



CALIFORNIA FOOD +
FARMING NETWORK

Cultivating a Just California Food and Farming System

A Briefing Packet for
California's State Leaders

FALL 2026



California feeds the nation—yet **1 in 4 Californians goes hungry** and the **800,000 farmworkers** who grow our food earn poverty wages.

This is not bad luck. It's the result of policy choices that state leaders have the power to change. The **California Food and Farming Network** — a coalition of 50 member organizations prepared this briefing around four pillars — Food Access, Agriculture, Farmworkers, and Regional Food Ecosystems — to show where bold choices can build a food system that works for everyone.

CA's Food and Farming System: At What Cost?

The Cost of Consolidation

Four food retailers control over half the grocery market, and four or fewer corporations dominate 60-93% of meat processing, breakfast cereals, bread, and other staple food categories¹

Food prices have risen nearly 30 percent since 2020, with over half of recent increases driven not by supply shocks but by corporate profit-taking²

The largest 5% of farm properties control more than half of California's cropland, while the smallest 84% share just one-quarter³

California loses more than 1,500 small farms a year, disproportionately impacting BIPOC farmers who are more likely to operate small farms⁴

The Cost of Exploitation

Farmworkers have the highest rates of heat-related death of any profession.⁵ Rising temperatures make an already hazardous occupation increasingly deadly

California's **800,000 farmworkers** — many undocumented — are the backbone of the U.S. food system, yet earn between \$13,000 to \$23,000 per year.⁶ Only **37% have health insurance**, and **92% of undocumented farmworkers are ineligible for the California Food Assistance Program** because they are below age 55⁷

The Cost of Hunger

1 in 4 Californian adults face hunger,⁸ and **healthcare costs associated with food insecurity exceed \$7 billion annually**⁹ — more than any other state

Poor diet is the **leading cause** of death in the U.S. due to its direct link to chronic diseases¹⁰

Students facing food insecurity are more likely to **get lower grades, leave school, and deal with cognitive issues and anxiety**¹¹

The Cost of Climate Change

Average daily high temperatures are projected to rise 5.6–8.7°F by century's end,¹² increasing pest pressure and disease. Without action, **yields of almonds, walnuts, oranges, and table grapes may decline 20% and avocados 40% by 2050**¹³

76% of small-scale farmers reported being negatively impacted by California's megadrought,¹⁴ and rising production costs drove **\$1.7B in lost farm revenue in 2021**¹⁵

California applied **176 million pounds of pesticides in 2023**.¹⁶ **Counties with majority Latine population face 906% more pesticide exposure** per square mile than counties with fewer than 24% Latine residents¹⁷

Solutions Exist

Indigenous ecological practices — seed stewardship, agroforestry, prescribed fire, water management, and ecosystem restoration — have sustained California's land **for centuries** and are proven to enhance biodiversity, improve soil health, and mitigate climate change¹⁸

About **5% of California's farms are organic**, meaning they use no or limited pesticides, generating \$11.8 billion in sales—roughly **one-fifth of the state's agricultural economy**¹⁹

CalFresh kept 1.1 million Californians out of poverty in 2023²⁰

People with lived experience throughout the food system hold essential knowledge and perspectives to see it thrive. Advancing policies that center racial equity and the lived experiences of impacted communities is a vital strategy for transforming systems and creating lasting change. Read our full [Racial Equity Statement here](#).

Contents

Page 2	California's Food and Farming System: At What Cost?
Page 3	Executive Summary
Page 6	Four Ingredients to Building an Equitable Food and Farming System
Page 7	Regional Food Ecosystems

Page 9	Farmworker Justice
Page 11	Access to Healthy Food
Page 13	Agroecological Farming
Page 15	Member Directory
Page 19	Appendix A: The Food and Farm Field Guide

Executive Summary

Understanding California's Food & Farming System

Across all four pillars, one challenge is constant: California has built some of the most proven and innovative food system programs in the nation, but most are hanging on with unpredictable funding. It's time for a stable, dedicated revenue stream to end hunger, support the farmers feeding our communities, and protect the hands behind the labor.

Regional Food Ecosystems

Over-reliance on a highly-centralized food system built on exploitation makes it fragile—especially during crises. These shocks deepen class and racial inequities, worsening hunger, stress, chronic illness, and overall quality of life. At the same time, corporate control has turned communities into sites of extraction, rather than supportive of diverse, innovative local economies.

We envision a network of thriving, self-sustaining, and collaborative regional food systems working to make communities healthier.

Paths Forward:

- Build market value around regional identity and regenerative practices
- End corporate natural resource grabs and exploitative market practices by putting Tribes, small farmers, and community well-being first.
- Invest in cooperative and local infrastructure that helps foster independence from a centralized food system.

Farmworker Justice

Farmworkers carry out some of the most indispensable labor in California, yet they endure poverty wages, dangerous working conditions, and limited access to basic safety-net protections. Inhumane immigration policies heighten their vulnerability to abusive employers, while shifting government priorities leave them with inconsistent and insufficient safeguards.

We envision an agricultural industry that respects workers and protects their health and well-being with dignified wages and safe working conditions. Workers have the power to decide their own future, and continue feeding California, the country, and the world.

Paths Forward:

- Improve labor law enforcement for farmworkers by addressing enforcement agency staff vacancies, developing new tools for enforcement in the ag industry, and increasing collaboration between CBOs and state agencies.
- Ensure that all food chain workers earn livable wages and comprehensive benefits, regardless of citizenship status.

Access to Healthy Food

Hunger is a policy choice created by systems that perpetuate racial and economic inequities. 1 in 4 Californians were food insecure in 2025. This is worsening amid targeted federal safety-net cuts and anti-immigrant attacks, with disproportionate impacts on Latine, Black, Asian American, Native Hawaiian, other Pacific Islander, and Native American families.

We envision food as a human right, where no Californians experience hunger and every Californian has dignified access to fresh, culturally appropriate food.

Paths Forward:

- Protect and strengthen our state's innovative programs that have expanded dignified food access to more Californians
- Address income inequality and corporate consolidation as root causes of unaffordable food
- Advance community-controlled food access

Agroecological Farming

While a petrochemical-dependent farming system creates harm, small, mid-scale, BIPOC, and organic/regenerative farmers feed our communities and protect the climate.

These farmers face mounting barriers — from corporate consolidation and farmland loss to rising costs, shrinking markets, drought, climate chaos, and cuts to federal support.

We envision a future where underserved farmers steward climate-resilient, agroecological farms that produce clean air and water; farmers and farmworkers are valued; and equitable access to water, land, markets, and capital sustains livelihoods and thriving rural communities.

Paths Forward:

- Production support for farmers regardless of immigration status, including hardship assistance, technical assistance, and access to land, markets, capital, and water.
- Public food procurement that invests in the farms and farming systems that move farmers away from reliance on petrochemical inputs and sustains and regenerates our communities and environment
- Reverse corporate consolidation of land, water, and natural resources



Four Ingredients to Build an Equitable Food and Farming System



 **CALIFORNIA FOOD +
FARMING NETWORK**

CFFN believes these four ingredients are interconnected and essential to address the challenges California faces. They build on and contribute to other social justice movements to create a healthier, more just California.

Regional Food Ecosystems

Why This Matters

Wildfires, drought, pandemics, wars, tariffs, ICE attacks, and food-borne illnesses have revealed the shortcomings of a globalized, consolidated food system ill-equipped to handle disruption, address the affordability crisis, or support communities with care and dignity. These emergencies are our new normal, and their consequences fall hardest on those already marginalized: deepening hunger, chronic illness, and economic precarity along class and racial lines. Decades of consolidation and corporate control have turned communities into sites of extraction rather than engines of diverse, innovative, and stable local economies.

Consolidation also drives unaffordability. When four retailers control more than half the grocery market and four corporations dominate meat processing, breakfast cereals, and staple food categories, there is no meaningful price competition. A decentralized, regional food system is not just a resilience strategy; it is an anti-inflation strategy.

