SMALL FARMS, BIG POTENTIAL:

GROWING A RESILIENT LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM

SANTA CLARA COUNTY

FOOD SYSTEM ALLIANCE

JANUARY 2020

SUPPORT

I'm pleased to support the Santa Clara County Food System Alliance's report on small farms. The report complements and reinforces the goals and recommendations of the Santa Clara Valley Agricultural Plan.

The small parcels that make up the majority of our County's remaining farmland are critical to our local food system. They provide much-needed opportunities for new and small farm operations to get established and grow food for County residents. In addition to contributing to our local food supply and food economy, small farms provide a variety of ecological services that strengthen our region's climate resilience.

By preserving our farmland, particularly small parcels at the urban edge, we maintain these benefits—benefits that are essential to the health of Santa Clara County's people, communities, economy, and environment."

JOE SIMITIAN, PRESIDENT
SANTA CLARA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

We know that California is losing 50,000 acres of farmland and rangeland a year. In Santa Clara County, the majority of remaining agriculture parcels are 40 acres or less, indicating the farms operating in the county are small in size. As we face a changing environment, our agricultural landscape poses many challenges for our farmers, both large and small. From maintaining fertile soil conditions to building dignified housing for our farmworkers, the need for adaptation continues to grow within our statewide and local agricultural policy frameworks. We must strive to institute strategies that will provide resources for technical support and education, increase access to farmland, and use a multi-faceted approach that will achieve sustainability for farmers and local food systems. I am proud of the work our local leaders are doing to get a better understanding of the issues facing our Agricultural communities."

STATE ASSEMBLYMEMBER ROBERT RIVAS, 30TH DISTRICT

photo: Spade & Plow

SMALL FARMS, BIG POTENTIAL:
GROWING A RESILIENT LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM

SANTA CLARA COUNTY
FOOD SYSTEM ALLIANCE

It is our pleasure to present you with the Santa Clara County Food System Alliance's report on the viability of small-scale agriculture in our county – Small Farms, Big Potential: Growing a Resilient Local Food System.

In January of 2018 the County of Santa Clara and the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority adopted the Santa Clara Valley Agricultural Plan (Ag Plan), a strategic plan with a toolkit of policies and programs to curb the conversion of over 28,000 acres of viable farmland and rangeland to sprawl development. In the past 30 years alone, Santa Clara County has lost more than 21,000 acres of its working lands.

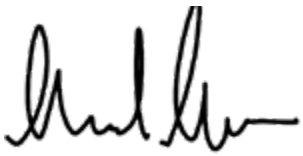
Over the past 20 months, the Ag Plan has set into motion a great deal of activity and conversation about the past, present, and future roles for the uniquely peri-urban working lands and agricultural livelihoods in our county. One thing has become clear: the survival of agriculture in Santa Clara County is dependent upon the long-term viability of farming on small parcels, which make up the majority of farmland in the county and which are the most vulnerable to development.

In the spirit of collaboration and cross-pollination, the Food System Alliance has researched and written the following report to further the conversation and momentum of the Ag Plan, with special attention paid to the viability of small-parcel farming. This subject matter is essential to understand for those of us dedicated to supporting Santa Clara County agriculture.

This report represents a two-year effort carried by a multiplicity of stakeholders and perspectives. We invite you to dive in to the issues and opportunities facing our small farms, and we hope that you will join us in the ongoing work of investing in our working lands and cultivating agricultural resilience for our county and the greater Bay Area.

Joseph Deviney

Agricultural Commissioner
Division of Agriculture
County of Santa Clara



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CONTENT

photo: Spade & Plow

Through this report, the Alliance hopes to reinforce the role of small farms in the renewed conversation about the future of farmland and farming initiated by the Santa Clara Valley Agricultural Plan.

PREFACE

The Santa Clara County Food System Alliance (Alliance) is a collaborative of stakeholders concerned with issues of healthy food access, agricultural production, and food distribution in Santa Clara County. The Alliance developed this report as a tool to educate policymakers, food system stakeholders, and the general public about the challenges facing small farms in our county. It highlights opportunities to bolster small-scale farm operations through improved access to farmland, a more supportive community and policy environment, and expanded regional markets for county-grown produce. The report also provides practical recommendations that can serve as a foundation to make positive changes for current and prospective farmers in Santa Clara County.

The Alliance gathered information for the report over a two-year period, beginning in winter 2017. In researching this topic, the Alliance drew on county and federal agricultural statistics and reviewed various assessments of agriculture in the Bay Area and California. With assistance from students at Santa Clara University, Alliance members interviewed and surveyed small-scale farmers in Santa Clara County and the surrounding region, and investigated successful models for supporting small farms from around the region and around the country. Alliance members also surveyed food service providers in the county.

Through this report, the Alliance hopes to reinforce the role of small farms in the renewed conversation about the future of farmland and farming initiated by the Santa Clara Valley Agricultural Plan (Ag Plan). The Ag Plan, adopted by the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors in January 2018, outlines a framework for mitigating climate change while preserving Santa Clara County's agricultural lands and supporting the regional agricultural economy. The Alliance's report brings successful models for supporting the viability of small-scale farms to this larger initiative, with the shared goal of maintaining a robust and resilient food and farm system in Santa Clara County.

photo: Spade & Plow

Between 1992 & 2012, the United States lost 31 million acres of farmland.

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

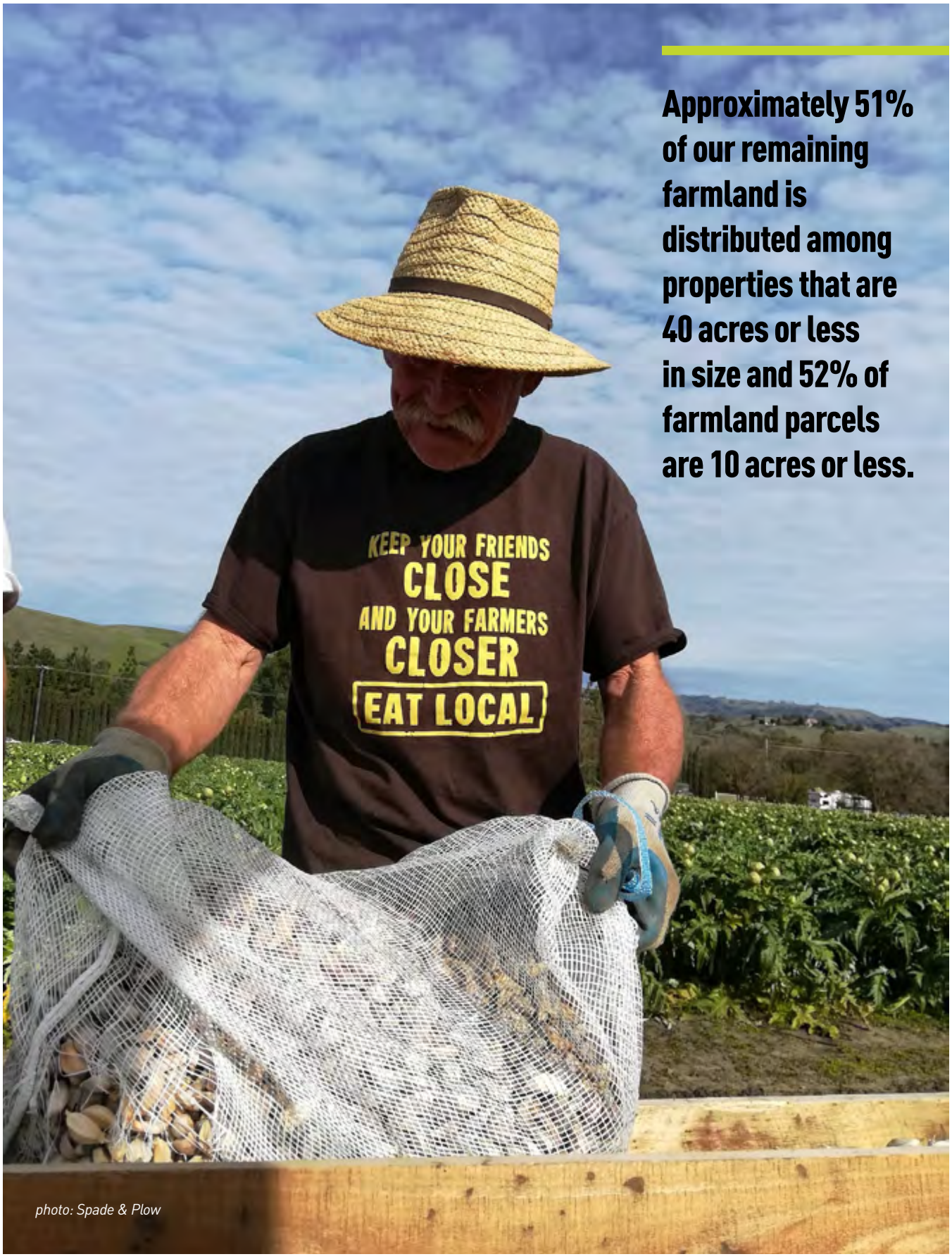
Across the country, farmland near cities is threatened by development. Between 1992 and 2012, the United States lost 31 million acres of farmland. Nearly 60% of this land was lost to urban development, while the remainder was converted to low-density rural residential development. This farmland around urban areas is often our highest quality cropland, supplying 91% of domestically grown fruits, nuts, and berries, and 77% of domestically grown vegetables.[1] The paradox of farming at the urban edge is that our most productive farmland—which is also in close proximity to the majority of consumers—has the highest market value for non-farm uses.

photo: Berkeleyside/Melati Citrawireja

This pattern of development and farmland loss is taking place in Santa Clara County. For two centuries, Santa Clara Valley's rich, alluvial soil and abundant, well-managed water supply has produced fruits, vegetables, and grains to feed a growing population. However, the rapid urbanization of the valley after World War II has led to a massive loss of agricultural land. Between 1945 and 1955, the County lost about 23% (or 22,944 acres) of the 100,770 acres that were in fruit and nut orchards at that time.[2]

As the county's land values have risen steadily higher, thousands of acres of farmland have been lost to development, and thousands more are at risk of being developed in the near future. Over the past 35 years, urban development has been responsible for 42 percent of this loss, while rural development, particularly around Morgan Hill and San Martin, accounts for the other 58 percent. Despite the strong role the Santa Clara County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) has played in curbing urban sprawl, Santa Clara County has lost more farmland than any other Bay Area county over the last 35 years. The agricultural area from south San Jose to south of Gilroy, where another 15,285 acres are at risk, continues to be one of the region's most vulnerable.[3]

In addition to development pressure and rising land prices, there is another critical component that factors into the future of agriculture in Santa Clara County: property size. Approximately 51% of our remaining farmland is distributed among properties that are 40 acres or less in size and 52% of farmland parcels are 10 acres or less. A parcel of this size may not be suitable for an agricultural business model that focuses on selling a large volume of one or two crops to national or international markets. But these smaller parcels are well suited for small- or mid-sized farm businesses that primarily sell smaller quantities of diverse crops to regional markets. They can also work well as an entry point for new farmers, who are looking to gain experience and grow their operations incrementally over time. However, small agricultural parcels are at particular risk for conversion to other land uses because their prices are based on their value for development. As a result, farmland in Santa Clara County is especially vulnerable as the smaller parcel sizes common here exacerbate the trend toward farmland loss already taking place nationwide.



Approximately 51% of our remaining farmland is distributed among properties that are 40 acres or less in size and 52% of farmland parcels are 10 acres or less.

photo: Spade & Plow

PUBLIC VALUE OF SMALL FARMS

While individual farmers bear the costs and risks of running an agricultural operation, well-managed farmland provides public benefits that are widely distributed in the surrounding areas.[4] Not only do farms contribute to the food supply and local economy, they also provide open space, opportunities for education, and many ecological services—such as flood control, groundwater recharge, pollinator habitat, fire hazard mitigation, and carbon sequestration.[5] When farmland is converted to non-farm uses, sold to investors with plans for future development, or priced too high for farmers to purchase or rent, agriculture and its associated benefits suffer. While agricultural benefits are significant, they are largely indirect and often go unnoticed by county residents. The fate of our remaining farmland concerns all county residents because of farming's contribution to the health of Santa Clara County's people, communities, economy, and environment.[6]

RESILIENT URBAN FOOD SUPPLY

Fruits and vegetables grown in Santa Clara County reach local, national, and international markets. With fertile soils and a temperate climate, our farmers are able to grow a diverse set of crops year-round. Historically, cities have located near high quality farmland to ensure their supply of perishable fruit and vegetables. Even as cities have become more enmeshed in global supply chains, cultivating a diverse local food economy and maintaining food supply connections between cities and the surrounding regions remain important strategies for building resilient urban food systems that can withstand and recover from natural and man-made disasters.[7]

CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION

Farmland preservation is part of a comprehensive strategy to mitigate the effects of climate change. UC Davis researchers found that irrigated cropland produces 70 times less greenhouse gas emissions than urban land of an equivalent size.[10] In addition, climate-smart agricultural practices, such as newly appreciated soil management practices and improved irrigation efficiency, increase carbon sequestration and reduce emissions of greenhouse gases.

LOCAL FOOD ECONOMY

Agriculture plays an important role in supporting a robust local economy, in both urban and rural parts of the county. Small farms strengthen and diversify the local economy through food-related entrepreneurial and employment opportunities. In 2017, Santa Clara County produced crops worth more than $316.5 million. However, the total economic activity associated with agriculture is much greater. According to the Agricultural Commissioner's 2014 economic analysis, agriculture contributes 8,100 jobs and $830 million to the county's economy.[8] San Jose's food-related businesses alone employ nearly 42,000 people and earn $2.8 billion in revenue each year.[9]

ECOLOGICAL SERVICES

In addition to helping to minimize the effects of climate change, well-managed farms provide valuable ecological services which contribute to our region's health, safety, quality of life, and economy. Some of the benefits derived from farming include clean air, groundwater recharge, and the mitigation of extreme weather events, e.g. flooding. The Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority's 2014 economic assessment of the county's natural areas and working landscapes estimated that the value of the services these lands provide to the people of Santa Clara County is between $1.6 and $3.9 billion annually.[11]

photos: Spade & Plow

FOOD ACCESS AND HEALTH

Small farms, when paired with local vendors, can improve health by increasing access to healthy foods, encouraging fruit and vegetable consumption, and promoting food and health literacy.

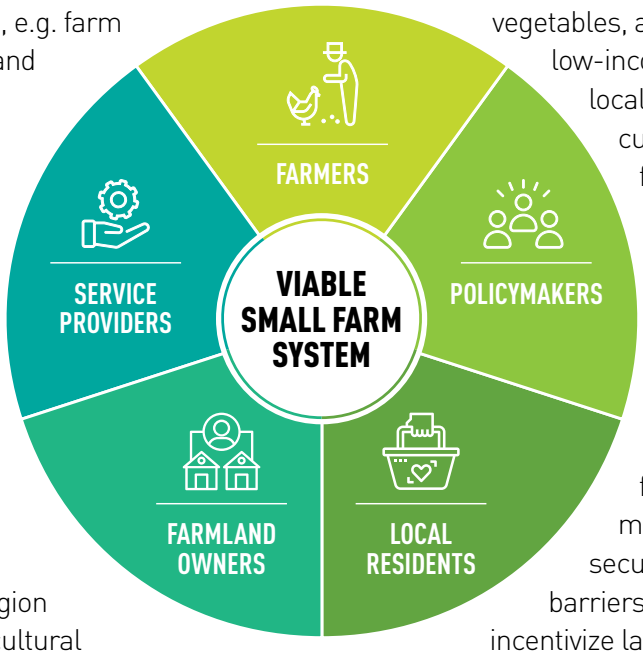
SENSE OF PLACE

The presence of small farms also provides opportunities for people to connect with the origins of their food, promoting the sharing of cultural and intergenerational knowledge of farming. Small urban and peri-urban farms are valuable educational locations for children to learn about agricultural life and food production.

BUILDING A VIABLE FARM SYSTEM IN THE SANTA CLARA VALLEY

As Santa Clara County grapples with farmland preservation, it is important to recognize that agricultural landscapes that are ecologically rich and culturally meaningful cannot exist without farming and ranching. To preserve the productive farmland in and around our cities, we must prioritize and plan for farming livelihoods.[12]

Supporting viable farm systems is a multi-dimensional process that involves social, economic, and political systems. For instance, having enough farmers in a given area to form a farm community is important for the social and economic viability of farms. This "critical mass" of farms provides farmers with the opportunity to share labor and equipment; and together, farmers can generate enough demand to maintain agricultural support services, e.g. farm supply businesses. As farmland becomes more fragmented, the farm-urban interface expands, which can make farming more difficult and costly, cutting into farmers' bottom line.[13] In the realm of policy, zoning and planning decisions can be used to offer farmers some long-term land use stability and create buffers between urban and agricultural uses. Because farms contribute to the overall well-being of a region by providing food as well as cultural and ecological services, it is imperative that farm viability be part of the conversation as food system stakeholders and the general public envision Santa Clara County's future.



Many stakeholders have a role in improving access to farmland and encouraging a vibrant local farm community. They include established and prospective farmers, farmland landowners, organizations that provide agricultural support services, consumers (from individuals to institutions), and communities and policymakers. Because farming connects to so many issues, it can engage residents and potential partners with wide-ranging interests, including food security, conservation or environmental stewardship, food and economic system development, sense of place, and community character. Interested consumers can direct more of their purchasing power toward regionally-grown fruits and vegetables, and programs that help low-income consumers purchase local produce can increase the customer base for small farms while expanding healthy food access. Farm service providers can offer programs to assist farmers, landowners, and policymakers. Supportive community members and civic leaders can advocate for public policies and funding mechanisms that promote secure land tenure, remove barriers to farm improvements, and incentivize land stewardship.[14]

In this report, we identify strategies for stakeholders in the county who want to preserve both farmland and farming, concentrating on issues and recommendations that can be addressed at the local level. For the most part, state, national, and international factors affecting farm viability are outside the scope of this report. Because our focus is on cropland on the floor of the Santa Clara Valley, the county's ranchers and rangelands also fall outside the report's scope.

FIGURE 1: KEY STAKEHOLDERS IN A VIABLE SMALL FARM SYSTEM. ADAPTED FROM RUHF (2013)

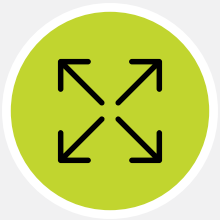
After synthesizing some of the challenges that Santa Clara County farmers face, especially small or beginning farmers, this report describes three areas that can make Santa Clara County more hospitable to farms, and farming here more viable:

INCREASE

Increase farmers' access to affordable land with secure tenure.

DEVELOP

Develop a supportive environment for farming that provides the systems, resources and information farmers need to thrive and educates citizens about the value of local small farms.



EXPAND

Expand and diversify regional markets for fresh produce.

