

Planning for Food Justice

Advancing Equity in City and County General Plans Through California's Senate Bill 1000

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Introduction

In 2012, the non-profit organization Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice (CCA EJ) sued the City of Jurupa Valley, California, for proposing to build a warehouse and distribution center near a low-income neighborhood. According to CCA EJ, the industrial site would exemplify the historic and persistent issue of discrimination in land use planning throughout the United States. For decades, city zoning and siting decisions have disproportionately exposed low-income neighborhoods and communities of color to environmental hazards, while limiting these communities' access to resources like public green space, permanent affordable housing, and healthy food. This pattern has had a measurable impact on the health of these communities.

In Jurupa Valley, CCA EJ not only worked to halt the distribution center's construction. The organization also ensured that all members of the community could participate in city planning decisions that would affect their health. In 2014, the City of Jurupa Valley adopted into its General Plan the *Jurupa Valley Environmental Justice Element* — prepared by CCA EJ to codify equity into future city development decisions.¹ Incorporating environmental justice (EJ) into local land use planning soon became a statewide effort. A few years later, CCA EJ worked with the Environmental Health Coalition, the California Environmental Justice Alliance, and State Senator Connie Leyva (SD 20) to author *Senate Bill 1000: The Planning for Healthy Communities Act*.² In September 2016, then California Governor Jerry Brown signed SB 1000 into law.³

While the city planning process has historically perpetuated inequalities, a growing body of academic literature and advocacy has focused on how land use planning could be mobilized for environmental justice⁴ and how integrating equity-based policies can converge the movements for environmental justice, food justice, and health equity.⁵ Our research on SB 1000 builds on this literature, with a particular focus on the link between environmental justice in land use planning and food justice.

By combining desk review of General Plan documents, quantitative data analysis, and in-depth interviews, we tracked the statewide implementation and compliance of SB 1000. We also determined how comprehensively cities and counties have integrated policies that advance food justice. Based on this analysis, this report emphasizes the importance of explicitly targeting food inequities in EJ land use planning and offers recommendations to city planners and state legislators to improve SB 1000 implementation to better advance the law's food justice goals.

Cover photo: Overview of Gilroy, CA. iStock.com/Derek_Neumann.

Environmental and Food Justice: Two Overlapping Movements

Often seen as separate social movements, environmental and food justice are deeply intertwined, with roots in equity and civil rights. The EJ movement sparked in Warren County, North Carolina, where a rural Black community fought the creation of a toxic landfill in 1982.⁶ This fight represented a growing awareness of unjust siting of undesirable land uses among communities of color, as documented by sociologist Robert Bullard throughout the 1970s.⁷ By that time, groups like the Black Panthers had already considered food security as part of the fight for civil rights by spearheading meal programs for their communities. Today, the food justice movement encompasses food sovereignty, nutrition, and food access, specifically with a focus on racial equity.⁸

In their 1996 article “‘First Feed the Face’: Environmental Justice and Community Food Security,” Robert Gottlieb and Andrew Fisher argued that food is essential to the environmental justice movement.⁹ Our research reemphasizes this argument: As cities and counties incorporate EJ into land use planning, SB 1000 provides an important avenue for advancing food justice throughout the state.



Residents of Warren County, North Carolina, sparked the EJ movement by protesting a PCB landfill from 1978 to 1982. Photo courtesy of the Jerome Friar Photographic Collection and Related Materials, Wilson Special Collections Library, UNC-Chapel Hill.