California boasts 10 bioregions, 483 municipalities, and 40 rural counties. This environmental, economic, and demographic diversity requires a decentralized food system tuned to each region's specific strengths and needs—one that is adaptive, collaborative, and resilient in the face of sudden upheaval. Keeping production, processing, and purchasing closer to home strengthens local economies, supports Tribal food sovereignty, and improves access to nutritious, culturally relevant food.

Challenges

California's multi-billion-dollar agricultural industry provides hundreds of thousands of jobs and produces a bounty of food, yet at significant social and ecological cost. About 1 in 4 Californians (roughly 9.8 million people) are hungry.²¹ Forty-nine percent of BIPOC small farmers experience food insecurity,²² and food-chain workers live in poverty. This is not a stable and thriving industry. Being the salad bowl of the nation is futile when it's at the expense of our own communities.

Extreme infrastructure concentration and decades of under-investment in rural regions leave communities without enough aggregation, processing, and distribution capacity, making farmers, local businesses and consumers more vulnerable to disruption. This siloed infrastructure ignores the deep interconnection of our system that relies on farmers,

Values-Based Procurement: Every dollar the state spends on food is a policy choice.

Thoughtful procurement can create cascading effects in our food system; it sustains farmers' businesses, creates jobs, advances climate goals, prevents diet-related diseases, reduces pesticide use, and strengthens regional economies. An institution spending \$150M annually that shifts just **10% toward local purchasing** creates at least **35 jobs** and **\$1.75M in wages**. Replacing just five conventionally grown items with organic alternatives eliminates **4,500+ pounds of pesticides** across nearly 250 football fields of farmland.

Unlike typical public food contracts that prioritize low bids above all else, **values-based procurement directs public dollars toward a range of public benefits**. California has already made more than ten commitments to this approachⁱ — but most are underfunded, siloed, or falling short of their own goals.ⁱ The infrastructure exists; what's missing is the resourcing to make it work.

land stewards, Tribes, farmworkers, ecosystems, and communities to work together.

Corporate dominance—from fertilizers and pesticides to land ownership and food distribution—means fewer viable options for farmers and consumers, greater vulnerability to disruption, and easier profit extraction by large players. This pattern plays out from the COVID-19 pandemic to the most recent halting of trade through the Strait of Hormuz. Sudden scarcities create cost spikes, small harvests, and economically hurt farmers and consumers.

Federal cuts have further weakened the fight for regional footholds. The Trump administration gutted countless programs connecting small farmers to community markets. For example, the Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA) and Local Foods for Schools (LFS) programs — which helped states buy food directly from local producers and distribute it through schools, food banks, and pantries — were terminated in 2025, eliminating more than \$47 million in California funding that served as an economic multiplier for rural communities.²³ Localizing and decentralizing our food system can enrich our soil, keep dollars circulating locally, and build the resilience we urgently need.

ⁱ **Examples of California values-based targets include:** Organic Transition Targets in 2022 Climate Scoping Plan (CARB); Sustainable Pest Management Roadmap (CalEPA/DPR and CDFA); 60% California Grown Procurement by 2026 (Department of Government Services); State goal to spend 25% of all contract dollars with small businesses or Disabled Veteran Business Enterprises (DGS); Environmental Preferable Purchasing (DGS). **Examples of State programs with values-based procurement goals include:** California Farm to School Incubator Grant Program and Roadmap (CDFA), Kitchen Infrastructure and Training Program (CDE), Farm to CACFP Program (CDSS), Farm to Community Food Hubs Program (CDFA), Local Food Purchase Assistance Program (CDSS/CDFA)

Solutions

Strengthen regional markets

- Require transparency and traceability in public food purchasing through a statewide baseline procurement assessment
- Adopt a whole-of-government strategy aligning California's ten-plus existing procurement commitments with shared targets and accountability
- Leverage public food-purchasing dollars to support values-based procurement
- Make it easy and rewarding for schools, hospitals, and agencies to buy from local and sustainable farms — expand the Farm to Community Food Hub Grant Program
- Invest in kitchen infrastructure and workforce training through the Kitchen Infrastructure and Training Program and the Healthy School Food Pathway Fellowship Program
- Continue investing in farm-to-food-assistance purchasing programs, such as the Local Food Purchase Assistance Program (LFPA),

Curb corporate extraction

- End grocery store “lease squatting” that limits competition, food access and enables corporate food price hikes
- Readopt the enforcement of the Robinson-Patman Act to prohibit anticompetitive price discrimination in the food supply chain
- Prohibit the use of electronic price tags to prevent surge pricing on foods
- Prohibit discriminatory surveillance pricing where grocery retailers use personally identifiable information such as age, gender, marital status, and geolocation to alter food prices
- Require stores to have in-store versions of digital coupons available to those without smart phones which are often seniors

For an overview of current programs by state department, see [Appendix A](#).

Invest in regional infrastructure

- Build on CA's Proposition 4 funding—a 2025 Climate Bond—to expand:
 - Certified Farmers Market Infrastructure Grant Program and Mobile Farmers Markets Infrastructure Grant Program, including Tribally operated farmer and fishermen's markets.
 - Farmer Equipment Sharing & Farmer Cooperative Technical Assistance Program
 - Tribal Food Sovereignty Program
- Continue investing in CDFA's Urban Agriculture Program
- Ending hunger requires a plan - invest in community infrastructure to develop a State Master Plan to End Hunger



Farmworker Justice

Why This Matters

There are nearly 800,000 agricultural workers in California.²⁴ These primarily Latine and Indigenous Mexican and Central American immigrants bring cultural and technical knowledge of farming systems from their countries of origin and are the drivers of California's agricultural industry. They tend and pick nearly half of the country's vegetables and three-quarters of the fruit and nut supply.²⁵

Despite this essential role, they endure poverty wages and wage theft, dangerous working conditions, and limited access to basic safety-net protections. California has both a moral and economic obligation to support its agricultural workers, who are woven into the fabric of our economic health and cultural vitality. When we fail to provide jobs with fair pay, safe conditions, or basic benefits, the damage ripples outward—into families, rural towns, and the broader economy we all depend on. A prosperous California cannot be built on the backs of workers left behind by the very economy they sustain.

Challenges

Agricultural workers labor in one of the nation's most dangerous industries. With extreme heat days predicted to increase sevenfold in the Central Valley,²⁶ the stakes are high: farmworkers are already 35 times more likely to die of heat-related injury than those in other industries,²⁷ experience occupational injuries at nearly double the rate of other private sector workers,²⁸ and face a pesticide poisoning rate 39 times higher than all other industries combined²⁹—a burden that will only grow as climate-driven heat intensifies pesticide volatility. Meanwhile, the same forces driving up temperatures are reducing work opportunities through more frequent droughts and wildfires.

Nearly 1 in 5 California farmworkers experience wage theft,³⁰ compounding the impacts of an industry that doesn't pay a living wage. Median annual earnings range from just \$13,000 to \$23,000 per year,³¹⁽ⁱⁱ⁾ well below the \$35,920 needed to support a family of four in California, forcing many workers into unsafe and overcrowded housing, making it difficult to meet basic needs.

State systems intended to protect farmworkers are failing them. Enforcement relies on workers filing complaints, yet complicated claims processes, mistrust of government, language barriers, and fear of retaliation deter workers from

coming forward. Enforcement agencies lack sufficient staff who speak Spanish, Indigenous Mesoamerican, or other languages spoken by workers, meaning workers miss critical safety and labor rights information. Even when workers overcome these barriers, enforcement agencies are understaffed. As of February 2026, Cal/OSHA faces a 33% vacancy rate in their enforcement division,³² and workers have to wait three or more years to resolve wage theft cases at the state Labor Commissioner Office.³³ CalOSHA is currently working to diminish their egregious over-reliance on letter inspections, which rely on employer self-inspection and assurance that they've fixed hazards.