In each section, we highlight examples of successful tools and strategies for achieving these goals. Examples of small-scale agriculture are featured throughout to help policymakers, farmers, and community members envision a future for Santa Clara County that includes similar types of farms as part of a robust agricultural economy. The report ends with specific recommendations on how to apply these models in Santa Clara County. While our focus is on the viability of small farms, many of the strategies described here would benefit all farms, regardless of size.

Despite the many risks and challenges, there are people eager to begin farming as well as many small farmers already succeeding in Santa Clara County, the Bay Area, and beyond. Each farmer has a different story. In the process of writing this report, we talked to nine small-scale farm operators to learn about their experiences. Profiles of their farms are interspersed throughout the report to illustrate the diversity of small farms, demonstrating how small-scale farmers have built viable businesses despite many challenges. Finally, these farm stories point to tools, organizations, and strategies that are already helping small-scale farm operators succeed and that should be considered in Santa Clara County to make farming a more economically viable pursuit.

photo: Spade & Plow

> **“Finding and securing land and not having long-term leases has been our biggest setback.”**

- FARM SURVEY RESPONDENT

CHAPTER 2:
LAY OF THE LAND

This chapter describes the current state of farmland and small-scale farm operations in the County as well as the challenges that farmers face in maintaining their operations and that aspiring farmers face in setting up new farm businesses. Subsequent chapters explore possible solutions to some of the larger challenges, drawing on successful models for **1) increasing farmland access; 2) developing a supportive environment for farming; and 3) expanding and diversifying regional marketing opportunities.**

INCREASE

DEVELOP

EXPAND

FARMLAND TRENDS

Today Santa Clara County contains more than 46,000 acres of farmland and more than 800 farms. The Santa Clara Valley Agricultural Resources Area (or ARA), which extends from San Jose's southern edge to the border with San Benito County, is home to the vast majority of the county's remaining farmland. As defined in the Santa Clara Valley Agricultural Plan, the ARA contains 44,462 acres of prime or important farmland soils. Although most of the county's farmland is south of San Jose, small parcels of agricultural land remain in and around the county's northern urban areas. On the periphery of cities in the northern part of the county vineyards are the most common type of small farm.[1]

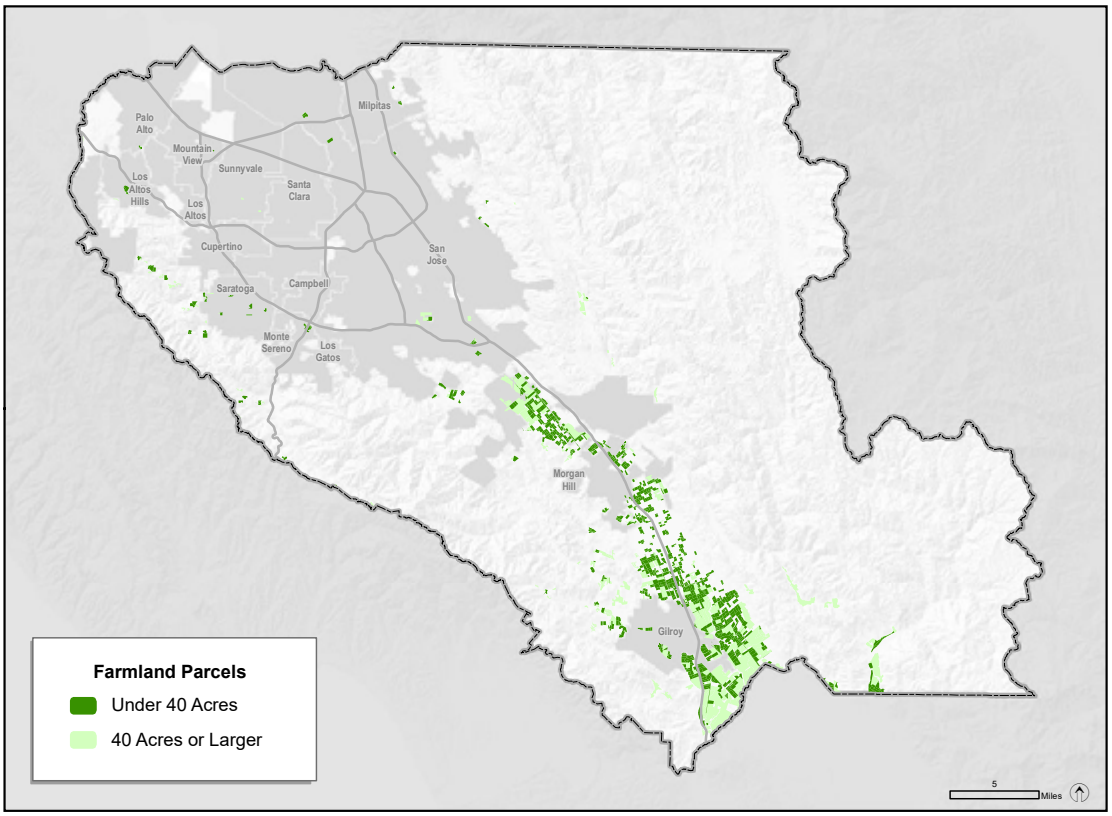
WHAT ARE URBAN AGRICULTURE INCENTIVE ZONES?

While much of this report is focused on small farms on the peri-urban edge, urban agriculture accounts for more than 250 acres of small farms, orchards, and community gardens within Santa Clara County's 15 cities. With the exception of Jacobs Farm at Martial Cottle Park and Emma Prusch Farm Park in San Jose, most urban agriculture sites are 10 acres or less. An additional 366 acres are potentially available for farming if all Urban Agriculture Incentive Zone (UAIZ) eligible parcels in San Jose and adjacent unincorporated areas are taken into consideration. Vacant public land could also be used to further expand the agricultural footprint within Silicon Valley's urban core.

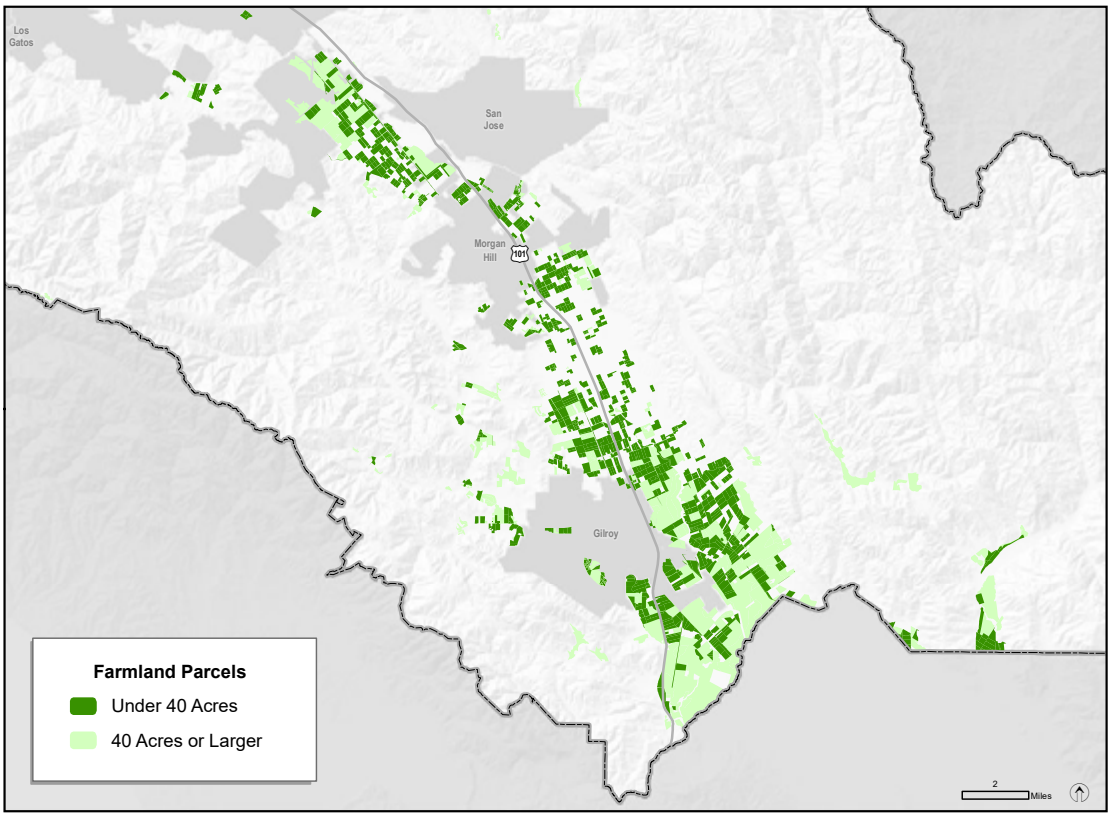
In 2014, the California State legislature passed Assembly BIll 551 (AB 551), which created a framework for cities and counties to implement Urban Agriculture Incentive Zones (UAIZs) that facilitate land access for urban farming and gardening. Within UAIZs, owners of undeveloped lots receive a tax benefit if they allow urban agriculture--such as community gardens, greenhouses, and permaculture sites--on their vacant properties for a minimum of five years.

Locally, the City of San Jose and the County of Santa Clara have adopted UAIZs and outlined implementing procedures. To be eligible, properties must not have any buildings or structures onsite that do not support urban agriculture (e.g., residential dwellings), and be from 0.1 to 3.0 acres in size in unincorporated areas or 0.1 to 1.0 acres in the City of San Jose. By incentivizing the transformation of vacant and undeveloped urban land into agricultural spaces, AB 551 has the potential to increase the amount of land in northern Santa Clara County that is available for agricultural uses.

As of Spring 2019, there are two projects operating under a UAIZ in the City of San Jose. One of these is the non-profit organization Valley Verde that utilizes 11,000 square feet on two adjacent properties in San Jose to grow culturally-specific seedlings, host workshops, and provide a garden bed building space for their home garden program. This is still a relatively new mechanism to bring agriculture into cities. Better understanding of what attracts landowners and project creators to take advantage of this tax incentive could help increase participation in the program.



DISTRIBUTION OF FARMLAND PARCELS IN SANTA CLARA COUNTY:
Most of the farmland in the county is concentrated to the South



FARMLAND PARCELS ABOVE AND BELOW 40 ACRES IN SIZE:
Small parcels make up the majority of farmland in the County, especially between the cities of Morgan Hill and Gilroy

WHY SO MANY PARCELS OF 10 ACRES OR LESS?

1900s

Over 51% of farmland parcels in Santa Clara County are 10 acres or less. But how did this situation come about? It began in the late 1800s and early 1900s when large landowners in the southern portion of the county began to subdivide their land into smaller plots. Land was divided using subdivision maps, known as Ranch Maps, that created smaller-sized lots, many of which were 10 acres.

1940s-70s

Zoning further exacerbated the issue of small lot sizes. In the 1940s and 1950s, zoning districts, which no longer exist today, allowed minimum lot sizes of 1 acre or 2.5 acres in agricultural areas in the southern end of the county. By the 1960s and 1970s, some parcels had overlapping zoning districts, which permitted substantial subdivision of parcels into the minimum lot sizes. These lots could be created without a parcel map and sold or transferred by deed without assurance that it could be accessed or improved for residential use. This exemption resulted in the majority of lots less than 20 acres, also known as substandard lots, that exist today.

1969-1980

Changes to the County's subdivision regulations in June 1969 began to address the situation. The adoption of the County's first comprehensive general plan in 1980 was another big step. The general plan established minimum lot size and density policies for rural lands (i.e., those outside a city's designated area for urban development).

1984

Then in 1984, the County adopted zoning districts to implement general plan designations and policies for agriculture, ranchlands, hillsides, and rural residential areas. This led to the rezoning of most farmland in the south valley to either 20-acre minimum parcel sizes such as in Morgan Hill's Southeast Quadrant, or 40-acre minimum parcel sizes as in Gilroy's Agricultural Preserve and San Jose's mid-Coyote Valley.

Present

Nonetheless, substandard lots remain in existence. A property owner with records proving the existence of substandard lots smaller than the permitted minimum of 20 or 40 acres may be able to obtain a building permit to develop these lots. Thus, 20-and-40 acre minimum agricultural zoning requirements can be overridden to develop the land, usually with a single-family residence, which contributes to the loss of agricultural land and the fragmentation of agricultural areas.

Within Santa Clara County, small-sized parcels of farmland are common. In the ARA, 53% of of farmland parcels are 10 acres or less. These smaller parcels, often adjacent to the urban edge, are at high risk of development given their proximity to Silicon Valley. According to the American Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers, the farmland in Santa Clara County most at risk for speculation consists of parcels along the urban edge that are 40 acres or less.[2] **Because these parcels are sought after by investors for rural residential homes, they can command ten times the price per acre than larger parcels that are considered commercial agricultural land.**

To illustrate this dynamic in the real estate market, consider two adjacent farm properties in Santa Clara County that sold recently. Although the two parcels have similar potential for development, the smaller parcel is valued at 27 times more per acre than the larger parcel, or the difference between $600,000/acre and $22,000/acre. The smaller of the two parcels, a 3.5-acre undeveloped agricultural property in the north of Santa Clara Valley, sold for two million dollars, or nearly $600,000/acre. The value of this property was based almost entirely on the potential to construct one single-family home on the site. An adjacent 113-acre farm of equal or higher quality soil and water access and with greater development potential (i.e., the potential to construct two single-family residences) sold for three and a half million dollars or $31,000/acre. A possible agricultural conservation easement (ACE) restricting the 113-acre property to the same development potential as the 3.5-acre property (that is, the ability to construct just one single-family home) would bring the value down to an estimated $22,000/acre.[3]

photo: Spade & Plow

In the ARA, a little under half of the remaining agricultural land (20,999 acres) is fallow. Because many fallow parcels are not made available for farmers to lease, it is presumed that they have been purchased for their future development potential rather than for agriculture. Around the City of Morgan Hill, nearly all small agricultural parcels are owned by absentee landowners.[4]

Despite the challenges to keeping small parcels in agricultural production, close to half (47%) of existing farms in Santa Clara County are one to nine acres in size. Another 31% of farms are 10 to 49 acres. In total, 78% of the county's farms are less than 50 acres.[5] Furthermore, a number of farmers in the region have established viable business on small acreages by growing high-value crops like mushrooms, wine grapes, Asian vegetables, and nursery plants.[6]

CHALLENGES TO AGRICULTURAL VIABILITY AND FARMLAND PRESERVATION

Land access & tenure

One of the most significant challenges facing farmers in Santa Clara County is access to farmland, and relatedly, the security of land tenure when properties are leased. This is the biggest obstacle for those looking to start a farm business in the county, and it is an ongoing challenge for current growers as well. In most regions, and especially around growing metropolitan areas, land is worth more for development than agriculture. Higher prices make it attractive for current agricultural property owners to sell their land to buyers who want to develop it, especially if heirs are not interested in taking over the farm operation. In this real estate environment, a beginning or small farmer is unlikely to be able to compete with investors or developers when a small farm parcel goes on the market. Other property owners might lease their land for cultivation, but issue only one-year lease agreements, so that they can sell or develop it themselves at a moment's notice. As a result, it is difficult for farmers to gain access to new parcels of farmland and retain management of properties under lease. These trends make it particularly challenging for immigrant and first-generation farmers to get a foothold.

Access to land is the greatest barrier to the success of new entry farmers nationwide, but this problem is exacerbated in California, where the cost of cropland is roughly three times higher than the national average.[7] A study commissioned by the City of Morgan Hill found that in 2011 larger acreages slated for agricultural use sold for $30,000-$50,000 per acre, while smaller parcels (<40 acres) sold for $150,000-$200,000 per acre.[8] Often a single residence is constructed on five to forty acre plots, which ultimately takes land out of commercial production. These types of developments are frequently referred to as rural ranchettes.[9] One reason for the large difference in land prices between agriculture and other land uses is that many of the ecosystem services that farmland provides—groundwater recharge, flood control, climate change mitigation, wildlife habitat—are not reflected in its market price. It is noteworthy that these benefits are often what land trusts emphasize when they are purchasing an agricultural conservation easement.[10]

With little agricultural land available and affordable for purchase, farmers often turn to leasing. Currently in Santa Clara County, 23% of farm operations lease all or some of their land. However, the land managed by these farms accounts for about 60% of all harvested cropland in the county.[11] At present, the cost of leasing land in Santa Clara County is typically $300-$500 per acre per year, and can go as high as $1,000 for farmland with excellent soil, reliable water, and other desirable features. While leasing provides access to land at a lower price than purchasing, it presents a different set of challenges to a farm's long-term success.

“Not only access to land, but access to infrastructure is a big issue. Sheds, dry storage, cold storage, wash stations, road stabilization in winter, greenhouses, compost stalls. Whether you are 1 acre or 10 acres, these infrastructures are a huge chunk of capital that does not make its money back. On leased land with 1-3 year leases, we can’t afford to keep reinvesting in these structures from property to property.”

~ FARM SURVEY RESPONDENT

Short-term lease contracts can hinder long-term business planning and create a disincentive for investing in infrastructure development or long-term improvements to the property and its soils. This is because there is no guarantee farmers will farm a leased parcel long enough to see a return on their investment. For example, growers farming land on short-term leases are often deemed ineligible for conservation grants which require assurances that funded improvements will be maintained over a certain period. Investments that are beneficial for the long-term health of a farming operation like farm buildings, perennial plantings, and organic certification, are often not implemented on short-term leases due to uncertainty and a negative return on investment.[12] Ultimately, short-term leases do not provide long-term stability and put farmers at risk of losing land, crops, and infrastructure when the lease expires.

During the writing of this report, two farm operations dependent upon short-term leases were compromised due to impending land use changes. One operation is a new and growing diversified vegetable farm that, despite seeking additional acreage to expand their business, has been forced into a smaller footprint because the property-owner renewed a two-year lease only on the condition of forfeiting over a third of the previously farmed area for the property owner’s storage needs. The other operation is a second-generation farm that has been in business for nearly 50 years. This farm has had a running year-to-year lease on the parcel central to business for over 30 years, but suddenly found itself unable to renew the lease because the property owner is selling multiple underlying lots for development into rural single-family homes.

The new farmer pipeline problem

Protecting farmland is necessary but not sufficient to maintain a regional agricultural economy. Farmland does not produce food and other benefits without a farmer to actively manage and cultivate the land. Currently, 68% of our county's farmers are over 55—with an average age of 60—which means many agricultural properties and businesses are likely to change hands in the next 20 years as farmers retire. Without intervention, few younger farmers will be in a position to replace those that retire. Only 6% of the county's current farmers are under 35, and another 7% are age 35 to 44. In Santa Clara County, only one-fourth of farmers are considered beginning farmers, defined as someone who has operated a farm for less than 10 years.[13]

Rising prices and limited access to land are primary reasons that the pipeline of skilled new entry farmers is not in place for a successful transition of so many farm operations. Additionally, with fewer new farms in the county there are also fewer opportunities for aspiring farmers to gain experience in the county.[14] For those who have built up experience and are looking to launch their own farm enterprise, there is often no clear pathway to land access. Within 100 miles of Santa Clara County, there are multiple farmer training organizations, but graduates of these programs frequently leave the area, relocating to places with more opportunities for additional training and more affordable land and housing. In the absence of a strong new farmer pipeline and interventions aimed at aiding the next generation of farmers, Santa Clara County farmland is more likely to be lost to development and the region's agricultural economy is less likely to survive.