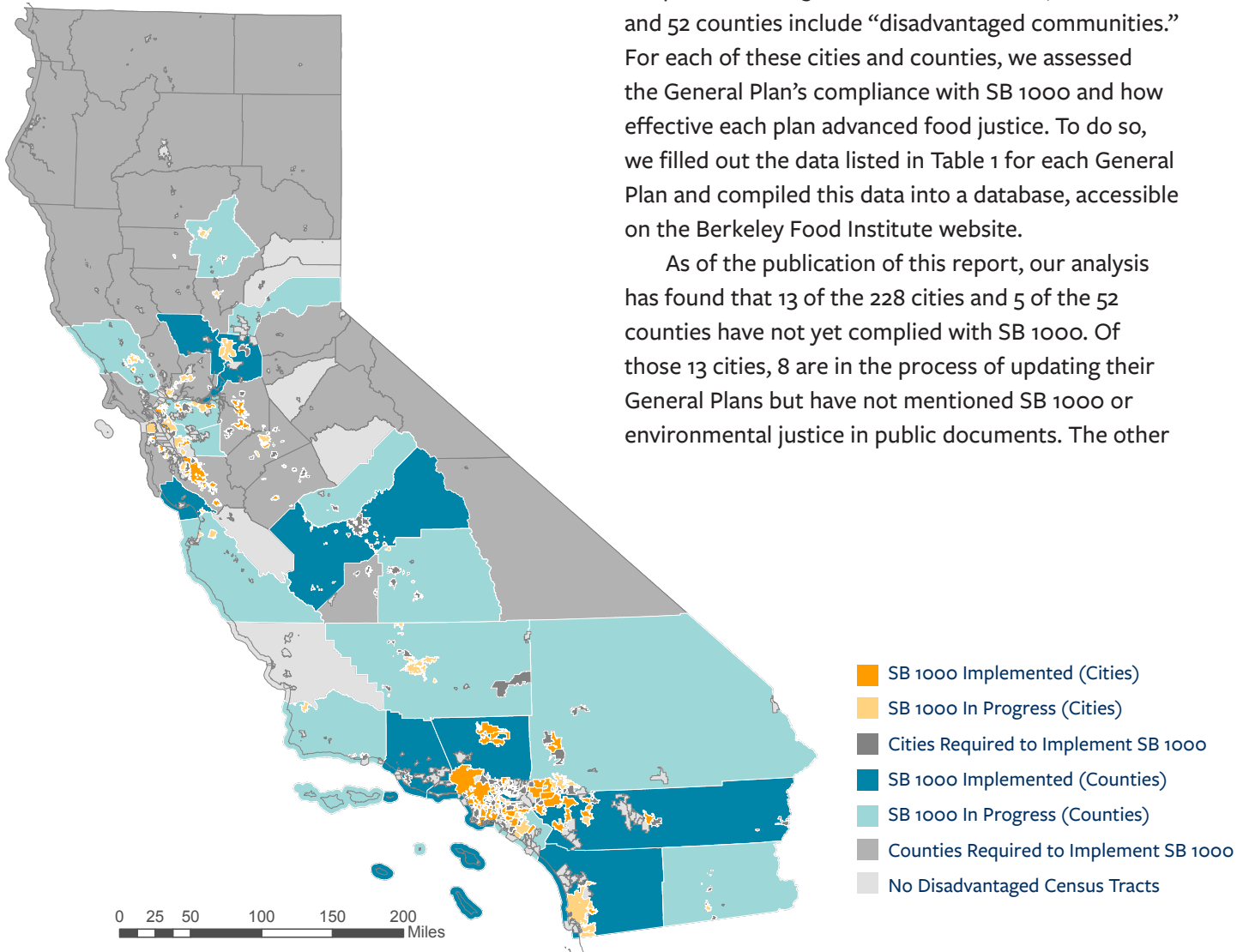
What is SB 1000?

In California, state law requires every city and county to have a General Plan to serve as a blueprint document for that municipality’s future development.¹⁰ These plans include policies, goals, principles, plan proposals, and maps organized into “elements,” which are the topics California law requires each General Plan to cover.¹¹ Elements include housing, open space, safety, and so on. In California, General Plans are typically updated every 15 to 20 years.

SB 1000: The Planning for Healthy Communities Act took effect on January 1, 2018. It requires cities and counties with “disadvantaged communities” to incorporate environmental justice into their General Plans, either as a standalone element or integrated in policies throughout the plan. The law is triggered in these localities when planners concurrently update two or more elements of the General Plan.