These conditions are not inevitable or random. The nation's broken immigration system does not support our agricultural workers. An estimated 90% of California's agricultural workers are foreign-born—85% from Mexico and 5% from Central America—and approximately 57% are unauthorized to work in the United States.³⁴ Growing reliance on Farm Labor Contractors—that account for an outsized portion of labor violations—allow employers to evade responsibility.³⁵ Expansion of the H-2A temporary visa program brings workers to California—primarily from Mexico—who are completely dependent on their employers for their visas, housing, food and transportation, fueling high rates of labor violations and threatening displacement for California's existing farmworker communities.

Immigration status also excludes many farmworkers from safety net programs. Undocumented Californians cannot access unemployment benefits when work dries up due to seasonality, disaster, or public health emergencies—leaving workers with no recourse but to endure dangerous conditions. Although they pick the food that feeds us, farmwork-

CFFN provides backbone support for the **California Farmworker Coalition**, which ensures farmworker organizations build power and advance worker-led policy priorities so farmworker communities help shape California's agricultural and labor agenda. Learn more [here](#).

ⁱⁱ While many commonly cited public data sources estimate higher annual salaries, they do not take into account the seasonal, highly variable, and unstable nature of farmwork

ers still cannot access CalFresh. The Food4All campaign has won a critical expansion—CalFresh eligibility for all Californians over 55 regardless of immigration status, taking effect in 2027—but full inclusion remains unfinished.

The recent escalation of ICE raids has made an already unjust and precarious existence untenable for many agricultural workers. Labor shortages of 20–40% in affected regions have caused an estimated \$3–7 billion in crop losses—an economic blow to the agriculture industry in the Central Coast.³⁶ A confirmation that California’s farms do not run without farmworkers, and policies that terrorize farmworkers are policies that destabilize California’s food supply.

Solutions

Ensure equal labor protections

- Improve enforcement of health and safety laws for farmworkers
 - Create a pathway for Cal OSHA inspectors without college degrees
 - Strengthen collaboration between Cal OSHA and CBOs to support workers navigating health and safety complaint processes
 - Make standards clearer and more enforceable and strengthen penalties
- Improve enforcement of wage and hour laws for farmworkers
 - Hold Farm Labor Contractors accountable by tightening oversight, accountability, and worker compensation
 - Give the Labor Commissioner more tools to enforce wage and hour laws and mitigate retaliation
 - Streamline the wage claim process to improve efficiency, worker outcomes, and agency backlogs
- Address the negative impacts of the H-2A program on guest workers and domestic farmworkers by increasing the program’s transparency and accountability

- Expand pesticide protections, prohibitions, and enforcement, as described in the [Agroecological Farming Practices](#) section.
- Implement comprehensive language accessibility across all regulatory agencies, including outreach and enforcement communications
- Develop multilingual audio- and text-based notification systems to alert essential frontline workers to health risks such as extreme heat and wildfire smoke

Guarantee economic security regardless of immigration status

- Provide all food chain workers with livable wages and comprehensive benefits, including paid sick leave, disability insurance, parental leave, pension plans, and overtime
- Extend access to safety-net programs for undocumented immigrants, including unemployment insurance, health-care, and food benefits
- Establish safety-net pay, such as supplemental paid sick leave or insurance to compensate farmworkers during climate-driven and public health emergencies
- Expand affordable housing for farmworkers with proper HVAC systems and weatherization for smoke and extreme heat
- Ensure training and workforce development programs are worker-led, worker-informed, and benefit high-road employers
- Fund English-language proficiency and digital literacy training to support advancement into higher-paying roles
- Reduce barriers to farmworker unionization

For an overview of current programs by state department, see [Appendix A](#).



Access to Healthy Food

Why This Matters

More than 1 in 4 Californians and 1 in 3 with children were food insecure in 2025. High prices, low quality, and limited availability block access to nutritious food, especially in low-income communities where competing expenses like healthcare, housing, and transportation create a cycle of crisis. Benefits like CalFresh and WIC are often insufficient to meet people's nutritional and cultural food needs, and close to one million Californians cannot access CalFresh at all due to unjust exclusions based solely on immigration status.

Food insecurity is deeply unequal. Thirty-five percent of Latine families and 31% of Black families face harm from hunger.³⁷ In San Diego, 45% of Cambodian, 18% of Vietnamese, and 15% of Chamorro populations experience food insecurity while 92% of Native American households in the Klamath Basin suffer from it.³⁸ Ironically, the workers who grow and stock our food are among the most food insecure — over three-quarters of grocery workers lack reliable access to food, at a rate seven times the U.S. average. The consequences extend beyond hunger: healthcare costs linked to food insecurity exceed \$7 billion annually in California — more than any other state.³⁹ Maintaining nearly a fourth of the state's population in food-insecure conditions is costly and prevents Californians from thriving.

Hunger is not a scarcity problem. It is a failure of equitable distribution and access—economic, physical, and cultural—and at its root, a product of systemic racism. California's unparalleled farming system can feed everyone if we address these root causes.



Challenges

Federal policy changes are rapidly increasing hunger across California. Inflexible work requirements cut off certain CalFresh recipients unless they work more than 20 hours per week — ignoring the realities of volatile schedules and insufficient hours in low-wage work. One-third of those cut off are unhoused; others, including veterans, foster youth, and families, with average monthly incomes of approximately 17% of the federal poverty level. Hunger doesn't make it easier to find or keep a job—it makes both harder. Food banks across California served over 6 million people per month last year, up from 4.5 million at the height of the pandemic.

H.R. 1 removed an estimated 34,000 Californians with humanitarian protection — including refugees, asylees, and survivors of human trafficking — from CalFresh entirely. Tens of thousands more eligible immigrants have chosen to disenroll, scared off by a federal climate of fear: ICE data sharing, public charge threats, and violent immigration enforcement that makes accessing government benefits feel dangerous. And these are not the only immigrants unable to access food benefits. While the legislature and Governor have committed to expanding the California Food Assistance Program (CFAP) to all income-eligible Californians regardless of immigration status, implementation isn't until October 2027 and only for those ages 55 and older.

The federal government is also using promises of “healthier eating” to quietly erode SNAP access. New USDA stocking requirements are pushing smaller retailers to drop out of the program, shrinking where CalFresh recipients can shop. USDA is simultaneously offering states waivers to restrict what recipients can purchase. California law rightly prohibits these waivers because restricting food choices does not improve dietary outcomes. What works is incentivizing healthy choices through produce prescriptions, free produce programs, farmers market matches, and increased benefit allotments.

Meanwhile, food costs continue to soar — and much of it is not accidental. Prices have risen nearly 30 percent since 2020, with over half of recent increases driven not by supply shocks but by corporate profit-taking.⁴⁰ As grocery chains consolidate, they leverage market dominance to raise prices beyond inflation — Albertsons' profits grew nearly tenfold, and Kroger's surged from \$5.1 to \$6.8 billion in five years⁴¹ — as Californians spend an ever-growing share of their income just to eat.

Solutions

Protect and expand innovative food access programs

- Remove xenophobic exclusions to food assistance through Food4All:
 - Remain committed to, without delay, the expansion of food assistance through the California Food Assistance Program (CFAP) to Californians ages 55 and older, regardless of immigration status, starting October 2027
 - Restore food access to newly excluded humanitarian immigrants, and fully fund the Food4All expansion to all ages
- Leverage the planned CFAP expansion to restore benefits to the approximately 650,000 Californians cut off of CalFresh in 2026 due to the federal time limit rules
- Don't delay implementing new CA law that allows incarcerated people to apply for CalFresh benefits prior to release to support successful reentry
- Simplify CalFresh enrollment, translate it into every language spoken in California, and reach the college students and SSI recipients who qualify but aren't enrolled
- Set bold state and county goals to improve CalFresh participation, timeliness, and payment accuracy, with accountability measures
- Increase benefit levels by continuously appropriating and expanding funding for CalFresh shoppers to buy more fruits and vegetables, including the California Nutrition Incentive Program (CNIP) which supports local farmers and the CalFresh Fruit and Vegetable EBT Program
- Increase CalFresh benefit levels by raising the minimum benefit (currently \$24)
- Continue funding and expanding the CalFresh Safe Drinking Water Pilot to support low-income Californians without access to potable water
- Fully fund and expand the CalFood program to support food banks in purchasing California-grown foods
- Protect the CalFresh Outreach Network as federal H.R. 1 cuts eliminate funding for the community-based services that help vulnerable Californians navigate benefits enrollment
- Implement the Tribal Nutrition Assistance Program with meaningful Tribal consultation
- Continue to fully fund and strengthen School Meals for All, including maximizing student access and participation, investing in school kitchen infrastructure, and improving school food procurement



