



North Santa Clara Resource Conservation District

An independent special district of the State of California

October 8, 2025

California Strategic Growth Council
Attn: Agricultural Land Equity Task Force
c/o Office of the Governor
State of California
Sacramento, CA

RE: Public Comment on Draft Task Force Recommendations (August 13, 2025) – Protecting RCD Governance Integrity While Advancing Equity

Dear Members of the Agricultural Land Equity Task Force:

Thank you for your commitment to advancing agricultural land equity in California and for the thoughtful public engagement that has informed the draft recommendations released in August 2025. The North Santa Clara Resource Conservation District (NSCRCD) appreciates the opportunity to comment and offers the following observations regarding the proposed amendment to Public Resources Code (PRC) Division 9, which would “enable non-landowners and tenant farmers to join the board of Resource Conservation Districts”.

Chief among our concerns are:

- Existing law already permits non-landowner participation.** The proposal appears to rest on the premise that non-landowners are currently ineligible to serve on RCD boards. In fact, PRC § 9352 already provides multiple pathways for non-landowners to serve, including through prior service as an associate director or as the designated agent of a resident landowner. These provisions were intentionally designed to promote inclusive participation while maintaining local accountability. Amending Division 9 to restate or broaden these eligibility criteria could create ambiguity and unintended overlap with existing law.
- Opening Division 9 is a risk that could impact our ability to continue to provide existing services to the agricultural community.** Division 9 is foundational to RCD powers, authorities, and operational structure, making it highly sensitive to statutory change. Once opened, it may invite changes beyond eligibility (e.g., restrictions on program authority, financial mechanisms, contracting powers, or interlocal collaboration). Because statutory changes in Division 9 can interact with LAFCO governance and service authority, a permissive “eligibility” amendment could inadvertently become an opening for amendments that could potentially narrow the broad authority RCDs currently possess to serve agricultural producers. Careful consideration is warranted.
- Lack of agricultural producer representation weakens legitimacy of the thoughtful work that has already been put in.** At a recent Task Force forum, we heard a local agricultural producer express concern about how the lack of inclusion of representatives from the commercial agricultural industry may have created an “echo chamber” for discussion of task force recommendations.

Without robust inclusion of commodity groups, small and midsize farms, tenure-challenged growers, and regional farm bureaus, the Task Force risks crafting recommendations that overlook the practical realities and unintended impacts on agricultural landowners and tenants.

To balance the goals of equity and effective conservation governance, we respectfully suggest the following adjustments and guardrails for your recommendations:

1. **Omit from the recommendations any change to RCD board eligibility in Division 9.** Maintain PRC § 9352 intact as the governing statute for RCD director eligibility, which already includes pathways for non-landowners via associate directors or designated agents.
2. **Focus on non-statutory inclusion mechanisms to increase inclusion.** These actions can achieve the Task Force's inclusion goals without reopening foundational statutory language:
 - A statewide program to recruit and support associate director candidates from historically underserved or tenant-farming populations.
 - Technical assistance and scholarship or stipend funding to lower barriers for eligible appointees to complete the existing service pathway.
 - Outreach campaigns, in coordination with RCDs, DOC, UC Cooperative Extension, and other public agencies, to underrepresented producer groups about roles in local leadership and advisory bodies.
3. **Convene additional stakeholder sessions with agricultural industry representatives before finalizing the recommendations.** Hold structured listening sessions with agricultural organizations and publish a response-to-comments appendix showing how those inputs shaped the final report.

In summary, NSCRCD acknowledges and supports the intent of the Task Force to expand agricultural land equity and broaden engagement in conservation governance. However, changes to PRC Division 9 eligibility pose significant risk to the stability, authority, and flexibility of RCDs statewide. We urge the Task Force to remove that component from its recommendations, replace it with inclusive non-statutory strategies to increase Board representation by tenant farmers and historically underserved populations, and deepen engagement with the agricultural industry stakeholders before finalizing.

We appreciate the Task Force's continued collaboration with local resource conservation districts and look forward to continued dialogue regarding refinement of recommendations.

Sincerely,

Frank Maitski
NSCRCD Board President