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Statement of Need: As one of the most profitable agricultural regions in the world, California's Central Valley has been the leader of national industrial agricultural production. Years of extractive practices in this region have fractured human, animal, and microbial communities and we now know that those with the fewest resources to mitigate harm face the greatest threats to their survival. Declining groundwater availability, increasing heat, and the ongoing corporate consolidation of agricultural lands have led to a concentration of harms among the lowest-income people in the region. The decline of biological diversity, the sterilization of living soils, the loss of carbon sinks, and the export of financial and natural resources have left disadvantaged unincorporated communities without basic needs such as food, water, and shelter. Corporate farming enterprises benefit from subsidized land, water, and labor, especially in the Central Valley, and this trend toward greater land consolidation is only growing momentum.[1]

In the current race towards carbon neutrality and the protection of remaining precious groundwater resources, California risks repeating past mistakes by subsidizing the same factory farms to continue their historic land uses, turning local agricultural wastes into transportation fuel instead of healthy soil, expanding export commodity orchard cropping that depletes vital groundwater resources, and transitioning acres of spent land to proposed clean energy uses without the promise of benefit to residents of the region.

As a countervailing force, the Marigold Fund for Unincorporated California supports community-led natural resource management strategies including the growth of a soil-based bioresource economy, composting and other responsible biomass management, nature-based climate solutions for groundwater longevity, and sustainable green jobs that strengthen rural economies. Importantly, these projects are proposed by community residents living in the cracks of California's agricultural patchwork, localizing benefits and keeping natural and financial resources in place.

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[1] Rempel JL, Belfer E, Ray I, Morello-Frosch R. Access for sale? Overlying rights, land transactions, and groundwater in California. Environ Res Lett. 2024 Feb 1;19(2):024017. doi: 10.1088/1748-9326/ad0f71. Epub 2024 Jan 23. PMID: 38283952; PMCID: PMC10811753.

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The Marigold Fund was formed over 10 years of strategic organizing by agroecology practitioners and farmworker community service providers who share a reparative orientation toward regenerative agriculture in the Central Valley[2]. The Fund prioritizes agroecological land stewardship by farmworkers, small farmers, and Tribes whose legacies have built California agriculture. We believe that, like any mycological network, we will be most successful in re-growing human, animal, plant, and microbial communities, economies, and ecosystems if we start small and decentralized.

The Marigold Fund makes grants in unincorporated communities to build the power of the unrepresented agricultural workers and land stewards living in the literal fringes of democracy, the deeply rural communities that have been excluded from access to capital and political representation that would otherwise support their participation in core natural resources governance.

The Marigold Fund's movement for political and environmental regeneration is co-located in the Central Valley due to the region's historic role as the backbone of California agriculture.

Why marigolds? Marigolds adorn the graves of the dead, welcome new life, and brighten the borders of farms and gardens. They are native to modern-day Mexico and have spread across the globe to settle in nearly every latitude, making home of their new surroundings. The Central Valley is a place where people from every latitude have made home of the California heartland. Native and immigrant communities built the region, from the construction of railroad and canal systems to the labor in diversified fruit and vegetable fields that made the garden bloom. These communities maintain connections to their cities and villages of origin in Latin America, Europe, Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and North America. Scanning stations while driving down Route 99 on the eastern side of the Valley you might hear Hmong, Tagalog, Punjabi, Armenian, Triqui, and Mixteco on the radio at once. Beyond the blur of the freeway and the monochromatic orchards is the colorful fabric of regional connections, spiritual orientations, cultural practices, and languages that hold the region together. Marigolds are a visible linkage in how our communities celebrate, mourn, pray, and tend the land.

[2] Core reference document: CVAgroecologyProgram.DraftPlan.FinalVersion.2020.pdf

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Goals of the Marigold Fund: The Marigold Fund will finance a vision to shift land uses in and around California's disadvantaged unincorporated communities and Tribal lands to agroecological practices and identify creative investment pathways for the ongoing success of these projects. The Fund supports both capacity building and project operation. Some examples of solutions that the Marigold Fund might finance are:

- The establishment of smallholder farms that work as buffer from conventional agriculture and community food source (example: Central California Environmental Justice Network, Cantua Creek, Fresno County, CA)
- The launch of new farming enterprises that employ organic agricultural practices (example: Allensworth Regenerative Farm Enterprises, Tulare County, CA)
- Community groundwater recharge efforts that meet multiple community needs such as creating community greenspace and ensuring the availability of groundwater (example: Fairmead Community and Friends, Fairmead, Madera County, CA)
- Community composting efforts that return healthy compost to the local community (example: Wukchumni Farm, Visalia, Tulare County, CA)
- The launch of new controlled burn/collaborative fire protection efforts for traditional areas including conservation efforts to protect traditional food, medicine, and basketry sources (example: Wukchumni Farm, Visalia, Tulare County, CA)