In the case of SB 1000, “disadvantaged communities,” or DACs, are defined by the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA) through its CalEnviroScreen 4.0, a tool that screens census tracts by pollution burden and other population characteristics.¹² Notably, race is not one of CalEPA’s indicators — illustrating the limits of the term “disadvantaged communities” to describe the historic discrimination faced by many communities in California.¹³ A separate analysis by the California Office of Environmental Health and Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) shows that people of color, especially Black and Latinx populations, are more likely to live in DACs.¹⁴ In this report, we continue to use the term “disadvantaged communities” as written in SB 1000, though we support a statewide reconsideration of the nomenclature.

FIGURE 1. SB 1000 IMPLEMENTATION MAP



Tracking SB 1000

Of 482 cities and 58 counties in California, 228 cities and 52 counties include “disadvantaged communities.” For each of these cities and counties, we assessed the General Plan’s compliance with SB 1000 and how effective each plan advanced food justice. To do so, we filled out the data listed in Table 1 for each General Plan and compiled this data into a database, accessible on the Berkeley Food Institute website.

As of the publication of this report, our analysis has found that 13 of the 228 cities and 5 of the 52 counties have not yet complied with SB 1000. Of those 13 cities, 8 are in the process of updating their General Plans but have not mentioned SB 1000 or environmental justice in public documents. The other

FIGURE 2. SB 1000 IMPLEMENTATION AMONG CALIFORNIA CITIES

Of **228** cities with “disadvantaged communities”

5 cities are out of compliance with SB 1000

8 cities are updating General Plans, but SB 1000 compliance is unclear

55 cities are in progress of implementing SB 1000

66 cities have implemented SB 1000

94 cities have not yet been triggered by SB 1000

TABLE 1. SB 1000 TRACKING DATA

Column	Meaning
Location	Name of California municipality
County	Name of County that municipality is in
Last Updated	Date that General Plan was last updated or if an update is currently in progress
Link to Plan	Link to General Plan
SB 1000	<p>Has the General Plan addressed the requirements of SB 1000?</p> <p>Yes: SB 1000 is included in the General Plan No: SB 1000 is not included in General Plan despite the fact that the law has been triggered In Progress: Municipality is currently working on General Plan update Law has not been triggered: City has not updated two or more elements of their General Plan concurrently since SB 1000 went into effect Not Mentioned: Municipality is working on General Plan update, but SB 1000 is not mentioned in planning documents</p>
EJ Element	<p>Is there a specific EJ element or is environmental justice incorporated throughout the document?</p> <p>Yes: There is a standalone EJ Element Incorporated Throughout: EJ Policies are integrated throughout General plan N/A: Need for Implementation of EJ Element has not yet been triggered Unclear: Update is in progress. This could mean it is unclear if policies will be incorporated throughout or in a stand alone element OR it is unclear if EJ will be incorporated at all</p>
In Compliance	<p>Is the city in compliance with SB 1000?</p> <p>Yes: Law has not been triggered, EJ policies are in progress, or EJ policies exist No: City is out of compliance with SB 1000 (Two or more elements have been updated concurrently since SB 1000 went into effect) Unclear: City is currently updating General Plan, but SB 1000 is not mentioned in published update information</p>
Agricultural Community?	Does the municipality have a strong link to agriculture production?

FOOD POLICY GOALS

Column	Meaning
Policy	Name of the policy as listed in the General Plan
Description	Description of the policy as listed in the General Plan
Food Access	Does the policy address food access?
Nutrition Outcomes	Does the policy address nutrition outcomes?
Local Food Production	Does the policy promote local food production?
Edible Landscapes	Does the policy promote/allow for edible landscapes (fruit trees, community gardens, etc.)
Protect Agricultural Land	Does the policy protect existing agricultural lands?
Addresses Equity	Does the policy directly address equity (both individual policies and overall)?
Policy Goals Adressed	Of the 6 policies goals identified, how many were met?