- Create an online statewide SUN Bucks (Summer EBT) application and continue to fully fund outreach and administration securing at least \$390 million in federal food assistance in summer months
- Transition medically supportive food and nutrition interventions—such as produce prescriptions, medically supportive groceries, and medically tailored meals—from optional Medi-Cal services to permanent benefits

Address root causes of food unaffordability and advance community-control

- Create a new dedicated revenue stream to fund the proven, expansive state food access programs
- Prohibit grocery store restrictive covenants — private clauses in property deeds that block competitors from moving in and leave neighborhoods without a grocery store
- Explore the feasibility of public grocery stores and invest in cooperatives as a direct challenge to consolidated corporate control over where and how people eat
- See [Solutions in the Regional Food Ecosystem](#) section limiting harms of corporate control on hunger and involving community to develop solutions

For an overview of current programs by state department, see [Appendix A](#).

Agroecological Farming

Why This Matters

California's food and farming system is dominated by industrial agriculture — a model rooted in white supremacy and built on the theft of Indigenous land, exploitation of immigrant labor, and the chemical transformation of soil into a production input. That model is failing ecologically, economically, and for the communities it was meant to feed. The alternative already exists.

Agroecology — farming in harmony with natural systems and community, centered on soil health, water conservation, biodiversity, and minimal chemical inputs — is not a future aspiration. It is already practiced by many of California's small, BIPOC, and Tribal farmers, and it is proven. Indigenous ecological practices including seed stewardship, prescribed fire, agroforestry, and water management have sustained California's land for centuries while enhancing biodiversity and building climate resilience. These are proven climate solutions the state's own programs too often fail to recognize or fund.

California is home to 110 federally recognized and more than 55 non-federally recognized Tribal Nations — the largest Native American population of any state. Tribal food sovereignty encompasses salmon restoration, cultural burns, seed stewardship, foraging, and ancestral food processing. Meanwhile, about 5% of California's farms are organic, and they generate \$11.8 billion in sales — roughly one-fifth of the state's agricultural economy.⁴² Small and mid-scale farms produce the food actually consumed in California, are more likely to be BIPOC-operated, and use diversified, sustainable practices. These farms are disappearing at a rate of four per day.

California cannot afford to lose them. A statewide food system built on agroecological, Tribal, and small-farm models can reduce our dependence on global supply chains, protect public health, stabilize rural economies, and keep California farming through a climate crises created and enabled by industrial agriculture.

Challenges

The barriers facing small, BIPOC, and Tribal farmers are the accumulated result of discriminatory policy. Fifty percent of California cropland is owned by just 5% of landowners,⁴³ increasingly controlled by corporations and investors rather than farming communities. Without land ownership, farmers cannot invest in long-term stewardship. Sixty-five

percent of BIPOC farmers report it is “very or extremely challenging” to find affordable land to purchase, compared to 59% of farmers overall — a gap that reflects inherited wealth disparities, unjust lending, and discriminatory USDA policies never fully remedied.⁴⁴ Tribal farmers face additional layers: certification and easement requirements that conflict with Tribal sovereignty, program eligibility that excludes non-federally recognized Tribes, and data systems that render Tribal-specific needs invisible to the agencies meant to serve them.

The Trump administration has compounded these barriers with sweeping cuts. More than \$6 billion has been frozen or canceled across USDA programs; California bearing the largest state-level impact at \$392 million. For example, the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities program, which had 14,000 farms and 3.2 million acres enrolled in conservation practices. Organizations are laying off staff, farmers are waiting on reimbursements, and local food supply chains built over years of public investment are unraveling.⁴⁵

California applies pesticides at 4.5 times the national average,⁴⁶ fueling water and air pollution, soil degradation, biodiversity loss, and elevated rates of developmental disorders and cancer that disproportionately affect farmworkers and rural Latine communities. Counties with majority Latine populations face 906% more pesticide exposure per square mile than less-Latine counties.⁴⁷ This crisis persists in part by design — the Department of Pesticide Regulation is largely funded by pesticide sales, creating a structural incentive to maintain high use rather than reduce it.

Industrial agriculture is economically fragile. The U.S./Israeli war on Iran exposed our dependence on global synthetic fertilizer markets with supply disruptions spiking prices by 23%, a cost that flows directly to farmers and ends up on everyone's grocery bills. Industrial agriculture's fragility is an affordability crisis waiting to happen, over and over. The same fragility applies domestically. ICE raids in agricultural communities have driven labor shortages of 20–40%, causing an estimated \$3–7 billion in crop losses.⁴⁸

The climate reckoning is already here. Extreme heat days in the Central Valley are expected to increase sevenfold.⁴⁹ Without significant change, yields of almonds, walnuts, oranges, and table grapes may fall 20% by 2050; avocados by 40%.⁵⁰ The farming system most capable of adapting — diversified, agroecological, Tribal and small-scale — is the one receiving the least support.

Solutions

Strengthen production support for farmers

- Invest in California Underserved and Small Producers Program (CUSP) to ensure small farmers recover from extreme weather events like droughts and fires
- Prioritize access to farmland ownership for Tribes and BIPOC farmers
- Invest in severely underfunded small- and mid-sized farm infrastructure (see the [Regional Food Ecosystem Section](#))
- Fund linguistically and culturally appropriate technical assistance for historically under-resourced farmers to improve on-farm support, financial resources, and business development
- Expand technical assistance through CDFA, the University of California system, and other providers to help farmers transition to organic or other ecologically based production methods
- Strengthen farmer-to-farmer learning programs such as the Biologically Integrated Farming Systems (BIFS) program
- Directly support Tribal food sovereignty by:
 - Removing certification and easement requirements that conflict with Tribal sovereignty
 - Include non-federally recognized Tribes in program eligibility
 - Require meaningful Tribal Consultation in state agencies
 - Fund rural infrastructure
 - Ensure data tracking makes Tribal-specific needs visible
- Empower the next generation of farmers through youth training, apprenticeships, credentialing in growth sectors such as organic agriculture, and continued investment in CDFA's Beginner Farmer and Farmworker Training Program
- Directly fund prescribed grazing—goats, sheep, or cattle managing vegetation—as a climate strategy that boosts wildfire resilience, community safety, soil health, and regional food and fiber production
- Streamline the variety of regulatory requirements like fees and reports for small, BIPOC, and Tribal producers

Invest in public food procurement

- See Solutions in the [Regional Food Ecosystem Section](#) for building alternative market value and strengthening public food purchasing relationships

Reverse corporate Ag consolidation

- Ensure Proposition 4's new Land Access for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers Programs prioritizes farmers and CA Natives most in need
- Enact the recommendations from the Strategic Growth Council's Ag Land Equity Report
- Support regulatory policies that curb speculative investment in CA ag land and water. Ensure that California's Sustainable Groundwater Management Act does not result in increased consolidation of water and land resources.
- Reform the Department of Pesticide Regulation to strengthen enforcement and ensure rigorous evaluation of pesticide safety
- Codify the goals of the Sustainable Pest Management Roadmap with enforceable targets, such as designating fumigants, organophosphates and PFAS pesticides as Priority Pesticides and funding SPM projects
- Establish agroecological zones around schools, homes, and other sensitive sites