Infrastructure

Infrastructure is an essential part of viable farm operations, but farmers' ability to invest in necessary infrastructure is hampered when they do not own the land or do not have a long-term lease. Furthermore, regional infrastructure like aggregators and distributors, community slaughterhouses, cooling and packing facilities, and processors like oil presses or flour mills are necessary for many small-scale farmers whose crops require processing or otherwise depend upon intermediaries.

Labor

Labor is an issue for farms of all sizes.[15] In Santa Clara County, it is difficult for farmers to find and retain skilled labor. The lack of affordable housing in the county combined with low wages earned by fieldworkers (an average of $26,240) severely impact the recruitment and retention of agricultural workers.[16]

Agricultural employee housing

It can be difficult to find affordable housing for both agricultural employees and farm business owners.[17] In a Santa Clara University survey of farmers in neighboring counties, 88% of respondents reported that affordable housing for themselves or their employees was a moderate to serious challenge.[18] The issue is not only the cost of housing, but also the number of housing units available, particularly in the ARA. In 2018, the Santa Clara County Planning Department surveyed farm industry representatives about the need for additional farmworker housing units. Survey respondents identified the need to create approximately 1,400 additional seasonal housing units and 700 long-term housing units to meet existing agricultural worker housing demand.[19]

photos: Spade & Plow

Water and climate change

In a recent survey of farmers in neighboring counties, 60% of respondents identified water access and/or climate change as one of the greatest barriers to long-term farm viability.[20] Locally, farmers have expressed concern about the cost of water and its availability, particularly because of drought and the potential loss of Valley Water's Open Space Credit. Valley Water's Open Space Credit policy provides an agricultural water rate to farmers in recognition of the aquifer recharge value farmers provide. Locally, a reduction in winter chill hours (dormancy hours below 45°F required for successful fruit bud development) is having a significant negative impact on tree fruit production, cherries in particular due to their dependence on chill hours for production. Other emerging issues associated with increasing climate variability include wildfires and smoke, greater seasonal variability, and highly disruptive extreme weather conditions.[21]

Access to markets

Lack of access to markets for small-scale growers is another frequently mentioned barrier to farm viability. In the survey of farmers in the region, one-fifth of respondents identified market access as one of their top barriers. Without access to markets, farmers are unable to fully benefit from the strong regional demand for locally-grown produce. Greater market access could help farmers to diversify their revenue streams and make them more resilient to price fluctuations in larger markets.[22]

Regulations

Regulations offer important protections for our health, safety, and environment, yet understanding the requirements of and complying with regulatory requirements tend to be time-consuming and expensive. The number of permits and agencies that can be involved in a single project can be overwhelming. The regulatory process is particularly burdensome for small and socially-disadvantaged farmers that have fewer resources, greater language barriers, and less technical expertise needed to comply with regulatory requirements. Noncompliance can often lead to fines that can be financially crippling for farmers.[23]

Relationship with neighbors

Despite the existence of Right-to-Farm ordinance provisions at state, county, and city levels, farming alongside a growing population of non-farming neighbors presents challenges for farmers. Both urban and rural farms face trespassing, illegal dumping, and theft. Increased traffic on rural roads can impair farmers' ability to operate tractors and move heavy farm equipment. Community acceptance and understanding of nearby farming operations is often lacking, especially for more visible practices like orchard spraying.

"We have pilferage. We have trespassing. We have people complaining."

- SANTA CLARA COUNTY FARMER

SPADE & PLOW

SIZE:

26 acres

YEARS IN BUSINESS:

4

PRODUCTS:

Diverse vegetable crops, including artichokes, swiss chard, tomatoes, and garlic.

MARKETS:

CSA, farmers' markets, restaurants, wholesaler

COUNTY:

Santa Clara

Spade & Plow, a small farm operating out of San Martin, is a family run business with a focus on serving Santa Clara County. It was started in 2015 by three members of the Thorp family: brothers, Sam and Nick, and their father, Mike. Each of the founders brought experience with a different aspect of agriculture to Spade & Plow. Mike Thorp's expertise is in organic production. Having become a certified organic farmer in the early 1980s, Mike spent most of his career working for organic companies such as Cal-Organic and Earthbound Farms. Sam had prior experience in wholesale and distribution, while Nick specializes in equipment design and construction. The Thorps' different skill sets and their ability to work together has been one of Spade & Plow's greatest assets.

Although they grew up farming in Monterey County, the Thorps "really wanted to be in Santa Clara County" because, as Sam says, "we saw an underserved need for organic and local produce" here. Yet finding land in Santa Clara County was harder than they anticipated and has remained Spade & Plow's biggest challenge. In 2015, they were able to rent a 10-acre plot just off the side of Highway 101 in San Martin. They added another 27 acres in 2017. Since then, their landlord has taken back 17 acres from the second leased field, reducing their acreage by nearly 50%. Two-year lease terms also create considerable uncertainty for this growing business and make it too risky for Spade & Plow to invest in certain types of farm technology, infrastructure and some crops, such as fruit trees, berries, and perennial flowers. In a few more years, they hope to be in a position to purchase farmland of their own within the county.

“CREATING A STRONG INDUSTRY HERE AROUND AG WOULD CREATE MORE INFRASTRUCTURE, AND CREATE MORE INTEREST, AND HELP BRING OUR COSTS DOWN AND OUR SALES UP.” ~SAM THORP

Spade & Plow runs a popular Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program that delivers boxes of fresh, certified-organic produce to about 220 customers. The Thorps were attracted to the CSA model because of the opportunities it provides for personal interactions with their customers and to grow a wider variety of crops. Their CSA boxes are highly customizable: customers can select different share sizes, different delivery schedules, and they can pick from a variety of seasonal, organic fruits and vegetables. Spade & Plow has also developed partnerships with local businesses like Pasture Chick Ranch in Hollister and Chromatic Coffee in San Jose, which enable customers to receive other local products in their CSA box. Having diverse market outlets is important to Spade & Plow, which also sells its products at farmers' markets in Santa Clara, San Mateo, and Santa Cruz counties, to restaurants, and to a local distributor.

Although the road to building an environmentally and financially sustainable small-scale farm in Santa Clara County is by no means an easy one, farms like Spade & Plow show that it is possible. Yet despite their successes, there have been challenges along the way. In addition to the struggle to find a place to farm, it was also challenging to get into farmers' markets. The Thorps knew that to gain entry to highly competitive local farmers' markets they would need to offer something that set them apart from other vendors. Initially, they were given access to one farmers' market to sell a unique variety of artichokes. When they expanded their produce offerings, the farmers' market manager pushed back until Spade & Plow explained that they were selling produce that had been grown in Santa Clara County. In this case, being a Santa Clara County farmer did not help them gain access to the market, but did enable Spade & Plow to sell their full range of produce there.

When asked their advice for new farmers, Sam emphasized the importance of connecting with other farmers. Good relationships with other farmers help create access to resources, such as land, equipment, and information. But they also see a strong community of farmers as integral to the future of farming in Santa Clara County. As Sam says, “creating a strong industry here around ag would create more infrastructure, and create more interest, and help bring our costs down and our sales up.” Spade & Plow also prioritizes building community. One of the ways that Spade & Plow has engaged the broader community is through their use of social media. Their active social media presence has connected them to new customers and highlighted the importance of fresh, locally grown food from Santa Clara County. Partnering with chefs is another way Spade & Plow works to create a community that is excited about regionally-grown food. Ultimately, Spade & Plow sees a well-informed and engaged community as essential for increasing the viability of Santa Clara County farms as a whole. Sam expects that if customers were more aware of the importance of having agriculture in the community--the agricultural benefits that go beyond food to include economic diversity, ecosystem services and climate change mitigation--they would be more likely to spend their money on local food and vote for policies that support small farms.

FRANTOIO GROVE

SIZE:

30 acres

YEARS IN BUSINESS:

14

PRODUCTS:

Olive oil

MARKETS:

Retail stores, online

COUNTY:

Santa Clara

When Jeff Martin, the owner-operator of Frantoio Grove, first purchased his property in San Martin, he was envisioning houses, not olive trees.

Zoned rural residential—a zoning designation which requires a 5-acre minimum lot size—the 97-acre property can accommodate 19 houses. But as Jeff explains, 5-acre zoning is an awkward size, leaving homeowners with 4 acres to maintain perpetually. Instead, he opted to apply for a zoning permit that allows for a denser development, with smaller lot sizes, in exchange for maintaining part of the property as a permanent open space. Out of this process, 30-acre Frantoio Grove was born.

When deciding what to grow on the 30 acres destined to be open space, Jeff knew he wanted a product that would stand out in the marketplace. His first thought was to plant grapes, but he quickly realized that there was too much competition in the grape industry, given the popularity of vineyards in California. California is home to only about 40 olive mills, so Jeff selected this niche product instead. Even then, he wanted to distinguish his product, leading him to plant Frantoio olives, a Tuscan variety, rather than the more common Spanish varieties that make up the majority of olives grown in California. From there he threw himself into learning everything he could about his new crop.

WHEN DECIDING WHAT TO GROW ON THE 30 ACRES DESTINED TO BE OPEN SPACE, JEFF KNEW HE WANTED A PRODUCT THAT WOULD STAND OUT IN THE MARKETPLACE.

Like other orchard crops, olives take time to bear fruit and mature. Jeff planted his olive trees in 2005, but it wasn't until 2010 that he pressed his first 12 tons of olives. By 2013, his harvest had grown to 25 tons, and it reached 100 tons in 2017. Unlike the more common Spanish Arbequina olive variety, which is harvested mechanically, the Frantoio variety is hand-harvested. As a result, Frantoio Grove's labor costs are much higher than many other commercial olive oil producers in California. Jeff estimates that it costs him $600 per ton to harvest, compared to $20 per ton for large-scale mechanically-harvested groves, a difference that is carried over into the cost of the finished product. Consequently, consumer education is part of making single-variety extra virgin olive oil, like Frantoio Grove's, economically viable. Customers need to appreciate the difference in taste if they are going to buy a more expensive bottle of olive oil.

Jeff's goal was to make a distinctive product, and Frantoio Grove olive oil has won awards at national and international competitions. Gradually, he has purchased his own milling and bottling equipment, enabling him to process all his fruit on site the same day that it is harvested. He primarily sells to retail stores and his olive oil has also been sold under San Francisco-based Bi-Rite Market's private label.

It has taken time for the olive orchard to mature and for Frantoio Grove's reputation and markets to develop. In fact, 2018 was the first year that Frantoio Grove was profitable. Part of the reason that Jeff could justify taking a loss for the business's first 13 years is that much of the value of the land remains in the development potential of the other 67 acres. Nevertheless, Jeff believes that Frantoio Grove has demonstrated it can be an economically viable business and it is on the path to being self-sustaining.

SHUN-FAT NURSERY

SIZE:

22 acres

YEARS IN BUSINESS:

~20

PRODUCTS:

Snow pea tips, bok choy, Chinese mustard, celtuce, edible chrysanthemums

MARKETS:

Restaurants, wholesale

COUNTY:

Santa Clara

Jenny Li's family has been growing vegetables in Santa Clara County for more than 20 years. They are one of roughly 80 Asian-American-owned farming operations that grow Asian vegetables and herbs here, part of a farming tradition that stretches back to the early 20th century.

The Li family specializes in snow pea tips, a high-value, specialty crop. This production system involves multiple plantings over the year, interspersed with rotations of bok choy, Chinese mustard, and other Asian leafy vegetable crops. Their primary sales are to wholesalers and restaurants in the South Bay, East Bay, and San Francisco. These marketing channels strike a balance between the smaller volume, higher price sales to restaurants and larger volume, lower price sales to wholesalers. Focusing on these specialty Asian crops, the Li's farm business has expanded steadily over the years, and the size of the land they farm has grown from 5 acres initially to a peak of 26 acres.

“LOCALS PREFER LOCALLY GROWN PRODUCTS. THAT’S REALLY HELPED US FLOURISH.” ~JENNY LI

On-site farm worker housing is a high priority for the Lis and other Chinese farmers. Much of the cultivation and harvesting of Asian vegetables is done by hand by a population of farm workers who often do not drive. Yet, like most other Chinese farmers, the Li family leases their land and short-term leases often make it difficult to justify the financial investment in farm infrastructure, such as irrigation systems, greenhouse structures, and farmworker housing, unless it can be easily moved to another site when the lease is up. Language can also be a barrier to accessing external resources and other sources of farm support.

The Chinese community in the Bay Area has been an important source of support for the Li family and other Chinese farmers. Community connections have helped farmers find land to lease and have helped them to build relationships with consumers. As Jenny explains, “locals prefer locally grown products. That’s really helped us flourish.” The Bay Area Chrysanthemum Growers Association (BACGA), which was founded in 1956, has also been an asset for Chinese farmers. The BACGA runs a buyers cooperative, where the Lis and other Asian farmers with language barriers can purchase fertilizers, seed, greenhouse plastic, pesticides, and other supplies. It has also been an advocate on agricultural issues for the Chinese farmers.

THE CHINESE COMMUNITY IN THE BAY AREA HAS BEEN AN IMPORTANT SOURCE OF SUPPORT FOR THE LI FAMILY AND OTHER CHINESE FARMERS.


3

One of the major barriers to preserving farmland in Santa Clara County is raising enough money for this purpose, especially given high land values.

INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO PRESERVING FARMLAND AND SUPPORTING FARMERS

Given the obstacles to land access and secure land tenure facing new entry and existing farmers, maintaining the benefits that viable agricultural enterprises provide will require investment in farmland preservation and additional support for food and farm entrepreneurs. By providing greater support and additional resources, local government, land trusts, farm support organizations, and county residents can play a significant role in conserving farmland and assisting farmers. This chapter of the report begins with a description of the three land trusts that are already preserving agricultural lands in Santa Clara County. It then examines successful tools and practices that can serve as models for expanding land trusts' capacity to preserve farmland in Santa Clara County. The second half of the chapter examines a variety of models for effectively supporting farm operations.

PRESERVING FARMLAND IN SANTA CLARA COUNTY

Land trusts are entities that protect farmland as well natural resources by acquiring or helping other organizations to acquire land or conservation easements. A conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement that restricts certain uses and development rights on a property in perpetuity while fairly compensating landowners for the development rights on their property. Landowners can either donate or sell their development rights to advance conservation objectives.[24] An agricultural conservation easement is one designed specifically with accommodating agricultural operations in mind, rather than conserving wetlands or open space for recreation, for example.

The cost of a conservation easement is assessed by subtracting the value of the land without the possibility of development from the current market value of the land with its development potential intact. The average cost of an agricultural conservation easement in California is 50% of the market value, but in highly speculative land markets such as Santa Clara Valley, the cost can reach as high as 75-90% of the market value. If landowners donate the development rights, they can receive a tax break for the value of the agricultural conservation easement. After the agreement has been made, landowners retain the right to sell the property, but with a deed restriction limiting development and uses of the property only to that which is delineated in the easement. More recently, some land trusts have started to use affirmative agricultural easements, which requires the land to remain actively farmed as part of the legal agreement.[25]

Three organizations currently preserving farmland in Santa Clara County are the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority, a public land conservation agency, and two nonprofit land trusts, the Land Trust of Santa Clara Valley and Peninsula Open Space Trust.[26] All three are accredited by the Land Trust Alliance, assuring their work meets the best practices and standards for professional land conservation. To increase their ability to protect and steward open space and agricultural lands, the Open Space Authority, the Land Trust of Santa Clara Valley, and the Peninsula Open Space Trust work together with county and city governments and other conservation organizations.

SANTA CLARA VALLEY OPEN SPACE AUTHORITY

Created by an act of the state legislature in 1992, the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority (OSA) is a public agency with a mission to preserve, manage, and enhance natural lands. It operates across a 1,000 square mile area of Santa Clara County and includes the cities of Milpitas, Campbell, Santa Clara, San Jose, and Morgan Hill. The OSA has an annual revenue stream of $12 million from a parcel tax and a benefit assessment. In the 25 years since its formation, the OSA has conserved over 25,000 acres of open space for natural resources such as habitat, water, recreation, and agriculture. Recently, the OSA purchased 380 acres of agricultural land, which they lease to a local grower who actively farms it. Like the other land trusts operating in the Valley, the OSA is eager to expand its preservation of farmland on the Valley floor.

LAND TRUST OF SANTA CLARA VALLEY

The Land Trust of Santa Clara Valley (LTSCV) is a nonprofit land trust committed to protecting, promoting, and enhancing the natural habitats in Santa Clara Valley and surrounding areas. It was founded in 1998 to take ownership and maintain the 116-acre Tulare Hill Ecological Preserve, which is located on the northernmost end of Coyote Valley by the Calpine Metcalf Energy Center. The preserve is dedicated to the protection of two threatened species: the Bay Checkerspot Butterfly and the California Red Legged Frog. LTSCV currently manages approximately 1,600 acres of working lands and open space in Santa Clara County that they either own or have encumbered with a conservation easement. The LTSCV is funded by donations from individuals, foundations, and grants.

PENINSULA OPEN SPACE TRUST

Founded in 1977, Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) is a nonprofit land trust that protects open space on the Peninsula and in the South Bay. It is funded entirely through donations from private individuals, foundations and grants. Over the past 42 years, POST has protected more than 77,000 acres of open space, farmland, and parkland in San Mateo, Santa Clara, and Santa Cruz counties. Like the OSA, POST works with willing landowners and public agencies to protect land and connect people and nature. In 2016, POST launched a Farmland Futures Initiative with a campaign goal of raising $25 million to fund farmland protection and infrastructure improvements along the San Mateo County coast. To date, POST has reached almost 50% of its Farmland Futures Initiative fundraising goal.[27] Recently, POST has begun working with other conservation groups in Santa Clara County to protect open space, farmland, and wildlife habitat connectivity in Coyote Valley. In 2017, POST purchased the 63-acre Fisher's Bend property and is currently managing it in partnership with the OSA for a combination of agricultural, riparian, and other habitat benefits.

photos: Spade & Plow

CURRENT STATUS OF FARMLAND PRESERVATION IN SANTA CLARA COUNTY

In 2018, the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors adopted the *Santa Clara Valley Agricultural Plan* co-authored by the OSA and the County. The Plan serves as a regional framework for the preservation of threatened agricultural lands in southern Santa Clara County as well as a greenhouse gas mitigation strategy. However, the OSA's $12 million annual revenue stream is insufficient to conserve, via conservation easements, the more than 12,000 acres of farmland projected to be at-risk in the county. The County currently does not have a local funding source for agricultural conservation easement acquisition and farmland preservation. In the absence of local funding the only significant funding sources are state and federal grants, which are highly competitive, onerous to apply for, politically unreliable as a long-term strategy, and usually require identifying a funding match.