Source: This table represents how we analyzed each General Plan to construct our database. We tracked General Plans for both compliance and comprehensive food policies. The database can be found at food.berkeley.edu/mission/policy/sb-1000

Our analysis found that the most effective and comprehensive food justice policies specifically target disadvantaged communities, provide actionable steps, and focus on measurable results. Here are a few examples:

Richmond–

“Leverage financial incentives, zoning, technical assistance, and other similar programs to attract grocery store retailers in underserved residential areas of the city. Periodically update information on the location of healthy food sources to track progress on meeting the goals of this element and the Community Health and Wellness Element.”

San Pablo–

“Seek ways to partner with regional Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) as an alternative source of fresh and healthy fruits and vegetables for San Pablo residents, particularly those with limited mobility, limited income, or those furthest from existing grocery stores.”

Anaheim–

“Support the establishment of farmer’s markets, farm stands, neighborhood markets, mobile health food markets, and other stores that sell healthy food and fresh produce, to expand access to healthy food options throughout the city, with a focus on locations within a walkable distance (i.e., half to a quarter mile away) of EJ Communities.”

5 cities and 5 counties have failed to incorporate environmental justice despite updating two or more elements concurrently since 2018. The rest of the cities and counties have either already adopted new elements in compliance with SB 1000, started the process of implementing EJ policies, or not been triggered by SB 1000 (see Figure 2.)

A majority of cities and counties are in compliance with the minimum requirements of SB 1000. However, the extent to which these General Plans comprehensively address food justice varies significantly across cities and counties. In our analysis, we identified each General Plan that contained food policies and assessed how that policy addressed six food policy goals: food access, nutrition outcomes, local food production, edible landscapes, protection of agricultural lands, and equity. We determined that a General Plan that thoroughly addresses at least four of these six goals (with equity required) is comprehensively meeting the food justice goals of SB 1000. Based on this definition, 51 cities and 12 counties have both complied with SB 1000 and comprehensively addressed food justice in their General Plans. One city contains comprehensive food policies though it has not yet complied with SB 1000.

TABLE 2. FOOD POLICY GOALS IN GENERAL PLANS AND IMPLEMENTATION OF SB 1000

Policy Goal Addressed	Total # of cities that have implemented SB 1000	Cities with goal who have not implemented SB 1000	% of total (t=163)	Cities with goal who have implemented SB 1000	% of total (t=65)	Difference between % with and without SB 1000	Z-score	P-value
Food Access	111	52	31.9%	59	90.8%	+58.9%	8.03299	<.00001*
Nutrition	92	37	22.7%	55	84.6%	+61.9%	8.6011	<.00001*
Food Production	119	63	38.6%	56	86.1%	+47.5%	6.4819	<.00001*
Edible Landscapes	61	25	15.3%	36	55.4%	+40.1%	6.1767	<.00001*
Agricultural Land	95	73	44.7%	22	33.8%	-11.0%	-1.5075	0.13167
Equity	80	26	16.0%	54	83.1%	+67.1%	9.69	<.00001*

*Statistically significant at p<0.01.

For all food policy goals except the protection of agricultural land, SB 1000 has clearly increased the frequency at which they appear in General Plans (see Table 2). General Plans in rural areas typically already contain policies that preserve agricultural land, and urban areas do not prioritize agricultural land against competing land uses. Food production is typically perceived as a rural land use, even as

research highlights urban farms as important spaces for community health and food access.¹⁵ Meanwhile, food policies that address equity have seen the most significant increase since SB 1000 took effect — occurring 67 percent more frequently in General Plans that have incorporated SB 1000. This illustrates the importance of policies that make equity an explicit priority in planning.

Case Studies

To complement the information in the database, we conducted case studies on the cities of Richmond and Gilroy, which both incorporated comprehensive and equity-focused food policies in their General Plans. These case studies illustrate how SB 1000 implementation might differ between urban (Richmond) and rural (Gilroy) municipalities. In each city, we interviewed planners, policymakers, and community advocates to understand the policy formation, community engagement, and implementation processes behind each city’s EJ element.