Funding Priorities for the Marigold Fund:

1. Build on existing agroecological ecosystem recovery in the San Joaquin Valley: Through practices rooted in Indigenous, Black, and local ecological wisdom, the Fund aims to demonstrate the viability of diverse agroecological approaches to land management to inspire broader adoption and replicate this success in diverse land use contexts.
2. Prioritize community-owned models for sustainability in infrastructure development: Today's cities, counties, and water districts were created in the mold of the white settler colonial approach to land, consolidating access to basic infrastructure in the hands of the few. Community residents of Tribes and disadvantaged communities have long pooled resources cooperatively to steward land, dig wells, grade roads, and make other local improvements. The Marigold Fund rewards these displays of resourcefulness and fosters cooperative land management that enables participation and decision-making by local communities. Cooperative models ensure that the benefits flow directly to individuals and communities involved, growing local jobs, worker ownership, and long-term access to land and water.

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3. Center communities that are structurally excluded from land-use planning: In pursuit of environmental justice, the Marigold Fund emphasizes unincorporated communities and Tribes. By intentionally centering and prioritizing these Valley communities that have historically been deliberately left without basic services and excluded from the benefits of sustainability initiatives[3], the Fund aims to address and rectify systemic inequities.

Should you give to the Marigold Fund or directly to projects and partner organizations? Do both!

- The Marigold Fund will aggregate and disburse grants to disadvantaged unincorporated communities and Tribes that may otherwise lack the legal status and grant-writing capacity to support their land stewardship goals for resilience. The fund's decision-making structure is led by people actively transitioning lands toward agroecology in the Central Valley.
- The Marigold Fund will hire a full-time staff person at People Food and Land Foundation to administer the fund. The role will include communications with grantees, issuance of GACs, and document preparation.
- The Marigold Fund will communicate the outcomes, challenges, successes, and failures to funder partners and reflect the changes in land use in the Central Valley over time.
- The Marigold Fund will aggregate learnings for philanthropy and help funders and grantee partners stop recreating the wheel and instead support the exponential growth of agroecological land management projects in the San Joaquin Valley against the tide of industrial agribusiness and green energy financing.
- The Marigold Fund organizes events, fundraisers, and tours at the behest of its leadership.

Agroecological transition requires direct support for capital costs, operation, and maintenance of projects for organizations leading land transition work on the ground. Don't stop at giving to the Marigold Fund; direct financing is also highly encouraged, including loan financing where projects are prepared to take on debt.

[3] https://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/CA%20UNINCORPORATED_FINAL.pdf

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Administration: The Marigold Fund is a program of People Food and Land Foundation and will hire an administrator in 2025. Janaki Anagha, Program Manager at the 11th Hour Project's Food and Agriculture Program, will be the interim administrator.

Axil Committee: This group is named after the part of a plant that determines new growth from the main stem, resourcing the budding region with the needed energy to emerge. This is a group of high-level thinkers with years of experience nurturing agroecological projects in the Central Valley at the nexus of climate, environmental, food, and land justice. This team will develop policies and funding priorities for the Marigold Fund to multiply agroecological land stewardship across the region. They will strategically invite proposals from Local Assemblies (see below) and invite new members to the Axil Committee as efforts expand. This group participates in storytelling, events, media appearances, and other branding for the Marigold Fund to attract and sustain funding support from donors, foundations, and corporate partners. It also vets donors, funders, and corporate partnerships for values alignment. This committee functions like a board of directors and meets once every two months.

Qualifications: Axil Committee members must be women and/or genderqueer people of color who reside or originate in the Central Valley and who are actively transitioning land toward agroecological land stewardship. They must have three or more years of experience managing an agroecological land stewardship project and be committed to the needs, goals, and priorities outlined here.

Responsibilities:

- Deliberation on policies for fund use, definitions of terms, administration of funds, and other fund logistics including hiring a fund administrator.
- Collective design of criteria for project financing.
- Selection and approval of grantees.
- Review of project updates on funded projects from Local Governance Assemblies (see below).
- Communication with funders of Marigold Fund
- Development of high-level discourse for our common objectives.
    - Proposing scholarly research to universities and authors on agroecology in the Central Valley
    - Appearance in media and public speaking on agroecology in the Central Valley

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- Submission of personal writings to the annual Marigold Fund publication
- Representing the California Central Valley in global food sovereignty spaces

Outcomes:

- Proposals from Local Assemblies are vetted and funding determinations are made.
- The network of funded projects grows and the past decade of agroecology organizing is continued, creating a legacy.
- Agroecological land stewardship is written back into the history of California through culture building and knowledge production.
- Regional challenges are raised at the federal and global levels attracting investment from philanthropy and government partners.