SUCCESSFUL TOOLS + PRACTICES FOR ACHIEVING CONSERVATION GOALS

Local funding critical to protecting farmland

Preserving farmland with conservation easements, particularly in high-priced real estate markets, requires significant amounts of capital. One of the major barriers to preserving farmland in Santa Clara County is raising enough money for this purpose, especially given high land values. Below are two successful examples of meeting the funding challenge. Developing a local funding source for farmland conservation in Santa Clara County has the potential to make a significant impact on the amount of farmland preserved.

Marin County's Measure A - Parks, Open Space, and Farmland Preservation 1/4 cent sales tax.
Marin Agricultural Land Trust (MALT), founded in 1980 to combat the conversion of farmland to development, has preserved 53,450 acres of agricultural land via conservation easements in partnership with 85 farming families.[28] Measure A, which Marin County voters passed in 2012, is an important source of funding for MALT. Twenty percent of this quarter cent local sales tax is dedicated to the Marin County Farmland Preservation Program. The Farmland Preservation Program provides matching funds for agricultural conservation easements, monitoring and enforcing the easements, and enhancing the agricultural and natural resource values on easement-protected properties. The remainder of the tax is used for parks and open space in the county. In FY 2017-18, MALT received a total of $6.49 million in Measure A monies (in the form of grants) for farmland preservation.[29]

While funding from Measure A alone cannot finance MALT's ambitious goal of protecting and maintaining 100,000 acres of farmland, it is a critical and reliable source of public funding which helps MALT leverage other grants and private donations. MALT successfully uses match-based donations to encourage public and private agencies to match donations made by private donors. This funding mechanism is especially popular with participating agencies, committed to leveraging limited conservation dollars.[30]

It is important to note that MALT's public outreach played a key role in building enough support to pass Measure A. MALT's effective approach to educating the public and policymakers about the importance of preserving agricultural land includes events, such as on-farm visits, as well as a volunteer program that informs and engages the public about the need for farmland preservation and for local, healthy food production.[31]


photos: Spade & Plow

Peconic Bay Region Community Preservation Fund 2% real estate transfer tax.

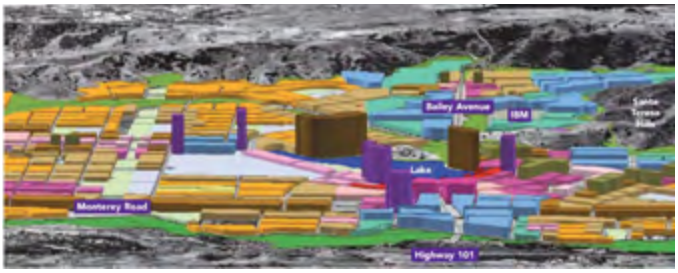
In 1998, voters in five towns on Long Island, New York passed a referendum for a 2% real estate transfer tax to establish the Peconic Bay Region Community Preservation Fund. Since its inception, the Fund has raised $1 billion dollars to preserve 10,000 acres of farmland, open space, and historic structures. The Peconic Land Trust played a key role in advocating for the original referendum and for its extension, ensuring a steady flow of funds for the preservation of farmland and open space.[32]

The Peconic Land Trust, one of the nation's first agriculturally focused land trusts, was incorporated in 1983. Similar to Santa Clara Valley, the Long Island farming region had been a hub of agricultural production for decades until threatened by development pressures from surrounding areas. Losing 50% (or 60,000 acres) of that county's farmland in production in less than 25 years spurred several farming families on the island to create the first program to purchase development rights from farmers to preserve agricultural land and local food production. Born from this program, the Peconic Land Trust has protected 12,000 acres to date. In total, the Peconic Land Trust and several other agencies have protected 25,000 out of the 40,000 acres of farmland remaining in production in Suffolk County.[33]

SPOTLIGHT ON : COYOTE VALLEY

Situated on the San Jose' urban edge, Coyote Valley is a 7,400 acre expanse of farmland, wetlands, creeks, and other natural lands cradled between the Santa Cruz Mountains and the Diablo Range. Currently designated for industrial campus and residential development, Coyote Valley remains largely undeveloped despite many attempts to urbanize it over the past 50 years. The most notable was the Coyote Valley Specific Plan in the mid-2000s which proposed a mini-city with 50,000 jobs and 25,000 homes, further exacerbating San Jose's historic pattern of costly sprawl.

The plan, however, was shelved, providing conservationists the opportunity to continue to strengthen their case for protecting this critical wildlife and natural landscape area. Furthermore, a recent concerted campaign for public support, a shift in the political landscape, and the need to address the impacts of climate change have opened the door to rethinking the future of Coyote Valley. In 2018, voters in San Jose passed a ballot measure to fund infrastructure improvements that included $50 million to purchase land in Coyote Valley to be used for natural flood protection and groundwater filtration.



RENDERING OF PORTION OF COYOTE VALLEY SPECIFIC PLAN


EXISTING COYOTE VALLEY LANDSCAPE

INNOVATIVE AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION EASEMENT ACQUISITION

Another critical tool in Peconic's farmland preservation toolbox is their innovative agricultural conservation easement acquisition model. Even after protecting farmland from development, Peconic discovered that other land uses continued to drive up the price of agricultural land. Wealthy individuals bought up and bundled protected properties into large estates, letting farmland lie fallow with no intention of farming it. Equestrian farms, nurseries, and vineyards also began to compete for protected land, further driving up prices. With all of these competing interests, the value of protected farmland in Suffolk County rose to $135,000-$350,000 per acre.[34] These protected farmland values are on par with those of unprotected small parcels in south Santa Clara County.[35] Problems regarding succession often exacerbated this issue. For example, if the owner of the protected land had multiple heirs, some interested in farming and others not, a portion or all of the farmland was sold in order to ensure all heirs received their share of inheritance. Given the higher buying power of those looking to create estate homes, horse farms, or vineyards, protected properties that were sold often ended up no longer in food production.[36]

To address this problem, Peconic created more robust easements that not only protected against estate homes, horse farms, and vineyards, but also guaranteed that the land would stay in food production to provide for the local food system. Peconic's more protective easement model now includes what is known as "affirmative" language requiring that the land remain in crop production. This affirmative easement couples future sales of the property with economic indices, establishes limits for the number of years that land can remain fallow, and limits resale to qualified farmers. In the case that the land remains fallow past the agreed upon limit, typically 2 years, Peconic reserves the right to lease the land out to someone who will put the land into food production. Peconic has also recently instituted another measure in their easements that requires landowners devote 80% of the protected land to food production. This requirement restricts the amount of land that can be devoted to non-food agricultural production, such as hemp.[37]

The restrictions that come with an affirmative easement significantly decrease the speculative land value, permitting the land trust to sell the land to farmers at a much lower price. In their effort to create this model, Peconic purchased land in the marketplace at a high per acre price (up to $300,000/acre), reselling it to farmers with the new easements in place for much lower prices (approximately $22,000/acre). These easements drastically reduce the amount of capital that a farmer must acquire to purchase the property and decrease the associated taxes during the lifetime of the property.[38]

Peconic created more robust easements that not only protected against estate homes, horse farms, and vineyards, but also guaranteed that the land would stay in food production to provide for the local food system.

SPOTLIGHT ON: BLUE HOUSE FARM

Ryan Casey, a graduate of UC Santa Cruz's Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems apprenticeship training program, first got his start in farming on four acres of POST-protected farmland in Pescadero in 2005. Since then, his operation has expanded steadily. In 2010, Ryan entered into a new lease on 50 acres of POST-protected farmland in Pescadero.[1] In 2016, POST awarded Ryan a long-term agricultural lease, with option to purchase, on 74 acres of farmland in San Gregorio. With this new, long-term lease, Ryan says he'll have more opportunity to "'invest for the future and build a business that's good for the community, the land and for Blue House."'[2] POST has already started to help Ryan make this investment for the future. Along with help from partnering agencies, they have provided funds and assistance to help Ryan construct a new reservoir with 30 acre feet of off-stream storage for irrigation, four mobile homes for farm labor housing, greenhouses, and sheds for storing tractors and other farm equipment.[3] With this land and infrastructure in both Pescadero and San Gregorio, Ryan has a diverse farm operation that is able to produce over 50 types of organic vegetables, as well as fruit and flowers, which he sells at local farmers' markets, restaurants, wholesalers, stores and through Blue House's CSA program.[4]

HELPING FARMERS THRIVE ON PROTECTED LAND

Farmers are often hesitant to engage with land trusts, whose focus on protecting wildlife, public recreational access, 'viewsheds', and on garnering donor support may be perceived as being at odds with maintaining the viability of agricultural livelihoods.[39] Like many private, donor-funded land trusts, the Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) had difficulty working with farm owners and tenants on its protected agricultural lands. Gradually made aware of the incredible challenges facing its farmer partners, POST began to work more intentionally with farm viability in mind, lest the self-financed managers of their working lands go out of business. POST has been especially attentive to meeting the needs of farmers in the easement-drafting process. A good agricultural conservation easement ensures that farmers have the ability to construct necessary structures to support their operations, such as farmworker housing.[40] POST's increased attentiveness to the needs of farmers has been crucial to supporting the viability of agricultural operations on their protected farmlands, and to enhancing the relationship between conservation-oriented groups and farmers in the region.

SUPPORTING FARMERS

The social environment in which farmers work is important for the viability of their operations, both their ability to start farming and to sustain their farms over time. Frequently, farmers turn to a supportive community of farm friends and mentors as well as farm support organizations for help starting and maintaining their businesses. Farm support organizations can provide critical assistance to help farmers access land and capital, comply with regulations, develop their businesses, and access technical information. Small farmers also report that connections to the larger community are essential for generating support for their mission, activities, and sales over the long-term. Conversely, negative interactions with neighbors can make farming more difficult and increase farmers' costs. By developing a pipeline of new small-scale farmers, advocating for farm support organizations, and engaging the public, Santa Clara County can create an environment that encourages a community of vibrant small farms.

This section describes services that support farmers and provides examples of programs and policies that:

01 **HELP** Help farmers find land and capital	**02** **PLAN** Plan for succession	**03** **BUILD** Build needed farm infrastructure
04 **DEVELOP** Develop business skills	**05** **INVEST** Invest in environmental stewardship	**06** **SUPPORT** Support farmers' compliance with regulations and access to government programs
07 **OVERCOME** Overcome inequities in access to land and various forms of farm assistance	**08** **ASSIST** Assist new farmers starting out	**09** **ENGAGE** Engage the broader public around food and agriculture

HELPING FARMERS FIND LAND AND CAPITAL

The ability to access farmland with secure land tenure is one of the most pressing challenges for small farmers nationwide, and Santa Clara County is no exception. The most common way that farmers acquire land, whether they're just starting out or seeking to expand or relocate their farm, is from a non-relative rather than a family member who is passing down farmland. When it comes to accessing land, small-scale farmers often face additional barriers and have different needs than larger operations. Unlike large-scale growers, who may employ someone to look for land and negotiate contracts, small-scale farmers often have to identify land and negotiate leases on their own. When land becomes available, landowners may prefer to lease larger parcels to a single grower and also favor leasing to established businesses. Beyond finding available farmland, beginning small-scale farmers need to know about lease agreements, farm financing, and more to successfully engage in a land transaction.[41]

Start-up and operating capital is another essential element of operating a small farm. Given the often seasonal nature of farm income and the large expense of land, equipment and infrastructure, inputs, and labor, many farmers are not able to make upfront payments and need some form of financial support.[42] Small farms require significant capital investment, but being a small or new farmer can make securing a loan difficult due to applicants' limited credit history and the inherently risky nature of farms and small businesses.[43]

Service providers assist farmers with the process of acquiring land for purchase or lease and accessing financing. One such organization in California is the nonprofit California FarmLink, which links independent farmers and ranchers with land and financing. In 2017, they helped negotiate 46 land leases for farmers in California, working with landowners and farmers to make sure that leases are tailored to meet the needs of both parties.[44] Additionally, California FarmLink operates a lending program for small and mid-sized farms.[45]

SPOTLIGHT ON: GE MOUA FARM

Ge Moua, an immigrant farmer from Laos, first started growing flowers and vegetables near the outskirts of Seattle. In 2005, she moved with her seven children to the Sacramento area, where she took a several-year hiatus from farming. It was her love for her children that eventually brought her back to farming. *"I wanted my seven children to understand farming and I thought that I would regret not trying again, while I have the strength to do it,"* Moua said in an interview with California FarmLink.[46] However, she quickly realized that obtaining land in California was much harder than in Washington. The land was expensive, hard to find, and she felt overlooked as a smaller operation. With the help of FarmLink, she was able to find three parcels, each better than the last, to restart her farming operation. By 2017, she was farming 17 acres of lemongrass, mint, sweet potato, bitter melon, yam leaf and more.[47]

SPOTLIGHT ON: LAND FOR GOOD

Farming family Mark and Jeannette Fellows have benefited from the work of nonprofit, Land for Good. Their small ranch, located in Warwick, Massachusetts, has a total of 40 animals that they use to produce organic dairy as well as meat and eggs. After owning and operating their farm for 33 years, the Fellows realized they needed to start planning for their retirement process. They reached out to Land for Good with the hope that they would be able to smoothly transition into retirement and find new owners who shared their values for organic, sustainable farming methods. Ben and Laura Wells-Tolley were two younger farmers who had worked on other farms together for almost 10 years but dreamed of having their own dairy operation. When Land for Good introduced the Fellows to Ben and Laura, they knew they had found two young farmers who shared their values and could carry on.[1] With their large network of specialists and advisors, Land for Good has been able to help many farmers navigate the complicated process of retirement while also making land available for the next generation.

FACILITATING FARMLAND TRANSITIONS

As America's farm population ages, American Farmland Trust has estimated that 371 million acres or 40% of American agricultural land will change hands in the next 15 years.[48] Yet only 11% of farmers have plans for succession.[49] In Santa Clara County, farmers are 60 years old on average, suggesting that a similar large-scale transfer of farm real estate will occur in the next one to two decades.[50] This transition is a particularly risky time for farms, but with willing landowners and the right support services, it also represents a significant opportunity for the next generation of farmers.[51]

Land for Good has been a leader among service providers that assist with farmland transfer and succession.[52] Operating out of New England, Land for Good provides retirement and succession services for an aging farming population. They connect retiring farmers with new farmers, often outside of the family, who are having difficulty accessing the land they need to get started. In Land for Good's experience, successful matches require additional services beyond helping landowners and farmers seeking land to find each other. Given the complexity of succession, Land for Good has established a coordinated network of advisors – with specialities in law, taxes, financial planning, retirement and estate planning, farm management, and health care – to successfully facilitate the transfer of farmland to the next generation of farmers. Land for Good provides personalized, sustained service and their field agents can spend more than 50 hours "working with landowners to assess properties, set goals, and guide farmer recruitment."[53]

FARMWORKER HOUSING

In a recent survey, lack of affordable housing was one of the primary reasons young farmers in California were leaving agriculture.[54] As farmers go greater distances to find land, the commute from where they live to where they farm can place a significant strain on personal and operational resources. Farmers in Santa Clara County have also identified the lack of affordable farmworker housing as a major barrier.[55]

photos: Spade & Plow

One strategy for increasing the supply of affordable farm worker housing is to provide funding to incentivize its construction. In neighboring San Mateo County, the Department of Housing has set aside $300,000 for low- or no-interest loans for a pilot program to rehabilitate and construct new farm labor housing.[56] Since its inception in 2016, the program has helped to construct 11 units for low-income, full-time, seasonal farm workers in San Mateo County.[57] The loan agreement requires that the units are rented at a rate that cannot exceed 30% of the eligible farmworker's income.[58] The Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) is a partner in this program, providing planning and permitting support to farmers and overseeing the construction process in partnership with the landowner. POST's support is important because farmers can otherwise struggle to navigate the complex permitting process.[59]

EMPOWERING FARMERS WITH BUSINESS TOOLS

An important piece of building a viable small farm is developing the knowledge and skills to run a business. Small-scale and new entry farmers often have production experience but little or no background in business.[60] Small farmers can benefit from training that helps them to improve their business skills, secure loans, or strategically grow their business.

In California, the nonprofit organization Kitchen Table Advisors (KTA) supports small-scale farmers, who have been in business for three to five years, by offering business knowledge and tools and connecting them to resources that support farm business viability.[61] Anthony Chang, KTA's founder, created the organization after realizing that "business planning and financial management are the weaker parts of the ecosystem of support" for farmers.[62] As part of KTA's program, small-scale farmers receive three years of personalized support through one-on-one business coaching with one of KTA's business advisors. KTA has helped clients make financial projections and secure loans to make land purchases, enter new markets, and optimize production.[63] By the end of 2018, KTA had 25 alumni and 50 active farmers and ranchers in their program, the majority of whom are people of color, immigrants, and/or women who practice sustainable or organic agriculture.[64]

Demonstrating the benefit of this type of support, after its first three years, KTA's first 10 clients had increased their net income by 60% and collectively their sales increased by $1 million annually.[65] Eighty percent of KTA's alumni are still actively farming, despite national statistics that indicate one in four farms fail in the first five years.[66] Recently, KTA added their first clients in Santa Clara County.

STEWARDSHIP PROGRAMS

Farmers, county residents, policymakers, and service providers have a shared interest in the environmental stewardship of our agricultural lands. Typically, farmers bear the costs of implementing conservation or climate-smart practices, while the general public benefits from the outcomes. Federal, state, and local programs exist to incentivize the adoption of environmental stewardship practices by modestly reimbursing farmers for a small portion of their investment. However, small-scale farmers encounter additional obstacles in accessing these programs, including eligibility requirements that may not be feasible for a small farm, and difficult application and recordkeeping requirements that can be onerous for an operation with limited staff.

The National Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) provides farmers and ranchers with access to federal grants and offers technical assistance. One example of NRCS's work is the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), which gives farmers technical and financial assistance to incorporate conservation practices, such as cover cropping, erosion control, and pollinator and wildlife habitat creation into their ongoing farming activities.[67] EQIP and other NRCS programs are so popular that most applicants are not selected for funding. Even with funding from NRCS, farmers typically still pay for about half of the cost of implementation, which is often not enough of a financial incentive for farmers not already highly interested in adopting new conservation practices.[68] Farmers already implementing such practices are often disqualified from applying to such programs, since the primary goal is new adoption.


photo: Berkeleyside/Melati Citrawireja

At the state level, the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) operates the Healthy Soils Program (HSP) which offers financial assistance to adopt conservation practices that improve soil health, sequester carbon, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Eligible practices include cover cropping, mulching, no-till or reduced till, compost applications, and conservation plantings.[69] For small and minority farmers, meeting the requirements of the program can be a barrier because of the a lengthy and complex application and compliance process, which is particularly difficult when technical assistance providers are not available to help. The requirement that practices be implemented over three years can be an obstacle for farmers with insecure land tenure.

California Farmlink has also developed loans specifically targeted at farmers that want to implement conservation and climate-smart practices. Because NRCS's EQIP model is based on reimbursement, FarmLink has set up a loan program to help farmers, who cannot afford to pay for the practices up front, participate in the program. In partnership with the Santa Cruz Resource Conservation District, FarmLink has also developed a Resource Efficiency program that sets targets for water consumption and input usage. If farmers stay under their targets, they receive money back on their loan.[70]

At the local level, Santa Clara County is developing an Agricultural Resilience Incentive Grant Program to help cover the costs of implementing conservation practices and complement the existing models of funding and technical assistance. By further lowering the cost of implementation, the County hopes to incentivize more farmers to adopt established practices that improve the local environment and build resilience to climate change.