Gilroy

Known for its annual garlic festival, the City of Gilroy is an agricultural community in Santa Clara County, on the southern edge of the San Francisco Bay Area, with a population of nearly 60,000. The city is majority Latinx, leans Democrat, and contains at least one disadvantaged community.¹⁶ The US Department of Agriculture designates a portion of the city as low-income and having low food access, which means that a majority of residents in this area live more than a mile from a supermarket.¹⁷ With help from Sacramento-based planning and development consulting firm Mintier Harnish, Gilroy was one of the first cities in the state to successfully adopt an EJ element after the passage of SB 1000.¹⁸

Early in the planning process, Mintier Harnish organized focus groups and workshops with Gilroy community members and city planners to discuss SB 1000 in the city’s updated General Plan. Food access quickly became a focus of these discussions. “One of the planners [had a] passion [for] food, oriented with community health. [We] had the freedom to pursue those interests in our work,” said a Mintier Harnish consultant. Members of the local community organization Nueva Vida, which operates a bimonthly



Old City Hall in Gilroy. Courtesy of the Jon B. Lovelace Collection of California Photographs, Library of Congress.

food drive in San Ysidro Park, were also vocal on food issues during the planning process. They expressed particular interest in policies that would distribute local, organic produce to Gilroy residents.

Our interviews in Gilroy revealed that public outreach and education were significant components of the planning process. Nueva Vida, along with local churches and other community members, passed out flyers in English and Spanish and went door to door to offer insight into the planning process around SB 1000. However, community engagement lapsed once the General Plan updates were drafted — perhaps due to staff turnover in city government. Neither Mintier Harnish nor Nueva Vida were informed by the city when the EJ element was finalized and adopted.

Richmond

On the northeast shore of San Francisco Bay in Contra Costa County, Richmond has a long history of industrial land use planning that has led to environmental burdens for its residents. The city made a name for itself as a major World War II shipyard. Today, Richmond’s largest employer is the Chevron Richmond Refinery, which processes 245,000 barrels of crude oil per day.¹⁹ Half of the current population of 115,000 is Latinx with the rest equally split among non-Hispanic white, Black, and Asian residents.²⁰ Similar to Gilroy, USDA designates portions of the city as low-income and low food access.

In 2012, the Richmond City Council published a General Plan that included a Health and Wellness element that incorporated environmental justice.²¹ In October 2022, Richmond built off this element to amend its plan with an EJ element.²² As part of our research, we spoke with a planner who worked on the Health and Wellness element in 2012, a member of the city’s Planning Division, a current City Council member, and a representative from the nonprofit organization, Planting Justice.

Response to our outreach in Richmond has been limited, so more interviews are required to understand the full scope of SB 1000 implementation in the city. However, one theme that emerged from our interviews is skepticism with the role of city planning in environmental and food justice. “I just don’t trust that the energy and capacity and time that we give to planning makes much of a difference,” said one of our interviewees. “It’s so exhausting, and it doesn’t seem to lead to very much direct linkages to what’s happening on the ground.”



Overview of Richmond, CA. iStock.com/MattGush

Policy Recommendations

Our database shows that SB 1000 put legislative weight behind incorporating environmental and food justice policies in city planning. However, the gap between SB 1000 compliance and comprehensive food justice policies, as well as insight from our case studies, highlight the need for improving SB 1000 implementation to further advance food justice in the planning process. We offer the following recommendations.

Recommendations for City and County Planners

1 Implement a standalone environmental justice element rather than incorporate environmental justice goals throughout the General Plan.

Our research shows that cities and counties are more likely to comprehensively address food justice in their General Plans if environmental justice is implemented as a standalone element, rather than incorporated throughout the plan. Even if EJ is spread throughout, General Plans should list them in a single, easily referenced place.

2 Involve public awareness and participation in drafting environmental justice goals, and communicate those goals to the public.

Many of our interviewees in Gilroy and Richmond, who work in either food or city government, were only vaguely aware of SB 1000 and did not know which policies their city had adopted. Cities and counties should include widespread public participation to create the environmental justice goals in their General Plans. The final goals should then be communicated back to community members and organizations, especially those who participated in the planning process.