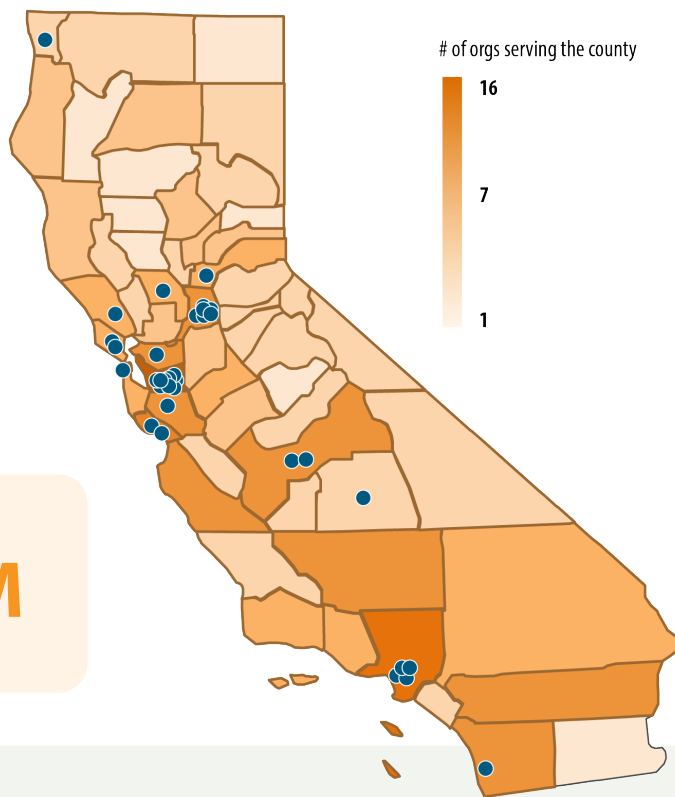
For an overview of current program by state department, see [Appendix A](#).



Member Directory

The California Food and Farming Network has an aggregate digital reach of over

1.9M



Organization

What they do

Agricultural Institute of Marin (AIM)

agriculturalinstitute.org ● ● ● ● ●

Expands regional reach, awareness, and impact of farmers markets, ag education, and community food access to advance a healthy, equitable local and regional food system.

Alameda County Community Food Bank

accfb.org ● ● ●

Distributes food, helps community members access CalFresh, and organizes advocacy for equitable policy to achieve food justice and end hunger. In 2025 ACCFB distributed nearly 60 million meals.

Alchemsit Community Development Corporation

alchemistcdc.org ● ● ● ● ●

Improves access to nutritious foods, community green spaces, and entrepreneurship to advance economic self-sufficiency. In 2024 Alchemist CDC facilitated \$1.44M in EBT and Market Match at farmers' markets.

Asian Pacific Islander Forward Movement

apifm.org ● ● ● ● ●

Cultivates healthy, long-lasting, and vibrant Asian and Pacific Islander communities through community-centered engagement, education, and advocacy

Berkeley Food Institute

food.berkeley.edu ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

Leverages University of California policy, research and education in partnership with communities to advance a just and sustainable farm and food system. Over 150 UC Berkeley faculty are affiliated with BFI.

California Food Banks

cafoodbanks.org ●

Represents 43 member food banks and their nearly 6,000 partner agencies across the state to end hunger in California. CAFB serves 6 million Californians a month and provides over 900 million pounds of food a year.

California Certified Organic Farmers

ccof.org ●

Certifies over 3,500 organic farms, ranches, and businesses in California while advocating to advance organic policy for a healthier world. CCOF granted over \$1.5M to 123 aspiring organic farmers and farmers experiencing hardship.

Who the organization serves

● Low-income Households

● Immigrant Families

● Farm & Food System Workers

● Farmers & Ranchers

● Rural Communities & Tribes

● Youth & Students

Member Directory, continued

California Farmer Justice Collaborative farmerjustice.com ●	Unites farmers, advocates, academics, and allies to advance economic sovereignty for farmers of color and to challenge racism, structural discrimination, and all forms of systemic oppression.
California FarmLink californiafarmlink.org ● ● ●	Creates equitable access to opportunity in support of healthy, local food systems. We help farmers, ranchers, and fishers to access affordable financing, learn how to create business resilience, and secure land for farming and ranching.
California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation crlaf.org ●	CRLAF works to address the most pressing needs of California's rural poor, some of the most marginalized communities, by providing free legal services, community outreach and policy advocacy in labor, housing, health, immigration, and environmental justice.
Californians Against Waste cawrecycles.org ●	Researches, develops, promotes, monitors, and advocates for policy solutions to eliminate pollution and reduce the environmental and public-health impacts of our waste.
Californians for Pesticide Reform pesticidereform.org ● ●	A coalition of over 200 organizations working to enhance agricultural pesticide policies and practices in California to protect public health, the environment, and advance sustainable, just agriculture.
Carbon Cycle Institute carboncycle.org ●	Advances the carbon cycle as the fundamental organizing process underlying land management and on-farm conservation in our efforts to mitigate and adapt to the global climate crisis.
Center for Ecoliteracy ecoliteracy.org ●	Inspires schools to serve fresh, local meals and engage students in the links between food, culture, health, and environment to provide a more just, sustainable and equitable experience for students and the people who nourish them.
Center for Food Safety centerforfoodsafety.org ● ● ● ●	Uses legal, scientific, and grassroots action to empower people, support farmers, and protect the earth from industrial agriculture's harms. CFS represents over a million members, including 14,000+ in California.
Center for Good Food Purchasing goodfoodpurchasing.org ● ● ● ●	Uses the power of procurement to create a transparent and equitable food system that prioritizes the well-being of people, animals, and the environment. We do this through the nationally networked adoption and implementation of the Good Food Purchasing Program by major institutions.
Central California Environmental Justice Network ccejn.org ● ● ●	CCEJN's mission is to empower our communities and secure our children's future by eliminating negative environmental impacts in low income and communities of color in the Central Valley.
Centro Binacional Para el Desarrollo Indigena Oaxaqueno centrobinacional.org ● ● ● ●	Created by Indigenous communities in rural California, CBDIO organizes and makes sure our communities' culture, languages, and knowledge are recognized and respected by the systems and institutions that impact our lives to advance the self-determination of Indigenous people.
Ceres Community Project ceresproject.org ● ● ●	Provides 100% organic medically tailored meals to people with chronic and complex health conditions and educates youth about organic farming and nutritious food to foster community health, healing, and empowerment.
Community Alliance with Family Farmers caff.org ●	Builds sustainable food and farming systems through statewide policy advocacy and on-the-ground programs to support family farmers. Our programs address problems and challenges in food and farming systems, creating more resilient family farms, communities, and ecosystems.

Member Directory, continued

Del Norte and Tribal Lands Community Food Council

dnatlfoodcouncil.org 

Strengthens the North Coast food system to enhance nutrition security—improving infrastructure, market access, and support for local producer. DNATL Food Council prioritizes equity, Indigenous foodways, sustainability, resilience, and emergency preparedness.

Ecology Center

ecologycenter.org 

Builds and Inspires to advance a healthy, sustainable, and just future for the East Bay and beyond.

Farm2People

farm2people.org 

Partners with independent California farmers to bring healthy, fresh, and regeneratively grown produce into our densely populated metropolis to fight hunger in Greater Los Angeles and keep our small- and mid-sized farmers farming.

Fibershed

fibershed.org 

Develops regional fiber systems that expand opportunities to implement climate beneficial agriculture, rebuild regional manufacturing, and educate the public about the benefits of soil-to-soil fiber and dye systems.

First Mother Farms

firstmotherfarms.com 

As a land-based cultural initiative rooted in Indigenous, diasporic, and regenerative traditions, First Mother Farms work across sites, seasons, and communities to restore reciprocal relationships between land, bodies, and collective care.

Fresh Approach

freshapproach.org 

Connects Californians with local, healthy food through farmers markets, food is medicine, community agriculture, and professional development, and supports small farms and food hubs in accessing market opportunities.

Food Access LA

foodaccessla.org 

Supports farmers and equitable access to fresh regional produce; advances sustainable food systems that benefit low- and moderate-income LA residents and California small farms and local businesses.

Fullwell

fullwell.us 

Advocates to advance a healthy, just, and sustainable food sysetm. Secured \$36 million dollars benefiting more than 70,000 CalFresh households to better afford fresh fruit and vegetables.