HELPING FARMERS COMPLY WITH REGULATIONS & ACCESS PROGRAMS

Many regulatory programs are designed without input from small farms or without small farms in mind. For example, the Food and Drug Administration's Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) in its original iteration did not take into account the ramifications of food safety regulations on small farms that sell produce locally. The addition of the Tester-Hagan Amendment gave small farms that sell locally certain exemptions from FSMA regulations. When penalties are not scaled to the size of operation or when they are applied without notice or opportunities for correction, being out of compliance can potentially put a small farm out of business.[71]

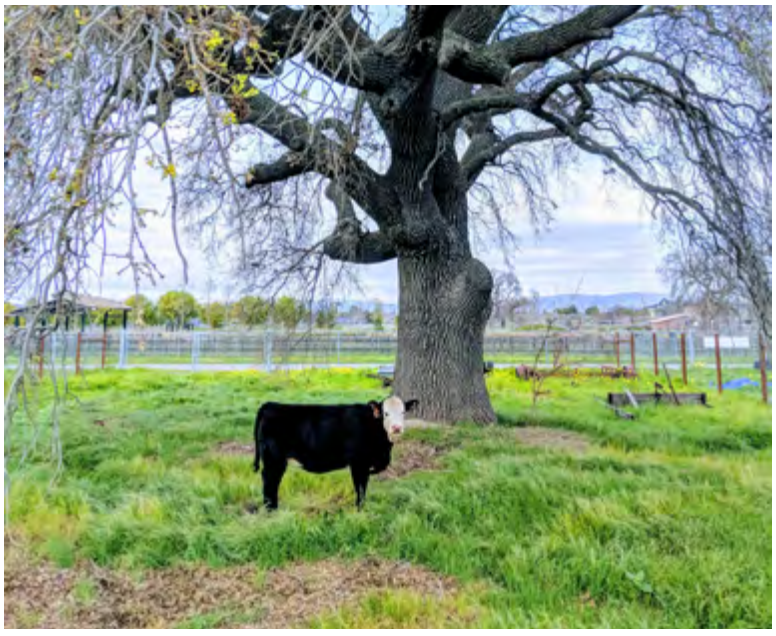
Compliance with regulations may also be particularly burdensome for small farms that have little staff support or spare time for additional paperwork and the various permits needed from several different agencies. In addition, small farms often find it difficult to take advantage of government programs intended to benefit farmers because they do not meet the eligibility requirements or because the time involved in navigating the application process costs more than the potential reward.[72]

In California, University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE) small farm advisors and county-based agricultural ombudsmen positions help small farms. Established in 1979, the University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources Small Farm Program currently includes four small farm advisors that work from UCCE offices located in various counties around the state, including Santa Clara County. In Santa Clara County, the small farm advisor develops education and applied research programs on critical issues facing commercial small-scale farmers and specialty crop producers in the region, including nutrient management, integrated pest management, irrigation, and soil health. UCCE small farm advisors also work with small-scale farmers on compliance with food safety, labor, pesticide, and water quality regulations and accessing grant programs, both of which affect the economic viability of their farms. In Fresno County, for example, during the height of the most recent drought, the small farm advisor informed small-scale Hmong growers about grant opportunities to improve water-use efficiency and helped farmers complete the extensive application packages.[73] Additionally, small farm advisors helped advise regulators on the unique difficulties that small farmers have complying with some regulations, such as the Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program, and suggested changes so that these rules do not have a disproportionately negative impact on small-scale farmers.[74] However, with only four advisors for all the small farms in the state, their capacity to provide the needed technical assistance for regulatory compliance is limited by constraints on funding and staffing levels.

Currently, five counties in Northern California have Agricultural Ombudsman positions, a role created specifically to help ease the regulatory burdens farmers face.[75] Agricultural Ombudsmen help farmers understand and navigate the rules, regulations, and permits that apply to various farm-related projects. Agricultural Ombudsmen also act as a liaison between farmers, ranchers, and relevant local and state agencies. For example, in San Mateo County, one of the Agricultural Ombudsman's roles is to "assist local producers with permitting projects (such as understanding regulations, zoning, permit requirements, acting as a liaison to the County on your project, or creating site plans)"[76]. In Marin County, the Agricultural Ombudsman "facilitate[s] connection between farmers and ranchers and relevant state/county regulatory agencies", "assist[s] with questions related to permitting of new enterprises and modifications to existing agricultural operations and provide[s] general education regarding ag-specific regulations in the county".[77] Farmers operating at all sizes and with varying levels of experience have expressed interest in a similar position for Santa Clara County.

INCREASING FARMER EQUITY

Historically, farmers of color and female farmers in the United States have been excluded from owning land and receiving loans and other benefits. Farmers from socially disadvantaged groups continue to face obstacles starting or developing their farm businesses beyond those that are faced by small-scale farmers generally. For example, the 2019 California Young Farmers Report describes how farmers of color have experienced increased difficulties accessing land, discrimination at various markets, and linguistic barriers to accessing technical assistance.[78] A number of service providers in California--including California FarmLink, Kitchen Table Advisors, and the Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA), which provides training to low-income farm workers and other aspiring farmers--have made supporting these groups a priority. At the state level, in 2017 California adopted the Farmer Equity Act, which formally defines "socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers" and instructs the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) to include socially disadvantaged farmers in all aspects of it work. The Act also created a Farm Equity Advisor position at CDFA. The advisor is tasked with integrating equity into all aspects of CDFA's work, giving socially disadvantaged farmers a greater voice in agency decision making, and improving outreach strategies to better reach socially disadvantaged farmers.[79]



CRAFT APPRENTICE: RYAN CLARK

Ryan Clark, of Fiddler's Green Farm in North Carolina, is one of the apprentices that has benefited from the work of the Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training (CRAFT). Ryan's career in farming started after he became disillusioned with the culinary track he was heading down. He still loved food, so he took a leap of faith and accepted an apprenticeship at the Ivy Creek Family Farm, where he stayed for three years to learn about sustainable production practices. Ryan also knew that he couldn't make it on his own with just an understanding of how to grow produce, he also wanted to learn the business management side of running a farm. With his multifaceted understanding of the industry, Ryan eventually went on to buy his own 5-acre farm where he grows vegetables, grits and cornmeal, and raises pastured poultry, eggs and pork. Now running his own farm, Ryan appreciates the experience he gained from his time at Ivy Creek Family Farm, but also says that his biggest challenge has been marketing his products, declaring, "Farming isn't just: if you grow, it they will come."[81]

BUILDING A FARMER PIPELINE FOR SANTA CLARA COUNTY

Part of making Santa Clara County a welcoming place for farmers involves having a critical mass of farmers, who can offer training or employment opportunities, share equipment and infrastructure, and provide each other with other forms of social and economic support.

Informal and formal farmer networks are crucial for providing farmers with access to land and resources, for amplifying their impact in the community, and advocating for their priorities. As an example, the Farm Alliance of Baltimore is a network of urban growers working cooperatively to "increase the viability of urban farming and improve access to urban grown foods." These farmers have pooled their resources to do joint sales at farmers' markets and to restaurants, shared a machine for accepting credit cards and EBT cards between their on-site neighborhood farm stands, and raised money to purchase tools to share.[80]

There are several farmer training programs close to Santa Clara County as well as local opportunities for experiential farm education, such as the sustainable agriculture and animal husbandry internships at Hidden Villa in Los Altos Hills. Santa Clara County would be more likely to attract and retain skilled beginning farmers if more opportunities to gain production and marketing experience were offered, either through apprenticeship programs or as farm employees.

Informal and formal farmer networks are crucial for providing farmers with access to land and resources, for amplifying their impact in the community, and advocating for their priorities.

URBAN AGRICULTURE AS A SUPPORTIVE STRUCTURE FOR SMALL FARMS

Urban agriculture–the production of food within cities–supports rural agriculture in several important ways. First, urban agriculture can be a forum for educating city residents about where their food comes from and how it is grown, ultimately connecting them to the region's rural as well as urban farms. Second, urban agriculture can be an important introduction to farming and a training ground for future farmers. The 2019 California Young Farmers Report notes that 28% of the young farmers they surveyed learned to farm, at least in part, in a community garden.[82] Other forms of urban agriculture, such as commercial and non-profit urban farms, also spark interest in farming and provide opportunities to learn about and practice small-scale farming.

In Santa Clara County, urban farms and gardens are sprouting up. There are at least 35 community gardens in the county, which cover nearly 29 acres and offer approximately 1,700 plots in total. Some of Silicon Valley's well-known technology companies, including Google and eBay, provide gardening opportunities to their employees. In addition, Santa Clara County is home to at least 11 urban farms. These range from Faithful Farm, a rooftop garden on the new Levi Stadium, to J&P Farms, which has provided fresh fruit to the Valley for over 50 years. Nonprofit farms like Veggielution in East San Jose and Hidden Villa in Los Altos Hills offer on-farm education, opportunities for community engagement, and healthy food access to low-income consumers. Similarly, La Mesa Verde, a gardening program run by Sacred Heart Community Service, and Valley Verde provide participants with the supplies and training they need to grow vegetables at home or in a community garden plot. Together, these programs are increasing access to fresh produce in low-income neighborhoods, providing opportunities for economic development, and training community leaders. In the past decade, Stanford University, Santa Clara University, and San Jose State University, as well as public school districts have begun to run their own farms and gardens, offering students hands-on learning opportunities and campus-grown food.

The recent expansion of urban agriculture opportunities in our cities, corporate campuses, schools, and colleges illustrates urban residents' interest in eating locally-sourced food and in understanding how their food is grown and where it comes from. Engaging people through urban farms and gardens can help to raise awareness of and connection to agriculture throughout the county, in both rural and urban places.

CONCLUSION

Small farms already exist in Santa Clara Valley and can continue to thrive with the right support systems in place. Farmer training programs in nearby counties indicate that there is no shortage of aspiring farmers who want to farm here. Many of the challenges current and new farmers face, including access to land, can be addressed by adapting the initiatives, programs, and policies discussed in this chapter to our county context. The Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority, the Land Trust of Santa Clara Valley, and Peninsula Open Space Trust are eager to provide their expertise and services to permanently preserve agricultural land in the county. Organizations supporting small farm operations will increase their presence as more new small farm operations are established here. The key will be to establish a local funding stream for the preservation of farmland and implement the needed programs, practices, and regulatory tools to ensure the continued viability of farming operations.

JSM ORGANICS

SIZE:

~60 acres

YEARS IN BUSINESS:

7

PRODUCTS:

Diverse crops, including strawberries, heirloom tomatoes, peppers, and cut flowers

MARKETS:

Independent grocery stores, wholesale

COUNTY:

Monterey

Growing up in Mexico, Javier Zamora had close ties to farming. His father farmed and Javier got an early start farming himself, beginning with a 600-yard plot in middle school where he grew carrots and chard. But after coming to Los Angeles in his twenties, Javier gave up farming to work in other industries. Then in 2009 he decided to go back to school, studying horticulture at Cabrillo College before enrolling in the Agriculture & Land-Based Training Association (ALBA). Being in school reawakened his love of farming. "It turns out I love soil, I love food production," explains Javier.

Today, Javier owns and operates JSM Organics, where he grows a wide variety of berries, herbs, flowers, and vegetables. He employs more than 25 people, a third of whom work year-round, and he is committed to paying them a fair wage. Javier recognizes that his employees are the heart of his operation, "They're the ones who make this happen every day, so I want to make sure they're happy and they take ownership of what they do."[1] His primary customers—independent grocery stores—are also invested in supporting sustainable food systems. Javier explains why that relationship is a good fit, "They understand what it really takes to grow the food and they are willing to pay us a really fair price."[2] JSM Organics' products are also sold to a few regional wholesalers and at a small number of farmers' markets.

"IF A CITY HAS LAND AVAILABLE OR A WAY TO GET LAND AND MAKE SOMETHING AVAILABLE FOR MANY FARMERS TO BEGIN FARMING, THEY SHOULD DO IT... THE IMPACT WILL BE GREATER IF YOU ALLOW MANY OTHERS TO PURSUE THEIR DREAMS." - JAVIER ZAMORA

Since establishing his own farm in 2012 on 1.5 leased acres, Javier's business has grown steadily. As his customer base grew, Javier found that he needed more land: he expanded to 6 acres by the end of his first season, leased another 18-acre parcel in his second year, and leased an additional 30 acres in his third year. While Javier was enterprising in finding land to lease, it was a strain on his business to spread equipment and labor across three different sites. In 2016, Javier purchased the 195-acre Triple M Ranch in Aromas, providing long-term stability for his business and the opportunity to consolidate his operations. The ranch is protected by a conservation easement on 135 acres of the property, which was key to making the land affordable to a beginning farmer. **"If we didn't have an easement on this property, there is no way a farmer like me would have been able to buy it. That's the bottom line,"** says Javier. The terms of the easement also gave the easement holder a say in who purchased the property, so they were able to prioritize selling to a farmer.

Although JSM Organics has thrived, there were obstacles to overcome in the early years: When he started, Javier had no land, no equipment, and limited resources. One of the keys to getting his new farm off the ground was connecting to people and organizations who assist and support farmers. Early on, he secured a $10,000 loan from California FarmLink, which enabled him to start growing strawberries and hire his first few employees. Many farm support organizations also pitched in to help arrange the purchase of the Triple M Ranch, including California FarmLink, Kitchen Table Advisors, USDA Farm Service Agency, and RSF Social Finance. Because of how important connecting to this network has been for JSM Organics, one of Javier's goals "is to help others, and show them how to access the people, programs, and organizations that are willing to help you."[3]

Giving back is at the core of Javier's farm business. "My goal has always been to better myself, caring for my wife and kids, and once I started feeling comfortable, giving back to the community, to make it easier for others to overcome the issues that you find when you're trying to have your own farm." As part of this commitment to giving back to the community, Javier leases small pieces of his property to six beginning farmers. As Javier says, "There are always people out there who need just a tiny piece of land to give it a shot: to begin farming, just to experience, figure out whether this is something they like to do, whether it will succeed or not." He also acts as a farm mentor, offering wide ranging advice on everything from where to buy fertilizer and sprinklers to which programs are available to assist farms. Two of his former leasees have gone on to start their own farm. After leasing 5 acres from him for several years, in 2018 they moved on to 40 acres of their own, where they now have 15 employees. He recommends this model of supporting the next generation of farmers to others as well: "If a city has land available or a way to get land and make something available for many farmers to begin farming, they should do it.... The impact will be greater if you allow many others to pursue their dreams."

1 *"Meet a Farmer: Javier Zamora of JSM Organics," California Grown Blog, June 30, 2017, https://californiagrown.org/blog/meet-a-farmer-javier-zamora-of-jsm-organics/*
2 *"In Their Words: Javier Zamora," Organic Produce Network, January 25, 2018, http://www.organicproducenetwork.com/article/348/in-their-words-javier-zamora*
3 *Gary Peterson, "Javier Zamora breaks new ground with FarmLink land loan," California FarmLink, May 17, 2017, https://www.californiafarmlink.org/javier-zamora-breaks-new-ground/*

ROOT DOWN FARM

SIZE:

62 acres

YEARS IN BUSINESS:

6

PRODUCTS:

Chicken, ducks, turkey, and pigs

MARKETS:

Farmers' markets, restaurants, grocery stores

COUNTY:

San Mateo

Dede Boies started farming because she "loved the work and the simplicity of planting a seed and growing something that's edible." But it wasn't long before she discovered another passion: humanely raising healthy and happy animals. For the last six years, she's run Root Down Farm in Pescadero, where she raises poultry—chickens, ducks, and turkeys—and pigs in a pasture-based system that strives to integrate care for the animals with stewardship of the land.

Root Down Farm's products are primarily available at eight farmers' markets, from Santa Cruz to San Francisco. Dede knew early on that the face-to-face interactions with customers that can take place at farmers' markets would be important for her business. That's because the heritage poultry breeds she raises look different, taste different, and need to be cooked differently than the poultry breeds we typically find in the store. These varieties also grow more slowly. As a result, they're more expensive for the farmer to raise and for the consumer to purchase. For Dede, creating demand for her products has involved educating consumers about how to cook with heritage varieties and why buying a different breed of chicken makes a difference.

CREATING DEMAND FOR HER PRODUCTS HAS INVOLVED EDUCATING CONSUMERS ABOUT HOW TO COOK WITH HERITAGE VARIETIES AND WHY BUYING A DIFFERENT BREED OF CHICKEN MAKES A DIFFERENCE.

Being located in Pescadero, with strong connections to the local farming community, has been an important part of Dede's farm story. Dede first came to Pescadero as an apprentice at Pie Ranch, a farming and food system education center on the San Mateo Coast. In addition to gaining lots of hands-on farming experience there, she was also immersed in the local farming community, which led her to subsequent jobs at other area farms, and ultimately to the property where she now farms. When she was ready to start her own farm, Dede had already been living in Pescadero for more than five years, giving her access to a support network that was instrumental in helping her navigate the early years of her farm business. Pescadero has another advantage as well. From a business standpoint, it's located just one hour from major urban markets.

Root Down Farm is located on 62 acres that are owned and protected by the Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST). Dede's time on the property has coincided with POST's increasing engagement in farmland and rangeland conservation. As a result, POST has helped to create a lease agreement that's favorable for a new farm business and invested in essential infrastructure like rebuilding the barn on the property. Now that Root Down Farm is established, Dede is subleasing some of her land to three other farmers: Fly Girl Farm, Steadfast Herbs, and LeftCoast GrassFed. The collaborations with other tenants feel like a natural continuation of Root Down Farm's story—Dede knew there were other small farm businesses that needed support, just like she had, and she is happy to be able to give back to the farming community in this way.

After six years in business, Dede remains passionate about humanely and sustainably raising meat. One of the things she's learned along the way is how important it is to understand the business side of farming, for the simple reason that farmers can't keep farming if their businesses aren't doing well. Recently, Dede's focus on financial viability has become even greater. She and her wife welcomed their first child, and Dede wants to ensure that she will be able to maintain the farm, so they can raise their family there.

VEGGIELUTION

SIZE:

6 acres

YEARS IN BUSINESS:

11

PRODUCTS:

150 varieties of fruits, 40 varieties of vegetables, and various herbs

MARKETS:

Fresh produce sold at farm stand; Prepared food distributed through food truck, commercial kitchen, food carts, and at educational programs

COUNTY:

Santa Clara

Veggielution was started in 2007 by three San Jose State University students who hoped to create community through farming and food. Initially they grew food in the front and backyards of homes around the University. Then in 2008, Veggielution moved to half an acre of land at the City of San Jose's Emma Prusch Park, where the farm has since expanded to 6 acres.