3 Improve the follow-through and on-the-ground implementation of stated goals.

A General Plan serves as a municipality's blueprint, but our analysis showed a lack of incentives and accountability to turn these blueprints into reality. This issue is not specific to SB 1000 but applies to General Plans more broadly. General Plan goals would become more effective by tying funding to these policies or committing more resources to their implementation.

4 Write food justice policies that are targeted, actionable, and specific.

Our analysis found that the best food justice policies targeted disadvantaged communities, specified a roadmap to achieve those goals, and would lead to specific, measurable changes. (See examples on page 6.)

5 Prioritize racial equity in environmental and food justice planning, despite the fact that CalEnviroScreen does not include race in its analysis of disadvantaged communities.

Cities and counties should explicitly address the legacy of racial discrimination in land use planning in their locality. Municipalities should ensure that communities of color have a voice in decisions that would affect their health. Resources and investments should be allocated equitably to support community-led initiatives that address environmental injustices. If cities do not specifically target racial equity in their General Plans, planning will perpetuate existing inequities.

Recommendations for the State of California

6 Include USDA food access metrics when defining “disadvantaged communities.”

Food access is not a criteria included in CalEPA’s CalEnviroScreen calculation of disadvantaged communities. Some cities or counties might not have a documented environmental burden, and are thus not required to implement SB 1000, but they might have food-insecure communities. Our database shows 130 cities triggered by SB 1000 contain a majority of households more than a mile away (or 10 miles in rural areas) from a supermarket. However, by overlaying CalEnviroScreen with USDA’s Food Access Research Atlas, we identified 98 additional cities that are not required to implement SB 1000 but do include low-income communities with food accessibility issues. Expanding CalEnviroScreen to account for food access would widen SB 1000’s impact to these communities.

7 Clarify CalEPA’s designation of Tribal communities as “disadvantaged” in SB 1000 to increase compliance in counties with federally recognized Tribes.

As of May 2022, CalEPA considers lands under the control of federally recognized Tribes in the state as “disadvantaged communities” for the purposes of laws like SB 1000.²³ Meanwhile, the 5 out-of-compliance counties contain Indigenous communities rather than DACs flagged by CalEnviroScreen, which indicates a lack of clarity or awareness that these counties are required to implement SB 1000. We suggest clarifying the law’s inclusion of counties with Tribal communities and targeting outreach to these county planning departments.

Conclusion

City planning and policies like SB 1000 play an essential role in advancing food justice. By requiring cities and counties to incorporate environmental justice into General Plans, SB 1000 can pave the way for policies that reduce inequities and potentially reduce health disparities. For the next phase of our research, we will attempt to link food access and diet-related health indicators to SB 1000 implementation.

In this report, we show some of the successes of SB 1000. The law works to explicitly target equity in goals and policies, to bring community members to the table, and to link environmental and food justice, two separate yet overlapping movements, through the city planning process. Already, we have met with the Governor’s Office of Planning and Research and the Attorney General’s Bureau of Environmental Justice (created in 2018 following SB 1000) to recommend best practices for food access policies and discuss how to bring all cities and counties triggered by SB 1000 into compliance. In September 2023, the Attorney General’s Office published a guide to best practices for

implementing SB 1000, which includes example policies and other resources for local governments.²⁴

Our research also shows some of the limits of SB 1000 and the city planning process. Planning for food justice is only the first step. With community involvement, General Plans can be leveraged as tools for transformation, especially for vulnerable, frontline, and impacted communities that have always fought for environmental and food justice inside and outside the city planning process.

SB 1000 itself was spearheaded by community groups and activists, which speaks to the critical role community advocacy plays in pushing policies that advance environmental and food justice. City planning works best with community participation. A General Plan serves as the blueprint to a city or county. If community members have the opportunity to engage with the planning process and have their EJ goals written into these plans, then a General Plan can also serve as a touchpoint for grassroots mobilization.

Notes

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The Berkeley Food Institute (BFI) at University of California, Berkeley leverages University of California resources in partnership with communities to shape a just farm and food system. BFI envisions a farm and food system rooted in urban and rural agroecology, good food access, fair and healthy jobs, and racial equity.