Kitchen Table Advisors

kitchentableadvisors.org 

Supports under-resourced farmers and ranchers to fuel their long-term success and transform the food system. KTA provides practical business advising and opportunities for equitable access to land, capital, and markets, with a particular focus on BIPOC, immigrant, and other historically marginalized producers.

Latino Coalition for a Healthy California

lchc.org 

Advocates for Latines and Indigenous people through policy, narrative change, and programs to build healthy communities in California.

Los Angeles Food Policy Council

goodfoodla.org 

Works at the intersection of food security, economic development, and environmental sustainability using policy and programs to advance healthy, affordable, sustainable food for all Angelenos.

Marin Food Policy Council

ucanr.edu/site/marin-food-policy-council


Convenes local food-system stakeholders through the lens of community food security to share resources, identify needs, and develop policies and practical solutions to improve Marin residents' food security and quality of life.

National Young Farmers Coalition

youngfarmers.org 

Supports young, beginning and BIPOC ag producers to become leaders. Advances equitable access to resources.

Natural Resource Defense Council

nrdc.org 

NRDC uses science, policy, law, and people power to fight the climate crisis, protect public health, and safeguard nature.

Member Directory, continued

Sierra Harvest / Nevada County Food Policy Council

sierraharvest.org 

Strengthens local food systems by supporting farmers, expanding market access, and building partnerships to advance equitable access to healthy food, resilient regional agriculture, and long-term community well-being.

Nourish California

nourishca.org 

Collaborates with diverse community partners to co-develop and advance policy solutions, ensuring equitable access to food, health, and wellbeing for all Californians.

Pesticide Action & Agroecology Network (PAN)

panna.org 

Uses grassroots science, strategic communications and coalition organizing to build power with communities across the U.S. and around the world to confront the harms of industrial agriculture and build solutions.

Praxis Project

thepaxisproject.org 

Assists powerbuilding community organizations to increase their impact through building capacity, leadership development, network infrastructure maintenance to improve equity, health, and racial justice across the determinants of health.

Rising Communities

risingcommunities.org 

Fosters and replicates transformational social equity models and strategies that promote health and positive well-being across all under-resourced communities.

Roots of Change

rootsofchange.org 

Advocates for policy change and runs demonstration programs to catalyze food-system transformation, elevate regenerative practices, and advance California climate targets, rural economic development, and resilience.

Sacramento Food Policy Council

sacfoodpolicy.org 

Advances justice through equity practices that lift up community priorities to advance policy, systems, and environmental change. Convenes policymakers and stakeholders around a collaborative agenda for a more resilient, just and sustainable food system.

San Diego Food System Alliance

sdfsa.org 

Supports small producers and food businesses with holistic TA, capital access, and land tenure. Mobilizes community through events, coalitions, and an annual gathering for 500 food-justice leaders. SDFSA engages leaders in advocacy opportunities.

Second Harvest Food Bank

shfb.org 

Provides nutritious food to individuals and families facing hunger through a network of partners. Advocates for policies and system change that strengthen food access and address the root causes of hunger to end hunger for all.

Sierra Club California

sierraclub.org/california 

Leads the legislative and regulatory advocacy arm for Sierra Club chapters across the state working to protect clean air and water, defend communities from pollution, and advance science-based climate solutions.

Sustainable Agriculture Education

sagecenter.org 

Advances multi-benefit agriculture as a foundation for regional resilience, catalyzes place-based regenerative agriculture, and fosters vital, equitable food systems that connect urban and rural communities.

Sustainable Economies Law Center

theselc.org 

Cultivates a new legal landscape to support community resilience and economic empowerment. Through education, research, and advocacy, communities can develop their own sustainable sources of food, housing, energy, and other key aspects to thrive.

Union of Concerned Scientists

ucs.org 

The Union of Concerned Scientists puts rigorous, independent science into action, developing solutions and advocating for a healthy, safe, and just future.

United Food and Commercial Workers Western States Council

ufcwwest.org 

Unites workers in grocery, retail, food processing, healthcare, cannabis, and related sectors across CA, NV, and AZ to win better wages, benefits, safety, job security, and fair treatment through collective bargaining and advocacy.

Appendix A - The Food and Farm Field Guide

California Food and Farming Network members have direct experience with the following departments, programs, and pieces of legislation, working as advocates, researchers, consultants, and/or program implementers. Needed improvements for these programs aim to deepen and broaden their impact on the communities they hope to serve. For additional information, policy consultation, or assistance with community engagement, please refer to CFFN as a resource.

California Department of Food and Agriculture

Program	Description	Improvement
Farm-to-School Program Est. FY 20-21 Budget	Increases purchases from local farmers and provides hands-on educational opportunities for students to connect classroom, cafeteria, and garden.	Consistently oversubscribed; maintain sustained multi-year funding.
California Nutrition Incentives Program (CNIP/"Market Match") Est. AB 1321 (Ting, 2015)	Provides CalFresh and other federal nutrition benefit users a dollar-for-dollar match for fresh produce at farm-direct sites like farmers' markets, generating income for small and mid-sized farmers.	A decade-proven program that needs ongoing baseline funding to support communities and farmers.
Mobile Farmers Markets Program and Certified Farmers Market Infrastructure Est. Prop 4 (2024), began 2026	Provides infrastructure, such as market stall, safety equipment, EBT equipment, food prep facilities, and more, for mobile and certified farmers markets to operate fully.	Program currently in development
Tribal Food Sovereignty Program Est. Prop 4 (2024), began 2026	CDFA's first program designed specifically for Tribes; provides infrastructure for cultivation, harvesting, hunting, fishing, and traditional practices.	Program currently in development
Farmer Equipment Sharing & Farmer Cooperative TA Program Est. Prop 4 (2024), reinforced SB 149 (Bennett, 2025)	Farm equipment sharing grant program, including funding for technical assistance and farm cooperative development.	Program currently in development
Farm to Community Food Hubs Program Est. AB 1009 (Bloom, 2021)	Invests in food aggregation and distribution infrastructure needed to increase purchasing of regional, ecologically healthy and equitably produced food.	Oversubscribed by 1,076%; needs additional funding.
Local Food Purchase Assistance Program (LFPA) Originally USDA-funded; federal funding stripped 2025; state invested \$15M in FY 26-27	A farm-to-food assistance initiative connecting local farmers with food banks and community providers to deliver fresh, California-grown food while supporting agricultural economies, food access and public health.	Needs expanded and sustained annual investment to grow a California-wide program.
Healthy Soils Program Est. SB 859, 2016	Funds on-farm practices that promote soil health and reduce GHG emissions—cover crops, compost, and hedgerows,—plus research and demonstration projects.	Over a decade of success, the program is regularly evolving based on stakeholder feedback, and can continue to do so, such as including reduced pesticide use in future program evaluations.

