistance(TA) programs or government grant resources. In order to rebuild, our farmers need equitable access to appropriate TA, access to government resources, education, and loans as well as in education and developing cooperative business models. These investments will support farmers to form stronger partnerships and become more competitive in the marketplace.



[Community Alliance with Family Farmers \(CAFF\)](#) currently represents over 8,000 small and mid-scale family farmers in California and have worked for over 40 years to preserve family-scale agriculture and promote environmental sustainability. We work to build sustainable food and farming systems through policy, advocacy and on-the-ground programs that create more resilient family farms, communities, and ecosystems.



Chue Ber Lee, Fresno Area Farmer
PC: Chue Ber Lee

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