Like many other farming nonprofits, Veggielution sees growing food as a way to achieve broader social goals. Veggielution's mission is "to connect people from diverse backgrounds through food and farming to build community in East San Jose." As a result, engaging the community is at the heart of the programming that Veggielution offers. Veggielution hosts volunteer programing and a farm stand every Saturday of the month. On the first Saturday of each month, Veggielution holds its Community Engagement Farm Day, where attendees can participate in farm tasks, cooking classes, yoga, and kids' activities. Veggielution also works with local food system advocates through its Eastside Grown program, which provides resources, assistance, and the opportunity for participants to advocate for the changes they want to see in the food system. Another program, Eastside Explorers, offers field trips to middle schoolers in East San Jose, who visit the farm to learn about agriculture, cooking and nutrition, and the local environment.

VEGGIELUTION'S MISSION IS "TO CONNECT PEOPLE FROM DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS THROUGH FOOD AND FARMING TO BUILD COMMUNITY IN EAST SAN JOSE."

Veggielution currently grows 150 varieties of fruits, 40 varieties of vegetables, and various herbs. The different crops grown on the farm are sold through their farm stand, used in various foods prepared in their commercial kitchen and food truck, and served at community engagement events on the farm. As a non-profit farm, Veggielution does not rely on sales of its produce to support its operations. Instead, the farm and Veggielution's other programs are funded by grants, individual donations, and the Farmer 4 A Day program, which offers corporate employees the chance to participate in a wide range of projects on the farm.

Located in the heart of Silicon Valley, one of the challenges that Veggielution faces is the cost of staffing. It is hard to find and retain skilled labor, and equally hard to pay them living wages in such an expensive labor market. The costs of salaries, health insurance, and workers compensation quickly add up for their staff of nine people. As a non-profit farm with an annual budget of $750,000, fundraising is their main source of revenue, and it can be a challenging process. Having a full-time staff member dedicated to fundraising and increasing name and brand recognition has helped them to fundraise successfully. Some of the challenges of being an urban farm such as vandalism, homelessness, and lack of community access to the farm (via public transportation, and bike and walk paths) have also been opportunities for the organization to engage with the local city government to help find solutions.

Over the next five to ten years, Veggielution plans to improve and increase both the infrastructure and programming on the farm. They would like to highlight the diverse agriculture in the county by bringing people together to share their food and farm stories. In the longer term, they hope to become a nationally recognized cultural gathering space.

photo: Spade & Plow

REGIONAL FOOD MARKETING OPPORTUNITIES IN SANTA CLARA COUNTY

While proximity to urban areas often presents challenges for farmers--foremost the ability to find an affordable place to farm with secure land tenure--it also offers opportunities, including the potential to capitalize on urban markets. Sales of regionally grown foods are substantial, reaching nearly $9 billion for the US as a whole in 2015[1]. City residents are key customers for this growing market. A US Department of Agriculture (USDA) survey found, for example, that two-thirds of regional food sales came from farms located in metropolitan counties.[2] In the San Francisco Bay Area, where the demand for regionally grown produce is high, it can be advantageous for farmers to be located close to the region's 7.6 million consumers.[3] Expanding regional food markets not only increases the viability of small and medium sized farms, it also has a positive impact on the local economy, generating more economic activity by keeping money circulating locally.[4] When Santa Clara County consumers, from individuals to large-scale food service providers, purchase regionally grown fruits and vegetables, they are supporting individual farms and the county's agricultural economy more broadly.

Local or regional food sales[5] generally occur in two ways. One possibility is for farmers to sell their products directly to consumers through farmers' markets, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs, farm stands, and agritourism venues such as U-pick, where visitors pick their own berries or produce. Another option is for farmers to use what are known as intermediated markets, where they sell to an intermediary, such as a restaurant, school, supermarket, or food hub, which in turn sells directly to consumers in the region.[6] Direct and intermediated markets in Santa Clara County provide regional farmers with market opportunities and local consumers with places to buy regionally grown produce. Increasing the demand in the county for regionally grown food through these markets is one part of an integrated strategy for building a more resilient, diverse farming system in Santa Clara County. This chapter describes some of the regional food marketing opportunities available to small farmers in Santa Clara County.

DIRECT MARKETS

Small-scale farmers often sell directly to consumers. When farmers' market their products through regional supply chains, they receive a greater portion of the retail price than they do in mainstream supply chains, while also bearing greater marketing and transportation costs. A USDA study of the Sacramento area found that farmers selling organic spring mix at a farmers' market earned six times more than farmers who sold to the mainstream supply chain. In this study, the direct market farmer earned $5.92/lb (or 74% of the final retail price), while farmers who sold to mainstream markets earned $0.71/lb or (12% of total retail price).[7]

In 2019, Santa Clara County had approximately 40 farmers' markets, 15 U-pick operations and farm stands, and 13 CSA programs that deliver to or have pick-up locations in Santa Clara County.[8] Only three of the 13 CSA programs grow fruits and vegetables in Santa Clara County. Currently, there are about 15 farmers in Santa Clara County who sell at farmers' markets.[9] The majority of farmers at farmers' markets in Santa Clara County come from outside the county. A recent survey of four representative farmers' markets in Santa Clara County noted agricultural producers from 21 California counties, most frequently Fresno and Monterey Counties.[10] While this diversity of producers helps to provide a wide range of products throughout the year, it can also make it difficult for beginning farmers in Santa Clara County to secure a spot at a local farmers' market.

Expanding regional food markets not only increases the viability of small and medium sized farms, it also has a positive impact on the local economy, generating more economic activity by keeping money circulating locally.

HEALTHY FOOD INCENTIVE PROGRAMS SUPPORT LOW-INCOME CONSUMERS, LOCAL MARKETS, AND SMALL FARMS

Food Security and Small Farm Viability

Direct-to-consumer business is essential to sustain many local farming operations, but consumers cannot always access locally-grown food—and fresh produce in general—because it may not be affordable on a limited budget. Nearly 1 in 10 people in Santa Clara County experience food insecurity,[11] which is defined as occasional or frequent lack of access to enough food to live an active, healthy life.[12] Finding ways to make fresh produce more affordable is vital to increase the food security of county residents. However, increasing the affordability of fresh produce for low-income consumers is often at odds with supporting the economic viability of local farms, whose business models cannot sustain selling produce below market rates.

Increasing low-income consumers' ability to purchase locally-grown produce through incentive programs is an elegant policy solution that simultaneously increases food security and bolsters the economic viability of local markets and small farms. From 2006 to 2014, the number of farmers' markets across the nation nearly tripled but sales revenue from farmers' markets has plateaued.[13] In order to ensure continued revenue from direct-to-consumer sales, farmers and retailers selling local produce need new consumers buying their food at market rates. Programs that increase purchasing power and motivation to buy locally-grown foods among low-income people and families expand the consumer base for our local food economy and increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables.

CalFresh recipients have been able to purchase fruits and vegetables at grocery stores and participating farmers' markets for many years. More recently, two healthy food incentive programs have emerged in Santa Clara County to increase the ability of CalFresh recipients to purchase fresh produce without lowering market prices: Market Match and Double Up Food Bucks.

photo: SPUR


photo: SPUR

Market Match

Market Match has two goals:

1) Increase low-income consumers' access to nutritious, fresh produce; and

2) Benefit California farmers by increasing purchases of their products.

The dollar-for-dollar match program is available at 13 farmers' markets in Santa Clara County. By purchasing fruits and vegetables at participating markets, CalFresh users can earn an additional 10 dollars per day to purchase fresh produce.

Market Match has greatly increased revenue from CalFresh at farmers' markets. In a statewide evaluation of the program, two-thirds of the customers using Market Match increased the number of trips they took to the market, and three-quarters reported purchasing more fruits and vegetables. Farmers selling at markets accepting Market Match reported an increase in both customers and sales.[14]

To further encourage CalFresh recipients' use of Market Match at farmers' markets, the Santa Clara County Public Health Department, Fresh Approach, the County of Santa Clara Social Services Agency, and the Pacific Coast Farmers' Market Association partnered to promote the program locally. Promotion activities included a wide-spread educational campaign, direct promotion to families using CalFresh and the organizations serving them, and a coupon incentive redeemable at Market Match farmers' markets. In addition to increasing the number of CalFresh recipients shopping at farmers' markets, the promotional campaign doubled farmers' market revenue from CalFresh and increased the use of Market Match by nearly 15 times.[15]

Double Up Food Bucks

Similar to Market Match, Double Up Food Bucks (DUFB) is a matching program that awards CalFresh recipients up to 10 additional dollars per day to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables when they buy an equal amount of California-grown produce in a participating store.[16]

DUFB is available at five grocery stores throughout the county. Over 95 percent of program participants reported buying and eating more fruits and vegetables, with store produce sales increasing by 5-12%. In 2017, more than 2,000 families participated in the program and redeemed over $85,000 in Double Up Food Bucks.[17]

California Fruit and Vegetable EBT Pilot Project (SB 900)

With the help of SPUR, California Food Policy Advocates, and Senator Scott Weiner, the state legislature passed the California Fruit and Vegetable EBT Pilot Project in 2018. This policy allows the CalFresh Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) system to integrate dollar-for-dollar matching benefits onto users' EBT cards rather than having retailers issue paper coupons. This legislation makes it easier to expand programs like Market Match and DUFB and will help increase the purchasing power of low-income consumers and support local farms.[18]

photo: Spade & Plow

INTERMEDIATED MARKETS

Between the two poles of direct-to-consumer marketing, where producers and consumers have the opportunity to develop personal relationships, and large-volume distribution, where farms sell into national or international supply chains, there are other models of distribution for selling source-identified products to local consumers. Intermediated market channels--such as grocery stores, local institutions, and restaurants that feature regionally sourced produce--allow:

1. Consumers to buy regionally grown produce;
2. Farmers to reach a wider set of customers; and
3. Businesses and institutions to express their food values, such as supporting the local agricultural economy and environmental sustainability.

Sales of regionally-grown food to restaurants, retailers, institutions, food service buyers, and regional distributors or food hubs are especially beneficial for small farms. In a report on neighboring San Mateo County, the Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) found that farms under 50 acres would benefit most from efforts to facilitate more local sales beyond existing farmers' markets, CSAs, and U-picks.[19]

INSTITUTIONS

Institutions—such as schools, universities, hospitals, corporate cafeterias, and prisons—are important actors in the food system. Like individuals and households, institutions are also consumers of food. Given the volume of food they handle (preparing thousands of meals a day in Santa Clara Valley) and their purchasing power ($200 billion annually in the US), institutions' choices about the food they serve have the power to affect both the farmers who supply them and the people who eat their food.[20] When institutions opt to direct a part of their food budget to regionally grown products, they can leverage their purchasing power to support small and mid-size farms in the region. They also increase access to fresh, healthy, and regionally-sourced produce for their customers.[21]

Institutions have been creative in how they use procurement to support small farmers. In 2017, Stanford University began a Farm Accelerator Program, specifically designed to help three small, local farms increase their viability by committing to buy $20,000 of their produce per year for a three-year period.[22] Some food banks have found ways to increase the volume of fresh produce they provide while supporting small farmers. Examples include purchasing directly from small growers or starting their own farms, which supply fresh produce while creating training opportunities for new farmers.[23]

To get a sense for the extent to which institutional buyers in Santa Clara County purchase produce from the region, Alliance members sent out a survey to 62 school districts, hospitals, tech companies, colleges and universities, and correctional facilities. The survey asked about current regional produce purchases, obstacles to purchasing from regional farmers, and interest in purchasing from farmers in the region. Of the 16 institutions that responded, 40% already purchased some locally sourced produce. Although the meaning of the term "local" was not clearly defined, two institutions specified that they receive produce from Santa Clara, Monterey, and Santa Cruz Counties. Significantly, 81% of surveyed buyers expressed interest in purchasing from local growers. However, expanding sales of regionally grown produce to institutions in the county will require overcoming some obstacles. Several institutional buyers indicated that their ability to purchase local produce would increase if farmers were able and willing to sell through the distributors that those institutions already used.

	RESPONSE RATE	RECEIVE SOME LOCAL PRODUCE ALREADY	WOULD BE INTERESTED IN PURCHASING FROM LOCAL GROWERS
School districts	9 out of 30 (30%)	33%	89%
Hospitals	4 out of 11 (36%)	50%	75%
Tech Companies	0 out of 10 (0%)	--	--
Colleges	1 out of 9 (11%)	100%	NA
Correctional Facilities	2 out of 2 (100%)	NA	100%
Total	16 out of 62 (26%)	40%	81%

GOOD FOOD PURCHASING POLICY (GFPP)

Purchasing policies can increase institutional demand for regional food. Across California institutional buyers such as schools, hospitals and prisons are adopting the Good Food Purchasing Policy (GFPP) to transform how they procure food.[1] The GFPP provides a framework for scoring food purchased by the institution based on five values: local economies, nutrition, valued workforce, environmental sustainability, and animal welfare. Within each value an institution is awarded points based on their purchasing which communicate the level at which the institution's purchasing aligns with the stated values.

The policy is also designed to be evaluated on an ongoing basis, encouraging institutions to continue to improve across the value categories. For example, while the local economies value measures distance from the institution, it also prioritizes small and mid-size agriculture by acreage. Over time an institution can improve its score by sourcing food closer to the institution and by shifting its purchases from large producers to small and mid-size producers.

The GFPP was developed by the Los Angeles Food Policy Council and adopted by the City of Los Angeles and the Los Angeles Unified School District in 2012. As a result, in Los Angeles, $12 million was redirected to local produce purchases.[2] They also switched from serving 45 million servings of bread and rolls made from wheat from out-of-state to wheat grown in central California and milled in downtown Los Angeles.

Subsequently, institutions in San Francisco, Oakland and across the country have adopted the policy. Oakland Unified School District implemented California Thursdays, a program started by the Center for Ecoliteracy that promotes California-grown products.[3] This program and others supported by the GFPP helped save $42,000 and 42 million gallons of water over two years.[4]

By valuing foods for their production characteristics, institutions can change the way food is produced and support regional farms. Because Santa Clara County offers many agricultural products, institutions here are uniquely positioned to support farms in the region by aligning their purchasing policies with their values.

SANTA CLARA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT FARM

In 1981, when Santa Clara Unified School District changed Peterson High School to Peterson Middle School, the District was left with 11 acres of school property no longer needed for instructional purposes. After several years as a sports field, a community-led effort culminated in the creation of a farm on the site in 2007. For 10 years, the nonprofit Sustainable Community Gardens ran it as Full Circle Farm, educating children about healthy food and farming and providing fresh produce to the community. In 2017, when Sustainable Community Gardens' lease expired, the District chose not to renew, instead hiring its own farm consultant to operate the farm.

The creation of the Santa Clara Unified School District Farm in 2017 has allowed the Nutrition Services Department, which oversees all school meals, to expand its Local Foods Initiative and integrate the farm more fully into its nutritional and educational programming. The farm uses organic methods to grow produce, all of which meets USDA certification for minimizing food safety risks. Farmer David Tuttle focuses on growing fruits and vegetables that are used in the District cafeterias, where so far more than 35,000 pounds of produce from the farm have been served. Some of the crops served include rainbow carrots, red romaine lettuce, kale, snap peas, radishes, nectarines, apricots, eggplant, squash, tomatoes, basil, and cilantro. Nutrition Services also uses farm produce for nutrition education in the cafeteria, including taste tests. These programs aim to introduce students to locally grown fruits and vegetables and to increase their consumption of fruits and vegetables served in the cafeteria. The larger community also has opportunities to be involved by purchasing fresh picked produce at the farm stand, volunteering on the farm, attending farm camp, and taking part in food and farm events.

GROCERY STORES

Grocery stores have the potential to carry county-grown foods when they make regional sourcing a priority and the appropriate distribution and aggregation infrastructure exists. However, centralization and consolidation in the grocery industry means there are fewer grocery stores who are directing their own produce purchases and can cultivate relationships with local growers. Data on major grocery chains in Santa Clara County are not available, but in San Mateo County, CAFF found that none of the larger grocers expressed an interest in sourcing produce from farmers in the county.[24]

Independent and cooperative grocery stores as well as smaller regional chains focused on serving immigrant or specific ethnic communities may have greater ability to prioritize purchasing regional produce. In Santa Clara County, Lion Market—an Asian supermarket with six locations in San Jose, Milpitas, and Newark—sources produce from Asian growers in Santa Clara County. Lucky 7 Supermarket also sources some vegetables from Asian growers in the southern part of the county. These are important markets for these growers and a way for shoppers to buy locally grown, culturally specific crops. In addition, small fruit and vegetable markets have sometimes been an outlet for urban farmers' produce. In Oakland, the Mandela Grocery Cooperative has made supporting small, under-resourced farmers in the region an important goal. To achieve this goal, the Coop created Mandela Distribution Partners, which now sources 60% of its produce from small regional farmers, many of whom are located in the Hollister and Watsonville areas. As a values-driven organization, Mandela has been able to create an alternate distribution network and market outlet in support of small growers.[25]

RESTAURANTS

Farm-restaurant partnerships have provided valuable markets for small-scale farms and have helped to raise the visibility and reputation of those farms. Sometimes these partnerships are an exclusive relationship between a farm and a restaurant and other times restaurants feature produce from a variety of farms on their menus. One such example is Namu Farm, which was co-founded by farmer Kristyn Leach in partnership with chef Dennis Lee and his

brothers, who own Namu Gaji, a restaurant in San Francisco. Built around shared appreciation for Korean natural farming methods, this partnership has provided Namu Farm with a steady source of income and Namu Gaji with a local source of fresh vegetables and Korean herbs, such as perilla.[26] There are several restaurants in Santa Clara County that source produce from farms in the region, but there remains considerable opportunity to expand these types of partnerships.

AGGREGATION AND DISTRIBUTION

Regionally-oriented food systems that support the viability of small-scale farmers have a distribution system that transfers farmers' products to local buyers. Connecting local farmers with local consumers requires a distribution system and infrastructure tailored to the characteristics of small and mid-sized growers. Food hubs and other supply chain intermediaries can help manage purchasing, aggregation, storage, and distribution of local products for small farmers.

Located in San Benito County, Coke Farm serves as a food hub for more than 50 small and mid-sized organic farmers who grow within 150 miles of Coke Farm's headquarters in San Juan Bautista. The farms range in size from half an acre to more than 100 acres. As a food hub, Coke Farm serves as a key intermediary between smaller growers and larger distributors. For farmers, Coke Farm provides marketing, sales, cold storage, and distribution infrastructure. Coke Farm also takes on labeling, food safety, and insurance. By aggregating produce from many farmers, Coke Farm is able to offer its customers a wide range of certified-organic fruits and vegetables throughout the year.[27]

FEED Sonoma is another Bay Area food hub, but one that works on a smaller, more regional scale. As a "micro-regional aggregator and distributor," FEED Sonoma works with farms in Sonoma County that range from half an acre to 120 acres, with an average size of 10 acres. Co-founder Tim Page began FEED Sonoma to help small farmers sell more and advises others to start small if necessary (e.g., with a small number of farmers and a small space). From small beginnings in 2011, FEED Sonoma has grown considerably. Today it works with about 60 farms, has 15 employees and a fleet of four refrigerated trucks, and sells to about 85 different buyers. The majority of FEED Sonoma's customers are restaurants, but they also sell to caterers and specialty markets. Both FEED Sonoma and Coke Farm are critical pieces of the Bay Area's small farm economy and infrastructure.

