

# Land Access and Land Tenure for Limited Resource Farmers in Sonoma County

The study summarized here aims to inform decision makers about the needs of limited resource farmers (LRFs) and recommend actions to support LRFs' success in Sonoma County. [Read the study here.](#)

## What is a Limited Resource Farmer (LRF)?

The term "limited resource farmer" refers to farmers and ranchers who have limited access to the funds and other forms of capital needed to support development of a financially sustainable farming operation. Many of Sonoma County's local food and fiber producers are LRFs. These farmers are essential to building a vibrant, diverse agricultural sector, which provides multiple social, economic, and ecological benefits to the County.

## Challenges for LRFs in Sonoma County

In Sonoma County, availability of farmland is limited and the cost of land is very high. Combined with the high cost of living, this puts affordable land access and tenure out of reach for most LRFs. Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District and University of California Cooperative Extension are committed to supporting equitable land access, secure land tenure, and associated farm business viability for LRFs in the County.



Photo Credit: Kelsey Joy

## Recommendations

Many of these recommendations can be immediately implemented by existing Sonoma County organizations, while others hinge upon emerging statewide initiatives and policy changes or the development of new organizations or programs.



### Support a range of affordable land access opportunities

- Form an entity to hold land and provide leases to LRFs, with a focus on equity-building leases
- Support development of agricultural parks and other joint land access and management options
- Partner with housing groups to improve housing availability on or near farms
- Improve local land-linking services



### Enhance justice and equity in land access & tenure work

- Ensure that BIPOC\* farmer and farmworker priorities are centered throughout work on land access
- Identify ways to engage with the work of the CA Agricultural Land Equity Task Force, as relevant to LRFs in Sonoma County



### Educate existing landholders

- Educate agricultural landholders to help them provide leases to producers seeking land
- Collaborate with BIPOC communities to educate landholders on how to support land access for historically excluded groups



### Use land conservation tools to support LRFs

- Use buy-protect-sell transactions to transfer land to LRFs with intermediate to advanced experience
- Protect and support access to land in disadvantaged and urban areas as an important source of fresh, culturally relevant food
- Implement easement enhancements that keep agricultural lands in production, such as affirmative agricultural covenants



### Enhance LRFs' use of existing support programs

- Identify incentives for climate-smart practices from which producers with short to medium leases can benefit
- Identify barriers that LRFs face when accessing incentive programs; work to lower and help LRFs overcome these barriers



### Improve policy for land access and tenure

- Review and revise Sonoma County Williamson Act policy and enforcement to better support land access for producers
- Advance urban agriculture policies which support LRFs and enhance local food access