State Water Efficiency and Enhancement Program (SWEEP) Est. Executive Order B-25-2014	Funds on-farm irrigation efficiency upgrades that also reduce GHG emissions, such as soil moisture monitoring, flow metering and pump repair.	NA
California Underserved and Small Producer (CUSP) Grant Program	Provides direct relief grants to small and mid-scale farmers, including socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, to address financial needs caused by drought, extreme weather, and other climate impacts.	Needs ongoing funding
Alternative Manure Management Program (AMMP) Est. by CDFA following SB 1383 (2017)	Funds dry manure management strategies in dairy and livestock operations to reduce GHG emissions and provide other co-benefits.	Emissions reductions are undercounted by CARB's current methodology, which AB 2100 (Connolly) sought to address. The program struggles to receive consistent funding despite its high cost:benefit ratio.
Organic Transition Pilot Program Est. AB 2499 (Maienschein, 2022)	Provides resources to farmers and ranchers, prioritizing socially disadvantaged producers, to help them transition to organic farming.	Has received only \$10 million; needs additional funding to meet its potential of helping conventional growers transition to resilient, climate-friendly, and biodiversity protective practices.
Biologically Integrated Farming System (BIFS) Originated as UC SAREP program in the 1990s; revived at CDFA in 2019	Funds biologically integrated farming systems that reduce reliance on pesticides and fertilizers through whole-farm ecological management, with demonstrated success in practice adoption and farmer outreach.	Needs a permanent funding mechanism with allocation commensurate with the scale of California agriculture.
Conservation Agriculture Planning Grants Program (CAPGP) Est. FY 21–22 Budget Act	Provides grants to develop whole-farm conservation agriculture plans supporting organic transition, climate-smart practices, water efficiency, and soil health, prioritizing small-scale, BIPOC, and transitioning organic farmers.	Needs additional funding since its first and only appropriation of \$17M in 2021.
Pollinator Habitat Program Est. FY 21–22 Budget Act	Funds organizations to establish pollinator habitat on farms and ranches, with co-benefits for biodiversity, integrated pest management, carbon sequestration, and soil health.	Needs additional funding since its first and only appropriation of \$15M in 2021.
Technical Assistance for Climate Smart Agriculture Est. AB 2377 (Irwin, 2018)	Requires 5% of annual Climate Smart Agriculture Program budgets to go toward technical assistance, with at least 25% of those funds supporting socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.	NA
Farmer Equity Act of 2017 Est. AB 1348 (Aguiar-Curry, 2017)	Enables CDFA to provide better resources, technical assistance, and decision-making power to socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, mandating their inclusion in all department laws, regulations, policies, and programs.	Needs more than one dedicated staff person to implement state wide farmer equity measures.

California Department of Social Services

Program	Description	Improvement
California Food Assistance Program (CFAP) Est. 1997	Created in response to harmful welfare reform cuts to protect many Californians from losing assistance due solely to immigration status. CFAP benefits mirror CalFresh but are state-funded. In 2022, California became the first state to commit benefits to Californians 55+ regardless of immigration status—expansion begins October 2027.	Food4All: Close to 1 million Californians remain shut out due only to immigration status. Fully fund the Food4All expansion to all ages. Restore HR 1 cuts: Leverage the planned CFAP expansion to restore food benefits to those losing CalFresh due to federal time limits or humanitarian immigrant status.
CalFood Est. 2011	Strengthens California's emergency food network by enabling food banks to purchase California-grown food, supporting farmers, food banks, and families.	Raise the \$8M baseline to \$60M.
CalFresh Fruit & Vegetable Supplemental Benefits Program Est. AB 1811 (Arambula, 2018)	Delivers supplemental benefits to CalFresh recipients purchasing fruits and vegetables, scalable across USDA-authorized retailers of various types and sizes.	Has received stop-and-start funding. Needs recurring funding for continuous operation and expansion to unserved geographies.
CalFresh Outreach Federally funded since 2003, Est. FY 26-27 CA Budget	CDSS collaborates with trusted community-based organizations (CBOs) to help Californians learn about, apply for, and manage CalFresh benefits. Brought in \$1.3 billion in federal food assistance last year.	H.R. 1 reduces federal funding for CalFresh Outreach, beginning October 1, 2026, making it difficult for CBOs to continue offering outreach and application assistance
CalFresh Minimum Nutrition Benefit Pilot Est. SB 600 (Menjivar, 2023); \$15M one-time	Pilot program increasing the minimum monthly CalFresh food benefit from \$23 to \$60 for select populations across the state.	Permanently raise the minimum benefit for all CalFresh households.

California Department of Education

Program	Description	Improvement
School Meals for All Est. 2021	California became the first state to provide free breakfast and lunch to all 5.7 million TK–12 public school students. Addresses childhood hunger and improves school meal culture — critical since 44% of food-insecure families don't qualify for federal school meal assistance, and food insecurity is 12% lower in states with free school meals.	Participation has increased nearly 9% with reduced stigma reported. This growth has surfaced long-term challenges: staffing shortages, decades of underinvestment in kitchen facilities, and students missing or not finishing meals due to limited time to eat.
Kitchen Infrastructure and Training (KIT) Est. 2021	Funds critical upgrades to school kitchen facilities and equipment, plus training for school nutrition professionals to serve freshly prepared meals	State has invested \$895 million; estimated cost to fully update California public school kitchens and staff training is \$5–8 billion.
SUN Bucks (Summer EBT) Est. SB 348 (Skinner, 2023)	Requires CDE to work with CDSS to maximize participation in Summer EBT	Multiple eligibility pathways make the program confusing to explain. A universal, online application would simplify family outreach.

California Department of Conservation

Program	Description	Improvement
Improve Land Access for SDFRs Est. Prop 4 (2024)	Will provide financial and technical resources to support farmers, including socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, and Tribal producers with land tenure	Program in development
Ag Land Equity Task Force & Report Est. FY 22-23 Budget (Aguilar-Curry)	Strategic Growth Council one-time task force that developed recommendations to equitably increase access to agricultural land for food production and traditional Tribal agricultural uses	Don't let the report sit on a shelf, implement recommendations for land tenure improvement

California Department of Pesticide Regulation

Program	Description	Improvement
Sustainable Pest Management Program Roadmap released Jan. 2023 by DPR, CDFA, CalEPA	Aims to make sustainable pest management the state's default approach and eliminate all Priority Pesticides by 2050. DPR established the SPM Advisory Committee and Scientific Prioritization and Review Committee (SPARC) and consolidated grant programs into the SPM Grants Program.	Codify the Roadmap in statute with measurable transition targets and interim milestones
DPR Environmental Justice Advisory Committee (EJAC) Est. AB 652 (Lee, 2023)	The first regularly scheduled public forum for hearing community concerns at DPR	Increase meetings from two to four annually for more meaningful public participation and oversight, aligning with other state EJACs — feasible within the current \$600,000 budget.
SprayDays Launched 2025	The nation's first fully public, advance pesticide notification system, giving communities advance notice of nearby applications of California's most highly regulated agricultural pesticides. Currently under review with public input through 2027.	Provide exact field location instead of the current system which identifies applications only within a one-mile-by-one-mile section rather than the exact field — unlike public notification systems for wildfires, air pollution, or chemical spills.

California Department of Health Care Services & Public Health

Program	Description	Improvement
CalAIM Since 2022	Created a pathway for Medi-Cal patients to access Medically Supportive Food & Nutrition (MSF&N) interventions— food-based services integrated into the health-care that can prevent, treat, and reverse diet-related chronic illnesses.	A federal “In Lieu of Services” authority will let Managed Care Plans continue covering MSF&N after CalAIM expires in December 2026, but only as an optional service — leaving beneficiaries vulnerable to losing access. MSF&N must transition from optional to fully covered, permanent Medi-Cal benefits.
Implementation of AB 1264	Phasing out ultra-processed foods (UPFs) from school meals	Program in process