CONCLUSION

Along with land, support, and community, small farmers need access to markets to be viable. In Santa Clara County, small farmers have a variety of market options that range from on-site farm stands and farmers' markets to sales to local restaurants and grocery stores. These markets represent an important foundation for the county's food and farm system. Continuing to expand and diversify these regional food markets will be important for the long-term viability of our county's small farms.

Along with land, support, and community, small farmers need access to markets to be viable.

OYA ORGANICS

SIZE:

20 acres

YEARS IN BUSINESS:

7

PRODUCTS:

Diverse vegetables, including heirloom tomatoes, summer squash, fennel, and leafy greens

MARKETS:

CSA, farmers' markets, and wholesale

COUNTY:

San Benito

Growing up in the San Francisco Bay Area, Marsha Habib didn't initially see herself becoming a farmer, though she had agricultural connections. When she was younger she visited her grandparents' subsistence rice farm in Japan. Later, she took a gap year before enrolling in UC Berkeley, volunteering at Hidden Villa and traveling to Switzerland and France with the WWOOF program (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms). These experiences, along with her agroecology and conservation studies at UC Berkeley and abroad, led her to understand the struggles faced by small farmers and rural communities. After graduating, Marsha was a farm apprentice at the Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Farming Systems at UC Santa Cruz, an AmeriCorps volunteer at Santa Clara University's BUG (Bronco Urban Garden) program, and a student at ALBA (Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association) in Salinas. It was through these farming programs that Marsha learned how to operate a farm. She sub-leased a 1-acre plot of land in San Benito County, growing food while bringing together college students and local farm workers to share conversation, meals, and field trips. The food from this small farm was donated and sold to underserved populations at a farm stand at a community center in San Jose.

“I DON’T WANT US TO GET BIG AND JUST KEEP GROWING AND GROWING. I WANT TO BE AT A SCALE WHERE I KNOW EVERY ACRE OF THE FARM AND HAVE A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PLANTS AND EMPLOYEES.” ~MARSHA HABIB

After the AmeriCorps project ended, Marsha continued farming, founding Oya Organics, a small diversified organic farm in Hollister. Currently, she works with 4 employees, growing mixed vegetable crops on a 20-acre plot. Though she grows over 50 crop varieties, Oya Organic’s main crops are tomatoes and squash in the summer and fennel and leafy greens in the winter. Marsha markets produce through a CSA program, wholesale clients like Coke Farms, and at Bay Area farmers’ markets. After all these years in agriculture, Marsha’s focus remains on farming at a small scale. As she says, “I don’t want us to get big and just keep growing and growing. I want to be at a scale where I know every acre of the farm and have a personal relationship with the plants and employees.”[1]

When asked what has helped the most, Marsha quickly points to her supportive network of neighbors, farm organizations, and access to land. She started Oya Organics with next to nothing. Neighbors loaned her equipment and taught her how to operate it. She was able to purchase her first tractor secondhand from another farmer for $5000. The security of a 10-year lease has permitted her to build out infrastructure that would have been difficult if she feared losing her land. Finally, it has been helpful to have access to small farm loans through the Farm Service Agency and business advising from Kitchen Table Advisors.

Though Marsha is clearly a successful farmer, and one of the few women running her own farm business, farming is tough. Long hours and long commutes are exhausting and stressful, particularly with a new baby and toddler in tow. There is always more work to be done and never enough staff. Marsha acknowledged that being closer to her markets in the Bay Area would make her farm operation more efficient and safer, with less time spent on the road, but she would miss out on the benefits of living in a more rural region, such as supportive farm services, the base of farming knowledge in the community, and more affordable costs of living for her workers and family.

1 Sarah Torney, “Oya Organics Cultivates Family and Food Justice,” CUESA, April 21, 2017, https://cuesa.org/article/oya-organics-cultivates-family-and-food-justice

PINK BARN FARM

SIZE:

1.75 acres

YEARS IN BUSINESS:

2

PRODUCTS:

Diverse vegetables, including heirloom tomatoes, lettuces, and scallions

MARKETS:

Distributor, restaurants

COUNTY:

Sonoma

Rose Madden, the farmer behind Pink Barn Farm in Sebastopol, learned to farm in Santa Clara County. After graduating from Santa Clara University, she got her start farming at the former Full Circle Farm in Sunnyvale. From there, she took a position as the garden manager at Santa Clara University's ½-acre organic garden and then as a farmer at the 6-acre O'Donohue Family Stanford Educational Farm. Rose enjoyed teaching students about sustainable agriculture at these educational farm sites, but her dream was always to start her own commercial farm. Now that she has begun her own farm business, the nearly 10 years of farming experience she gained in urban agriculture has been invaluable.

For two years, Rose and her husband Gavin looked for land to start their own farm, everywhere from Salinas to Santa Rosa. As they searched, they knew they really wanted to be able to live on the farm. They also prioritized purchasing, rather than leasing, because they wanted to be able to make long-term investments in their business. In 2017, Pink Barn Farm was born, when Rose and Gavin bought 2 acres with a house in Sebastopol. While owning their own land provides security—there's no worry that the owners will suddenly decide to sell to developers—having a monthly mortgage payment is a source of pressure for this new business.

PINK BARN FARM SELLS TO NINE CHEFS IN ADDITION TO FEED SONOMA, A MICRO-AGGREGATOR AND DISTRIBUTOR SERVING SONOMA COUNTY FARMERS, WHICH ACCOUNTS FOR MORE THAN HALF OF ROSE'S SALES.

One of the main selling points of Sebastopol and Sonoma County was the strong market for locally grown fruits and vegetables and the proximity to buyers. Pink Barn Farm sells to nine chefs in addition to Feed Sonoma, a micro-aggregator and distributor serving Sonoma County farmers, which accounts for more than half of Rose's sales. "The distributor has been amazing," says Rose. As the one person doing all the cultivation, harvesting, marketing, and sales, Rose does not have time to sell at farmers' markets. By working with restaurants and a distributor, Rose only harvests produce that has already been sold, unlike a farmers' market where farmers harvest without knowing how much they will sell. This is important for Pink Barn Farm because as a small operation, efficiency is of utmost importance, and as Rose explains, harvest labor is the most expensive labor on the farm.

Rose stresses that the hardest time for a new business are the first few years. For Pink Barn Farm's first year, Rose continued to hold a full-time off-farm job. Now in the second year, she has shifted to full-time farming. As they build Pink Barn Farm, Rose and Gavin are developing their systems and investing in equipment and infrastructure, like a new packing shed, to make their operation more efficient. Starting with just a small area under cultivation has been good, since Rose is the only person working on the farm. Ideally, as their business grows, Rose and Gavin would like to have 10 acres.

BLUMA FARM

SIZE:

¼ acre rooftop farm in Berkeley, 2 acres at Sunol AgPark

YEARS IN BUSINESS:

5

PRODUCTS:

Flowers

MARKETS:

Grocery stores, florists, special events

COUNTY:

Alameda

Bluma Farm, founded and run by Joanna Letz, specializes in growing sustainably raised, organic flowers. Flowers are a lucrative crop that typically earn far more per acre than most vegetable crops. In 2014, Joanna began Bluma Farm on one acre at the Sunol AgPark. Despite a steep learning curve initially, Bluma Farm has been profitable since its first growing season, with sales increasing considerably each year. Joanna first started selling her flowers at farmers' markets before expanding her markets to include grocery stores and florists. She also offers a range of flower design services for weddings and events. By 2018, Joanna was farming two acres at the Sunol AgPark and her gross sales were approaching $100,000 per acre.

Joanna is a first-generation farmer, but her interest in farming was inspired from an early age by time spent in her grandfather's garden. By the time she was in college, she knew she wanted to try working on a farm. Beginning in 2008, she apprenticed and was on staff at several regional farms, including Green Gulch Farm and Zen Center and Slide Ranch in Muir Beach. She also completed a 6-month farm and garden apprenticeship at the UC Santa Cruz Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems (CASFS). These training experiences

photos: Berkeleyside/Melati Citrawireja

FLOWERS ARE A LUCRATIVE CROP THAT TYPICALLY EARN FAR MORE PER ACRE THAN MOST VEGETABLE CROPS.

helped Joanna to build a supportive network of farm friends and mentors. At Sunol AgPark, she also received business advising and mentoring that was provided with support from a Beginning Farmer Grant. In 2017, Joanna began working with Kitchen Table Advisors, a local non-profit company which offers business coaching to beginning farmers. Joanna says that since starting her own business, her farm mentors, Kitchen Table Advisors, and FarmLink have been invaluable. She notes, "I've had a lot of that mentorship because I've been in the farming business for a long time. Some who get started and didn't have all these connections, they're left not knowing where to turn."

Some key steps in the successful development of her business have been establishing a relationship with an independent grocery store in her first year; getting into a really good farmers' market in her second year; and securing much needed equipment--a cooler she installed in her second year, and a refrigerated truck she purchased in her third year. Farming flowers is very labor intensive and having help has been critical. One of the challenges with labor, particularly in an urban area, is finding people with agricultural experience.

In 2019, Joanna shifted the majority of her operation to a ¼ acre rooftop farm in Berkeley. In this transitional year, Joanna is adjusting her business and production model to her new, smaller farm, but is excited about the possibilities that come with this new space and working closer to home. By farming in the city, she hopes to work less than 80 hours per week and spend less time commuting. Being in an urban setting also offers new opportunities to engage with the community through events and workshops.

photos: Berkeleyside/Melati Citrawireja

photo: Spade & Plow

There is still much to be done to increase the viability of our region's small farms, ensuring the public can continue to enjoy the many contributions that farming makes to the well-being of our communities, economy, and environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This report highlights the experiences of small-scale farmers in our region and identifies models for supporting the viability of small farms in Santa Clara County. The farm stories reveal the innovative ways in which farmers are already creating viable small-scale agricultural operations in Santa Clara County and the region, in spite of the obstacles.

These stories highlight some of the programs, support services, relationships, and markets that have been instrumental in building small farm businesses, reinforcing the value of the models described in chapters 3 and 4. For example, two of the profiled farms benefited from conservation easements that made it possible for them to gain access to and stay on their farmland. Several farmers were helped by farm service providers, who provided training, a farm incubator space, financial advising, or assistance with lease terms. Seven started with less than 10 acres and have expanded their acreage over time. All mentioned the importance of their relationships with other farmers and/or the larger community. And all of the farmers profiled depend on various regional markets to sell their products in ways that meet the unique needs of their operations.

Yet there is still much to be done to increase the viability of our region's small farms, ensuring that the Santa Clara County public can continue to enjoy the many contributions that farming makes to the well-being of our communities, economy, and environment. Drawing on the challenges farmers experience as well as the models identified in earlier chapters, the Alliance has developed recommendations that will help to advance this work. The Alliance's recommendations complement actions identified in the Ag Plan and focus on the county's small-scale farms.

REC 1

FACILITATE ACCESS TO LAND

Secure land tenure is one of the biggest challenges for small farms in California because of rising land prices and competition from developers and non-farm buyers.[1] Aspiring farmers need access to farmland in order to enter the agricultural field. Secure land tenure is the foundation of a viable farm business. Without it, certain business, infrastructure, and environmental investments are prohibitively costly.

Santa Clara County has many agricultural assets: high quality farmland, a well-managed water supply, optimal growing climate, and opportunities for local sales to growing nearby urban markets. The majority of our remaining agricultural parcels are a size that is well-suited for new entry, diversified, and direct-market farmers. To preserve our remaining farmland and to fully realize its potential, our community should consider implementing the tools below to make farmland available and affordable to small-scale farmers.

- **Develop a local funding source for agricultural conservation easements.** Protecting farmland in Santa Clara County is expensive. The current public and private funding for local land trusts is insufficient for conserving the county's prime farmland. State funds, while significant, require local funding matches and are unreliable as a long-term strategy.

  Local measures can generate significant revenue for agricultural conservation. For example, with funding from a real estate transfer tax, Peconic Bay Region Community Preservation Fund has raised $1 billion to preserve farmland and open space on Long Island since 1998. Santa Clara County already has a voter-approved fund for parks and open space called the Parks Charter Fund. Providing roughly $58 million annually, the Park Charter Fund is a stable source of local funding for County Parks. It was renewed in 2016 with 78% of the vote.[2]

- **Keep protected agricultural land in active production with affirmative agricultural easements.** While traditional conservation easements restrict development on a property, affirmative agricultural easements also require that land be kept in agricultural use.[3] In New York, the Peconic Land Trust has adopted easement provisions that limit the number of years that land can remain fallow and require that a majority of the property remains in food production. If the land remains fallow beyond the allotted time period, the easement holder (i.e., land trust) can lease the land to a farmer. As an additional restriction upon the property, affirmative language in an easement will increase the value of the easement.

  This type of provision helps to ensure that the intent of maintaining productive agriculture is realized, something that is particularly important when using public funds to purchase conservation easements. Experiences from outside the county show that farmland protected without an affirmative easement may be marketed as a rural estate to wealthy individuals with no intention of farming the land. This situation has the dual effect of taking protected land out of food production and, despite the prior purchase of development rights, raising the price of the property above the agricultural value, making the land once again unaffordable to farmers. Adopting affirmative agricultural easement provisions could help to avoid this problem in Santa Clara County.

- **Keep protected agricultural land in the hands of farmers and ranchers.** States like Massachusetts and Vermont have added an Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value (or OPAV) provision to their agricultural conservation easements. This provision is intended to quell competition from non-farm buyers and ensure that affected land is, if possible, first made available for sale to qualified farmers and therefore at a price that reflects its agricultural value. In exchange for this added restriction, these provisions result in a higher value agricultural conservation easement and more affordable residual purchase value. Additional incentives may be necessary to keep farmland affordable for new entry and small-scale farmers.[4]
- **Leverage locally-owned government land to incubate small urban and rural farms.** In addition to protecting private farmland, publicly-owned land can also be used to support new farmers. In Alameda County, the Sunol Agricultural Park is located on land owned by the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission and managed by the Alameda County Resource Conservation District. Currently, the Agricultural Park is home to six organic farmers and offers educational opportunities for Bay Area school children. Bluma Farm and several other farmers, whose businesses were incubated at the Agricultural Park, have since moved on to their own farms elsewhere. The demand for this type of opportunity among new entry farmers can be seen in the example of those with secure land tenure, such as JSM Organics in Monterey County and Root Down Farm in San Mateo County, who are themselves subleasing to other farmers to help establish new businesses.
- **Encourage landowners to keep farmland in active production.** Innovative tools such as a "Speculation Tax" or "Fallow Tax" incentivize landowners to keep agricultural land in production rather than fallowing it as a speculative land-banking opportunity. In British Columbia, Canada, a Speculation and Vacancy Tax is intended to discourage housing speculation and people from leaving houses vacant.[5] The tax applies to properties that are owned by foreign owners or "satellite families" and to homes that are not the principal residence of the owner or have not been rented out for at least six months per year. In Oakland, a vacancy tax on vacant lots and unoccupied condominiums was approved by 70% of voters in the 2018 election. Such taxes are used in cities around the world. They are sometimes paired with lowering taxes for new development[6], which incentivizes investment in desired land uses while taxing problematic investments in land. If applied to agricultural lands, property tax incentives such as the Williamson Act could act as positive reinforcement for maintaining agricultural production, while a "Speculation Tax" or "Fallow Tax" could act as a disincentive for purchasing agricultural land in Santa Clara County solely as a speculative investment. (By entering into a Williamson Act contract, landowners agree to keep properties in agricultural use for a minimum of 10 years in exchange for a lower property tax assessment.)

  » ***State-level advocacy opportunity:***

  AB 986 (Rivas, 2019) - Grant program that would assist socially disadvantaged farmers in accessing protected farmland. This legislation proposed a program for providing grant funds to land trusts, cities, counties, Resource Conservation Districts and other entities to protect and steward agricultural land in partnership with farmers of color, through purchases or long-term leases. The program would also provide direct financial resources such as down-payment assistance and one-time investments in infrastructure improvements, to ensure that socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers equitably can access the protected lands through purchases or long-term leases.[7]

REC 2

PRESERVE CONTIGUOUS AGRICULTURAL AREAS

Contiguous, or common border agricultural areas are resilient agricultural areas. Urban expansion and certain types of rural development threaten the retention of agricultural lands and introduce uses that are incompatible with farming. For example, a common threat to the continued productivity and resilience of agricultural lands is the development of mansions or "rural ranchettes" that exceed the size limitations of urban areas and take small to medium sized farm parcels out of production while breaking up formerly contiguous farming areas. Incompatible uses and fracturing put small-scale farming at risk of extinction and can pose threats to our local natural resources and regional biodiversity.[8]

When development occurs amidst farmland, more development is likely to follow. Relatedly, when subdivisions of farmland occurs, development and speculation become inevitable. While smaller farm parcels are often conducive to viable small-scale operations, retaining or expanding the minimum parcel sizes established by the County's General Plan is to the advantage of overall agricultural viability. In other words, while a farm may be successful on five or ten acres, there is no need for additional lots of this size, and minimum lot sizes of 20 and 40 acres in agricultural zones is needed to prevent further fracturing, speculation, and conversion of the County's remaining agricultural lands.

Coordination across jurisdictions can lead to the preservation of contiguous agricultural areas -- particularly between the County, the Santa Clara County Local Agency Formation Commission, and the Cities of San Jose, Morgan Hill and Gilroy, all of which have agricultural preservation policies and programs. Coordination amongst these jurisdictions can leverage limited available conservation funds and result in aligned priority areas for concentrating conservation efforts. Restricting the total allowed lot coverage and square footage of development, especially for residential "rural ranchettes" can also help to retain remaining contiguous farmland, as can taking steps to ensure that any developments that occur on agricultural land are compatible with agricultural operations.

REC 3

FOSTER A SUPPORTIVE PUBLIC ENVIRONMENT FOR FARMING

The future of small farms in Santa Clara County depends in large part upon the economic and political support of county residents. Predominantly living in a heavily urbanized place, Santa Clara County residents may not be aware of the county's agricultural heritage or of the hundreds of small farms and tens of thousands of acres of farmland adjacent to commercial, industrial, and residential areas. Raising public awareness of small farms in the county, the many ecological and cultural services they provide, and their specific challenges is an important part of building a constituency and customer base that is invested in regional resilience and the future of farming in Santa Clara County. Many of the farmers featured in this report mentioned the need for greater public awareness of small farms and their unique contributions and challenges. This report is intended to be one step in that direction.

Farming is a difficult livelihood. Many of the farmers we spoke to for this report commented that being able to tap into local support networks helped them address some of the challenges and risks of running a small farm business. Government, farmer support organizations, and members of the public can assist in this process by working to create an environment that makes it easier for small-scale farmers to thrive. Interested members of the public can ask their local, county, and state representatives to support policy actions that support small farms. One clear opportunity on this front, identified in the Ag Plan and prioritized for implementation, is improving the County's provisions that establish and protect a Right-to-Farm.

