

The Marigold Fund for Unincorporated California

CONCEPT NOTE .

California's Central Valley is among the most productive agricultural regions in the world, yet decades of extractive industrial farming have fractured human, animal, and microbial systems, concentrating harm among those with the fewest protections. Declining groundwater availability, rising temperatures, and accelerating corporate consolidation of farmland have intensified vulnerability for low-income residents, particularly in disadvantaged unincorporated communities and Tribal lands. The loss of biological diversity, sterilization of soils, depletion of carbon sinks, and the export of both financial and natural resources out of the region have left many communities spiraling. Today, corporate farming enterprises continue to benefit disproportionately from subsidized land, water, and labor. Land consolidation shows no sign of slowing.

As California allocates public investments towards fixing the climate crisis, we need to fund what we know works. Instead of repeating history, allowing industry to author the next chapter of California's climate future, it's time to focus on community-led alternatives with proven potential to restore ecosystems, strengthen rural economies, and keep resources in the ground.

RESOURCING PROVEN CLIMATE SOLUTIONS The Marigold Fund for Unincorporated California funds community-led natural resource management in the Central Valley, supporting agroecological land stewardship, soil-based bioresource economies, composting/responsible biomass management, and nature-based climate solutions. Importantly, it draws funding into areas of the state that have the least visibility to state agencies and philanthropy, and to organizations that are historic land stewards, but who lack formal status or funding to grow their climate impact. Projects do not just purport to "benefit" disadvantaged communities— they are proposed and led by residents of unincorporated communities and Tribal lands of the Central Valley, people long excluded from political representation, capital access, and natural resource governance. These

deeply rural communities, often beyond municipal boundaries and lacking basic services, are essential stewards of land and water in California's agricultural backbone.

Emerging from more than a decade of organizing by agroecology practitioners and farmworker community service providers, the Marigold Fund is built on a reparative, decentralized approach to climate stewardship and regenerative agriculture led by farmworkers, small farmers, and Tribes whose labor and knowledge built the region.

CORE FUNDING PRINCIPLES

1. Build on existing agroecological recovery through locally rooted ecological knowledge, demonstrating scalable alternatives to industrial land management.
2. Prioritize community-owned and cooperative models that ensure infrastructure investments generate local jobs, worker ownership, and long-term access to land and water.
3. Center communities excluded from land-use planning, particularly unincorporated communities and Tribes that have been systematically denied services and sustainability investments.

HOW IT WORKS The Marigold Fund is a program of People Food and Land Foundation. Janaki Anagha serves as the interim administrator. The Fund supports both capacity-building and project operations with grant funding and provides a durable investment pathway for public agencies and partnered philanthropies and donors to sustain these projects over time. People Food and Land Foundation offers fiscal sponsorship to grantees where desired and assistance in retaining counsel, consulting, and more.

THE AXIL COMMITTEE is named after the part of a plant that directs nutrients towards fresh growth. It functions as the Fund's governing body, developing policies, funding priorities, and strategic direction. Members of the committee are women and/or genderqueer people of color from the Central Valley with demonstrated experience leading agroecological land stewardship. This committee defines funding criteria and approves grants, vets funders and partnerships for values alignment and participates in storytelling, media, research, and public speaking

GRANTEE ASSEMBLIES are formal or sometimes informal groups of small farmers, community residents, and Tribal members who are Fund beneficiaries. These

assemblies often predate the Marigold Fund and have been bootstrapping climate action for years. They may not have a nonprofit or even any type of formalized organization yet, but they have a vision, have started creating jobs and leadership pathways within communities, and are working towards climate resilience in their hometown. Assemblies develop proposals, budgets, and work plans and steward projects that respond directly to local environmental and economic conditions. They apply and are selected for funding by the Axil Committee.

PROJECT EXAMPLES

- Smallholder farms that buffer conventional agriculture while serving as community food sources
- Community green spaces for food, shade and recreation for farmworkers located in remote rural communities surrounded by privately held agricultural land
- Community-based composting that returns nutrients to local soils and provides sustainable waste management
- Cultural burning and collaborative fire protection to steward traditional food, medicine, and basketry landscapes

WHY PARTNER? Through its integrated governance structure, the Marigold Fund will expand a regional network of community-led agroecological projects. Over time, it will

- Secure long-term public and philanthropic investment for just land transition
- Elevate the needs of unincorporated communities and Tribes in policy arenas
- Restore agroecological land stewardship to California's agricultural narrative through culture, research, and practice

Through deep relationship building and a history of grassroots connection, the Fund's governance structure supports communities and Tribes that often lack formal legal status or grant-writing capacity to initiate their trajectory towards land ownership. The Fund also documents and shares lessons learned, helping philanthropy and public agencies avoid duplicative efforts and accelerate the growth of agroecological land stewardship across the region.

CONTACT To learn more or partner on this project, contact Janaki Anagha at janaki@11thhourproject.org