California Labor & Workforce Development Agency

Program	Description	Improvement
Labor Commissioner	Division within the Dept of Industrial Relations responsible for wage and hour laws enforcement, investigation of workplace retaliation, and licensing specific high-violation industries such as farm labor contractors	Invest in staffing pipeline programs, strengthen enforcement of wage and hour laws and farm labor contractor licensing, and streamline the wage claim process to clear backlogs.
CalOSHA	Division within the Dept of Industrial Relations responsible for enforcement of California's health and safety laws.	Invest in staffing pipeline programs and build the capacity of the Ag Enforcement Task Force. Shift from letter-based to in-person inspections for worker complaints, and increase programmed inspections — particularly for heat and wildfire smoke exposure.
Agricultural Enforcement Task Force and Outreach Unit (AETFO)	This Cal/OSHA unit is a dedicated state team that performs proactive on-site worksite inspections, enforces heat illness prevention rules, and educates agricultural employers across agricultural regions hubs like Bakersfield and Salinas.	Ensure this unit is fully staffed and trained to understand the issues impacting farmworkers and to communicate effectively with in the languages workers speak. Partner with community based organizations to target problem employers and plan proactive inspections for high risk seasons and times.
Rural Strategic Engagement Program (RSEP)	Dedicates targeted outreach and legal resources to improve access to in-person labor rights and legal services in under-resourced rural areas, particularly for farmworkers, through training and coordination between LWDA departments, and grants and resources to community-based organizations (CBOs)	Needs ongoing funding
California Worker Outreach Program (CWOP) CWOP 5.0: July 2025–June 2026; CWOP 6.0: July 2026–June 2027	Provides grants and education to community-based organizations so they can be trusted messengers for the Department of Industrial Relations (DIR) and LWDA, delivering information on workers' rights and safety measures to workers and employers	Needs ongoing funding
Leave for Farmworkers During Climate Emergencies Est. SB 1105 (Padilla, 2024)	Creates flexibility for agricultural workers to use paid sick leave during climate emergencies to avoid smoke, heat, or flooding conditions created by a local or state emergency.	Invest in high-quality outreach materials and the community based organizations (CBO) that act as trusted messengers to educate workers of their rights, through programs like CWOP. Develop deeper partnerships with CBOs who act as navigators to help workers to file effective complaints when their rights are violated. Ensure that the State Labor Commissioner has the resources needed to enforce farmworkers' rights.
Farmworker Overtime Est. AB 1066 (Lorena Gonzalez, 2016)	Phased in overtime pay for farmworkers after 8 hours in one day and/or 40 hours in a week, like all other hourly workers.	
Paid Sick Leave Est. SB 616 (Lena Gonzalez, 2023)	Increased the number of paid sick leave days an employer must provide from three to five, without requiring a doctor's note.	

Endnotes

- 1 <https://grocerynerd.substack.com/p/grocery-update-117-making-food-affordable>
- 2 <https://groundworkcollaborative.org/news/new-groundwork-report-finds-corporate-profits-driving-more-than-half-of-inflation/>
- 3 Macaulay, L, and V Butsic. 2017. "Ownership Characteristics and Crop Selection in California Cropland." *California Agriculture: The Journal of UC Agriculture and Natural Resources* 71 (4): 221–30. <https://doi.org/10.3733/ca.2017a0041>.
- 4 https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2022/Full_Report/Volume_1_Chapter_1_State_Level/California/st06_1_001_001.pdf.
- 5 Gubernot DM, Anderson GB, Hunting KL. Characterizing occupational heat-related mortality in the United States, 2000–2010: an analysis using the Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries database. *Am J Ind Med*. 2015 Feb;58(2):20311. doi: 10.1002/ajim.22381. PMID: 25603942; PMCID: PMC4657558.
- 6 https://clc.ucmerced.edu/sites/g/files/ufvvh626/f/page/documents/farmworker_earnings_after_overtime.pdf
- 7 <https://www.ppic.org/blog/californias-farmworkers-and-their-children-are-vulnerable-to-food-insecurity/>
- 8 Zuckerman, Stephen. Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey, United States, 2017. Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2020-04-14. <https://doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR37513.v1> Urban Institute. 2020. Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey. Accessible from <https://datacatalog.urban.org/dataset/well-being-and-ba-sic-needs-survey>.
- 9 Berkowitz SA, Basu S, Gundersen C, Seligman HK. State-Level and County-Level Estimates of Health Care Costs Associated with Food Insecurity. *Prev Chronic Dis* 2019;16:180549. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5888/pcd16.180549>
- 10 Matthews ED, Kurnat-Thoma EL. U.S. food policy to address diet-related chronic disease. *Front Public Health*. 2024 May 16;12:1339859. doi: 10.3389/fpubh.2024.1339859. PMID: 38827626; PMCID: PMC11141542.
- 11 <https://californiacompetes.org/resources/food-insecurity-hampers-college-completion-for-californias-students/>
- 12 <https://climateresilience.ca.gov/overview/impacts.html>
- 13 <https://calclimateag.org/climatethreatstoag/>
- 14 Community Alliance with Family Farmers. "CAFF's Farmer Survey Results 2021." February 23, 2021. <https://caff.org/surveyresults2021/>.
- 15 <https://www.ppic.org/publication/policy-brief-drought-and-californias-agriculture/>
- 16 https://www.cdpr.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/2023_pur_highlights.pdf
- 17 <https://www.pesticidereform.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/DisproportionatePesticideHazardslatinx01-21.pdf>
- 18 <https://indigenousclimatehub.ca/2021/08/how-indigenous-sustainable-farming-practices-mitigate-the-impacts-of-climate-change/>
- 19 https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Statistics/PDFs/2023-2024_california_agricultural_organics_report.pdf
- 20 <https://www.ppic.org/publication/learning-from-calfresh-pandemic-boosts/>
- 21 Zuckerman, Stephen. Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey, United States, 2017. Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor], 2020-04-14. <https://doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR37513.v1> Urban Institute. 2020. Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey. Accessible from <https://datacatalog.urban.org/dataset/well-being-and-basic-needs-survey>.
- 22 2021 Community Alliance with Family Farmers Survey, <https://caff.org/surveyresults2021/>
- 23 <https://www.gov.ca.gov/2025/04/05/governor-newsom-ap-peals-abrupt-end-of-usda-farm-subsidies-used-to-supply-food-banks/>
- 24 <https://californiaagriculture.org/article/94420-california-has-882-000-farmworkers-to-fill-413-000-jobs>
- 25 <https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/statistics/>
- 26 <https://insideclimatenews.org/news/31122023/california-farm-workers-dying-in-the-heat/>
- 27 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8861180/>
- 28 https://clc.ucmerced.edu/sites/clc.ucmerced.edu/files/page/documents/fwhs_report_2.2.2383.pdf
- 29 Calvert, GM, J Karnik, L Mehler, J Beckman, B Morrissey, J Sievert, R Barrett, M Lackovic, L Mabee, A Schwartz, Y Mitchell, and S Moraga-McHaley. 2008. Acute Pesticide Poisoning Among Agricultural Workers in the United States, 1998–2005. *Am J Indust Med* 51:883–898.
- 30 <https://clc.ucmerced.edu/farmworker-health-study>
- 31 https://clc.ucmerced.edu/sites/g/files/ufvvh626/f/page/documents/farmworker_earnings_after_overtime.pdf
- 32 <https://insidecalosha.org/staffing/>
- 33 <https://www.auditor.ca.gov/reports/2023-104/>
- 34 <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/naws/pdfs/NAWS%20Research%20Report%2015.pdf>
- 35 https://www.epi.org/publication/federal-labor-standards-enforcement-in-agriculture-data-reveal-the-biggest-violators-and-raise-new-questions-about-how-to-improve-and-target-efforts-to-protect-farmworkers/?utm_source=chatgpt.com
- 36 <https://arxiv.org/abs/2508.03787>
- 37 <https://www.cafoodbanks.org/food-insecurity-data/>
- 38 <https://nature.berkeley.edu/news/2019/06/restoring-access-native-foods-can-reduce-food-insecurity>
- 39 <http://dx.doi.org/10.5888/pcd16.180549>
- 40 <https://groundworkcollaborative.org/news/new-groundwork-report-finds-corporate-profits-driving-more-than-half-of-inflation/>
- 41 <https://foodandpower.substack.com/p/whats-next-for-kroger-and-albertsons>
- 42 <https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/Statistics/>
- 43 https://s.giannini.ucop.edu/uploads/giannini_public/c8/f5/c8f549ed-510d-4531-a9d0-ad0b680df197/v21n3_2.pdf
- 44 https://youngfarmers.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/National-Survey-Web-Update_11.15.22-1.pdf
- 45 <https://sustainableagriculture.net/blog/usda-programs-freeze-what-we-know/>
- 46 <https://www.ucsusa.org/resources/farmworkers-at-risk>
- 47 <https://www.pesticidereform.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/DisproportionatePesticideHazardslatinx01-21.pdf>
- 48 <https://arxiv.org/abs/2508.03787>
- 49 <https://insideclimatenews.org/news/31122023/california-farm-workers-dying-in-the-heat/>
- 50 <https://calclimateag.org/climatethreatstoag/>