Central California Environmental Justice Network	Nayamin Martinez, Director
Wukchumni Tribe	Darlene Franco, Chairwoman
Allensworth Progressive Association	Dezaraye Bagalayos
[Pending]	
[Pending]	
[Pending]	

Members as of Sept 29, 2024

Land Transition Working Group: This group works like the root system of the fund, ensuring that locally derived projects and strategies are elevated within state frameworks and investment plans for natural resource management, economic development, and land use. It is a working group of academics, environmental justice, and land-use advocates interested in developing public financing pathways to support the Marigold Fund's priorities and finance projects proposed by the Local Assemblies. This group is a subcommittee of the pre-existing Land Transition Working Group that meets monthly and reports quarterly to the Axil Committee.

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Qualifications: Members of the Land Transition Working Group must adhere to the values and terms defined here: Land Transition Working Group Charter.

Responsibilities:

- Advocacy for funding from state programs for access to land for DACs, small farmers, and Tribes of the Central Valley.
- Engagement in research, data collection, and dissemination on equity-led land transition and best practices for cropland repurposing.
- State and local level advocacy for the incorporation of agroecology into land-use planning for land and water access as a part of their organizations' campaigns.
- Networking of organizations to support land access and other Fund objectives. i.e. in comments to government agencies on the distribution of Cap and Trade funding program dollars incorporating language around the importance of allocating funds to the Marigold Fund and directly to nonprofits engaging in just land transition work.
- Communicate outcomes of activities to the Axil Committee on a quarterly basis.

Outcomes:

- Increased state and federal dollars to community-based agroecological projects and initiatives. Increased adoption of sound state policies that support DACs and Tribes in acquiring land for agroecological land management in the Central Valley such as the Multi Benefit Land Repurposing Program.
- Secured longevity of funding for agroecological projects proposed and supported by the Marigold Fund.
- Increased visibility of the needs of small farmers before state and local agencies.
- Sound policy development for land use and water planning for just land transition.
- Axil Committee is updated quarterly on any relevant state or federal programs or policies on cropland or multi-benefit land repurposing.

Members as of Sept 28, 2024

Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability	Nataly Escobedo Garcia
Union of Concerned Scientists	J. Pablo Ortiz-Partida
Central California Environmental Justice Network	Angela Islas
Clean Water Action/Clean Water Fund	Jennifer Clary
11th Hour Project	Janaki Anagha
SocioEnvironmental and Education Network	Leticia Classen-Rodriguez
Community Water Center	Kjia Rivers
Environmental voters	Andrew Escamilla
California Farmer Justice Collaborative	Minkah Taharkah

Local Governance Assemblies: These are autonomous or semi-autonomous groups of small and subsistence farmers, community residents, and/or Tribal members whose agroecological projects are supported by grant funding from the Marigold Fund. In some cases, assemblies may be shepherded and/or fiscally sponsored by a nonprofit organization with issue-area expertise to assist in the development of a project proposal (i.e. a community groundwater recharge project might be stewarded by Community Water Center staff to assist in the development of this semi-autonomous grassroots group in an impacted DAC to develop a project plan). In other cases, assemblies are existing community-based groups that are ready to quickly utilize project financing. Assemblies will meet as needed for project management.

Responsibilities:

- Convening small farmers and/or disadvantaged community residents and tribal members of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds around the same table to develop agroecological land management projects in their communities.
- Developing funding plans and proposals to share with the Axil Committee.
- Developing projects including budgets, work plans, and proposed outcomes.

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Outcomes:

- Projects are developed from the ground up, responsive to local environmental challenges, and are the result of collaborative discussions/futuring of the Central Valley in conversation with residents.
- Local community residents manage proposed projects, creating the options for these residents to become employees of the projects (i.e., community farm operators, vendors, contractors, etc) providing jobs in the just transition of lands.

Example (existing) Local Governance Assemblies:

Name of Assembly	Fiscal Agent	Type of Project	County in the SJV
MILPA project	CCEJN (501 c 3)	Agroecological farm enterprise and training center	Fresno County
Wukchumni Farm	Wukchumni Tribe (501 c 3)	Agroecological farm enterprise and training center/Tribal land stewardship	Tulare County
Allensworth Progressive Association	Allensworth Progressive Association (501 c 3)	Agroecological farm enterprise and training center	Tulare County
Foodlink Tulare	Foodlink Tulare	Agroecology Center	Tulare County