- **Improve Right-to-Farm disclosures.** Santa Clara County and the Cities of Morgan Hill and Gilroy have adopted right-to-farm ordinances, which alert homebuyers to the potential impacts of locating near a farm, and are a required disclosure for real estate transactions in agricultural areas. Despite these ordinances, growers continue to receive complaints about common agricultural practices, suggesting that the current disclosures are not effectively communicating what living near a farm entails. To address this issue, the Ag Plan recommended strengthening right-to-farm disclosures so that home buyers have a better understanding of what to expect from neighboring farms as well as existing protections for agriculture. To improve the effectiveness of right-to-farm disclosures as an educational tool, the Alliance recommends developing and incorporating a video presentation and other communication tools that describe what it means to live near farming operations.

REC 4
STREAMLINE REGULATIONS

Burdensome regulatory requirements disproportionately impact small farms. Small farms often do not have the necessary staff and expertise to oversee regulatory processes. Policymakers and regulators can incorporate differences in the scale of farm operations when designing regulations and farm assistance programs to ease this burden. Streamlining regulatory processes based on a tiered system of size, scale, and intensity, where appropriate, can make it far easier for smaller-scale farms to invest in their operations and their employees.

By virtue of their size, these farms are less likely to have side effects that negatively impact others in the county -- for example, a small farm stand is less likely to cause a traffic jam than a larger one, or an unpermitted farm-to-table event for twenty attendees is less likely to result in a noise complaint than larger equivalents. For this reason, many federal regulatory processes exempt smaller operations from the standards applied uniformly to industrial farm operations. Local regulatory processes should follow this precedent, since small farms have reduced impacts compared to their larger counterparts. Regulatory streamlining for smaller farm operations can reduce prohibitively costly and challenging permitting processes for the following:

- *Infrastructure, e.g. storage and processing facilities;*
- *On-farm sales, e.g. roadside farm stands;*
- *Small-scale events, e.g. tastings and farm-to-table dinners;*
- *Overnight farm-stays; and*
- *Housing, i.e. on-site housing for new entry farmer-owners and small-scale agricultural employee housing.*

REC 5

INVEST IN ECOSYSTEM SERVICES AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

While farmers' expenses have gone up, the prices they receive for their products proportionately have not. Incentive and assistance programs that account for the manifold public benefits that working lands provide can support farmers' bottom line and facilitate investments in long-term stewardship or infrastructure projects that increase ecosystem services. Technical assistance providers can help farmers develop and implement precision irrigation, nutrient management, and carbon farm plans. They also help farmers access financing, implement business management tools, keep up-to-date on regulations, and apply for assistance programs. While small farms are more likely to innovate and adopt new management practices, incentives and assistance to do so are less likely to be made accessible to them.

Small farms often plant multiple crop successions each year and therefore can have a greater need to build and replenish soil organic matter. Without the economy of scale, small farms are also likely to have higher per-acre costs associated with irrigation, and therefore stand to benefit from programs that incentivize water efficiency. While state and federal programs exist to help farmers adopt conservation practices, they are often prohibitively difficult for small farms to apply for or are designed for larger-scale operations which can make them financially infeasible for small-scale operations. These programs should be designed to incentivize farms of all sizes. Technical assistance is needed in applying for these programs as well as implementing them.

- **Create programs to pay farmers for ecosystem services that provide a public benefit.** Farmers should be incentivized to steward their land in ways that provide ecological services and other public benefits, including groundwater recharge and carbon sequestration. Such programs, if tailored to the needs of small, peri-urban farms, will benefit producers who are among the most vulnerable to the effects of a changing climate. Small, diversified farms typically cultivate soil more intensely--planting multiple successions and varieties of crops in a particular field each year--than a larger farm that might be managed for only one crop per year. With intensity of cultivation comes a greater dependence on healthy soil and greater benefits from increased soil organic matter. Given their size, these farms have fewer options for adapting if a field floods or a well goes dry. The practices best suited to build resiliency for these small farms are also the practices best suited to climate change mitigation and adaptation. However, without special provisions, small farms are less likely to take part in stewardship program because of bureaucratic overhead and competition from larger farms that benefit from greater economies of scale and working capital.
- **Facilitate access to state and federal programs.** State and federal programs that incentivize conservation practices can make improvements to the economic and ecological sustainability of small farms. Many of these programs are inaccessible to farmers without third-party assistance from local service providers. As one example of how to increase access to these programs for small farmers, University of California Cooperative Extension, through a partnership with the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA), recently hired 10 community education specialists to help farmers participate in CDFA programs--such as the State Water Efficiency and Enhancement Program and the Healthy Soils Program--that encourage the adoption of climate-smart agricultural practices.[9]

BAY CHECKERSPOT BUTTERFLY, A FEDERALLY THREATENED SPECIES ENDEMIC TO THE BAY AREA'S GRASSLANDS ON SERPENTINE SOILS

- **Ensure agricultural water rates are affordable.** Currently agricultural water users in Santa Clara County receive a reduced water rate from Valley Water that is set at no more than 10% of the rate paid by municipal and industrial water users. Called the Open Space Credit, the lower water rate acknowledges the value that farmers provide to the county's water resources through open space and groundwater recharge. Valley Water periodically proposes raising the agricultural water rate but farmers argue that this cost increase could jeopardize their operations, which would in turn lead to the loss of open spaces that benefit our groundwater resources. An innovative program being piloted in Santa Cruz County's Pajaro Valley offers landowners a rebate if they collect rainwater using designed geologic elements that facilitate percolation, thereby replenishing local aquifers more effectively.[10]
- **Create new positions within local government to serve as liaisons to the agricultural community.** Many counties have "Agricultural Ombudsman" positions, often co-located with Resource Conservation Districts or Cooperative Extension offices, to help farmers comply with regulations and to coordinate with regulatory agencies. These positions also often help local governments to streamline permitting processes and to tailor regulations for applicability to farm operations.

  » ***State-level advocacy opportunity:***

  AB 838 (Eggman 2019) - Assistance program for small- and mid-scale diversified farms and ranches. This proposed legislation would fund the University of California to create a statewide program to support the operators of small farms and ranches, with a focus on limited-resource and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. As part of the implementation of this program, the University of California would establish a Farmer Equity and Innovation Center and increase the number of Small Farm Advisors serving the state. Restoring the University of California's Small Farm program would increase the capacity of farm advisors and other service providers to support small farms.

REC 6

INCREASE ACCESS TO DIVERSE MARKETS

Small farms need access to markets to sell their products. Often regional food sales--either direct-to-consumer at farmers' markets or to restaurants, grocery stores, and institutions--are important for small farms because their scale of production is typically incompatible with large wholesale markets. At the same time, maintaining vibrant farms within cities' foodsheds is important for the food security of metropolitan regions. Farms in Santa Clara County still have marketing challenges to overcome despite proximity to urban centers and consumers. There is a need for greater access to diversified markets and the development of regional distribution, packing, and processing infrastructure that is tailored to the needs of a diversity of operations, including small farms.[11]

- **Support and expand produce purchasing incentive programs.** Market Match, Double-Up Food Bucks, and similar programs increase farmers' sales and customer base, while also increasing access to fresh, healthy produce for low-income consumers. Matching programs at 13 farmers' markets and five grocery stores in Santa Clara County have demonstrated their effectiveness at increasing consumption of fruits and vegetables and increasing farmer revenue. By expanding these programs to additional farmers' markets and grocery stores, more low-income customers will be able to increase the amount of fruits and vegetables they purchase, and farmers and grocery stores will have an additional source of revenue. Strategies that can help promote and expand these programs include:
  - *Invest in expansion of matching programs through grants to local produce purchase incentive operators;*
  - *Sign on to state or federal legislation that will provide funding for matching programs for retailers or farmers' markets;*
  - *Promote matching programs in low-income communities to increase program recognition and utilization;*
  - *Educate CalFresh-eligible residents and families on how to take advantage of matching programs; and*
  - *Fund coupon promotions that incentivize low-income consumers to shop at participating farmers' markets and retailers that offer matching programs to engage and sustain them as repeat customers.*
- **Encourage and facilitate values-based institutional procurement policies and streamline procurement systems to better incorporate small, regional farms.** In 2012, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) adopted the Good Food Purchasing Program, shifting its purchasing to support local economies, fair labor practices, healthy eating, humane treatment of animals, and environmental sustainability. Since implementing the GFPP, LAUSD has increased its spending on local food by $12 million[12]. Santa Clara County is home to many private and public institutions that prepare millions of meals a day. By leveraging their purchasing power, these institutions can have a significant impact on small farms in the region and on the food available to the wide range of customers they serve (children, employees, patients, senior citizens, etc.).
- **Leverage state and federal grants to expand market access for small farms.** Both the state and federal government offer grant programs that can support marketing opportunities for small farms and increase consumers' access to locally or regionally produced farm products. For instance, the USDA's Local Food Promotion Program provides funds to plan, establish, or expand a local or regional food


photo: Spade & Plow

business enterprise. The Farmers Market Promotion Program provides funds to support the development and expansion of farmers' markets and other direct-to-consumer markets. By taking advantage of such grants, farmers, service providers, and local governments can strengthen and expand marketing opportunities in the county for small-scale farms, while increasing access to regionally produced crops for county residents.

- **Encourage priority access to farmers' markets for county growers.** Farmers' markets, either as a farmer's sole outlet or part of a diversified marketing strategy, are frequently an important sales channel for small-scale farmers. Yet, there is increasing competition for spaces at farmers' markets. We recommend working with farmers' market associations on creating spaces for farmers growing within the county to showcase local products and support local growers.

REC 7

GROW YOUTH KNOWLEDGE OF AGRICULTURE AND THE LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM

In many ways, the future of small farms in Santa Clara County depends on the economic and political support of county residents. Living in a heavily urbanized place, Santa Clara County residents may not be aware of the county's agricultural heritage or of the hundreds of farms and tens of thousands of acres of farmland that exist alongside major commercial, industrial, and residential areas. Raising awareness among residents of farms in the county, the many ecological and cultural services they provide, and their unique challenges is an important part of building a constituency and customer base who are invested in the future of farming in Santa Clara County. Many of the farmers featured in this report mentioned the need for greater public awareness of small farms and their unique contributions and challenges.

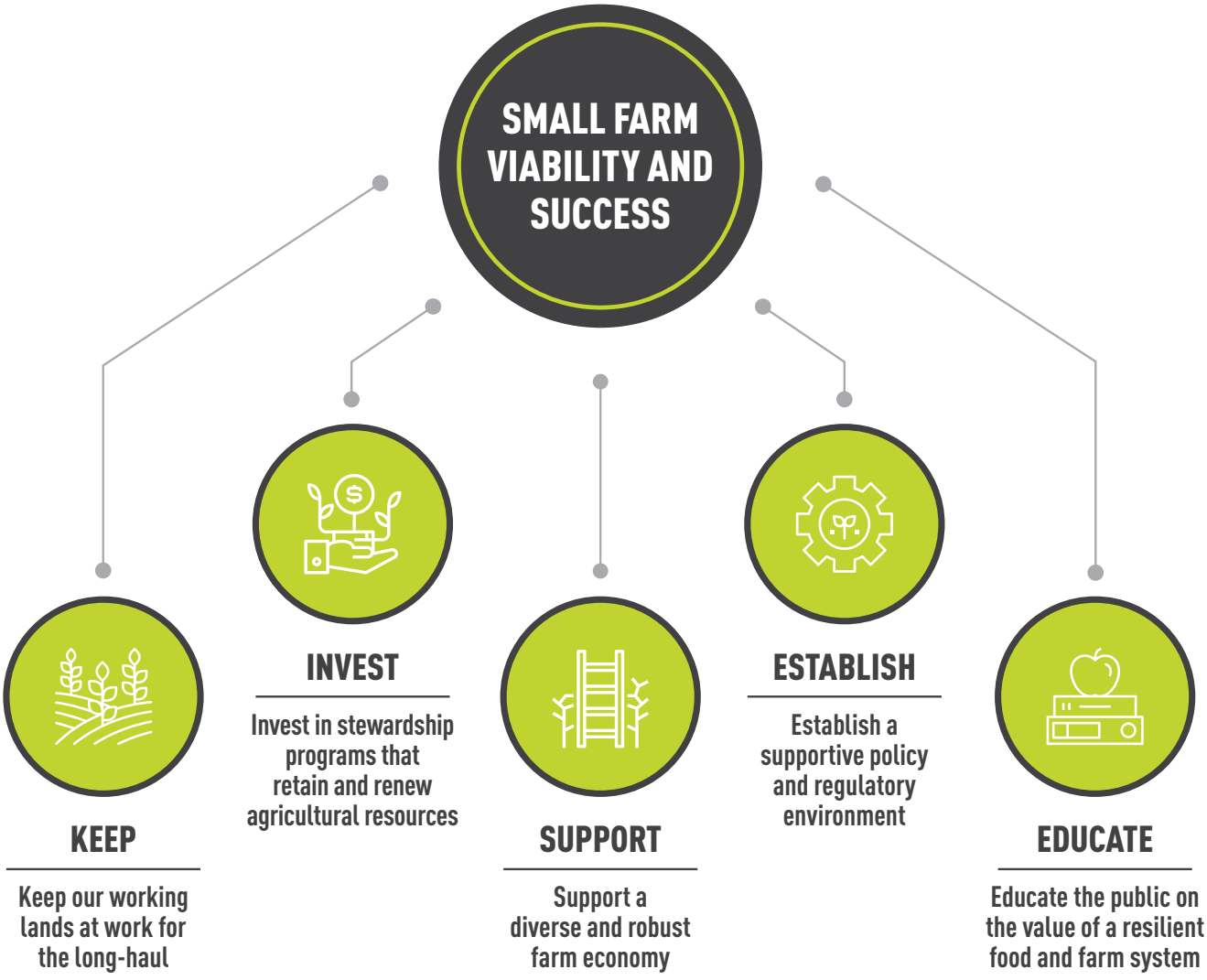
Food system education in K-12 settings is one way to teach county youth about agriculture and encourage increased consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables. By purchasing and serving produce from local farmers, the K-12 education system offers the opportunity to teach students about the food system through school meals. Organizations like the California Alliance of Family Farmers, Santa Clara County Public Health Department, Palo Alto Medical Foundation, and University of California Cooperative Extension support farm-to-school efforts in Santa Clara County by highlighting locally grown produce during Cafeteria Promotion events. During a cafeteria promotion event, a featured produce item is presented in bite-sized samples to students on their way to the lunch line. Information about the produce item and the farm or farmer is prominently displayed on professionally designed posters next to the sample station to help students make the connection between the featured produce and its source.

Another way for students to learn about the food system is to take field trips to local farms. Farmers and teachers may need support from professionals and organizations that specialize in agricultural education to facilitate a productive learning experience on farms. For example, in Half Moon Bay and Pescadero (San Mateo County), the HEAL Project, UC Elkus Ranch, and Pie Ranch offer food system education through experiential learning activities on working farms. Such agricultural education organizations have dedicated educational staff who deliver food system education in informal settings, and they may be a resource to farmers and teachers who are interested in bringing students to farms near urban communities. In Santa Clara County, many urban farms, such as Veggielution, Martial Cottle Park, the Santa Clara Unified School District Farm, and Hidden Villa, offer educational programming.

The greatest barrier to delivering food system education in K-12 settings is the lack of dedicated funding for agricultural education and field trip experiences. Interested administrators, teachers, parents, and community partners may explore the possibility of funding food system education activities through engaging with each district's Local Control Accountability Plan, a three-year plan that outlines goals for students and actions for achieving those goals.

CONCLUSION

Farmland soils and the ideal conditions for growing food, in Santa Clara County and the United States as a whole, are a finite and rapidly dwindling resource. Once lost, they will be lost for good. In addition to producing the food we eat, Santa Clara County's small farms steward our working lands, diversify the local economy, contribute to our sense of place and local identity, and bolster regional resilience in the face of climate collapse. It is critical that we work together to protect and promote our small farms and their many public services to the benefit of present and future generations. This report and its recommendations present multiple paths to increase the viability and success of agricultural operations on small parcels in Santa Clara County.



TAKING THE NECESSARY ACTIONS TO ENSURE THAT SMALL FARMS PERSIST IN SANTA CLARA COUNTY WILL REQUIRE AN ENDURING PUBLIC COMMITMENT AND INNOVATION WORTHY OF SILICON VALLEY.

ACRONYMS

ACE: Agricultural Conservation Easement

ALBA: Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association

ARA: Santa Clara Valley Agricultural Resources Area

CAFF: Community Alliance for Family Famers

CDFA: California Department of Food and Agriculture

CRAFT: Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training

CSA: Community Supported Agriculture

DUFB: Double Up Food Bucks

EBT: Electronic Benefits Transfer

EQIP: Environmental Quality Incentives Program

FSMA: Food Safety Modernization Act

GFPP: Good Food Purchasing Policy

HSP: Healthy Soils Program

LAFCo: Local Agency Formation Commission

LAUSD: Los Angeles Unified School District

LTSCV: Land Trust of Silicon Valley

KTA: Kitchen Table Advisors

MALT: Marin Agricultural Land Trust

NRCS: National Resource Conservation Services

OSA: Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority

POST: Peninsula Open Space Trust

RCD: Resource Conservation District

UAIZ: Urban Agriculture Incentive Zone

UCCE: University of California Cooperative Extension

USDA: United States Department of Agriculture

DEFINED TERMS

Agricultural conservation easement:
An agricultural conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement that restricts certain uses and development rights on agricultural land. An agricultural conservation easement is a type of conservation easement designed specifically to support agriculture and remove development pressure from an agricultural property. Landowners are fairly compensated for the development rights on their property.

Beginning farmer:
The USDA defines a beginning farmer as someone who has operated a farm or ranch for less than 10 years.

CalFresh:
The CalFresh Program helps individuals or families with low incomes to buy food.[1] Benefits are issued on an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card. At the federal level, this program is known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and it was formerly known as food stamps.

Climate-smart agriculture:
Climate-smart agriculture is a set of practices intended to address agriculture's vulnerability to climate change, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and increase soil carbon.[2]

Conservation easement:
A conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement that restricts certain uses and development rights on a property in perpetuity while fairly compensating landowners for the development rights on their property.

Direct markets:
In direct markets, consumers can purchase food directly from producers. Examples of direct markets include farmers' markets, farm stands, Community Supported Agriculture programs, and pick-your-own.[3]

Ecological or ecosystem services:
Ecological or ecosystem services are "the benefits people obtain from ecosystems." Some of these benefits include food, water, clean air, pollination, soil formation, and pest control.[4]

Farm service providers:
Government, civil society, industry, or academic organizations that offer various types of assistance to farmers.[5]

Food hub:
A food hub is "a business or organization that actively manages the aggregation, distribution, and marketing of source-identified food products primarily from local and regional producers to strengthen their ability to satisfy wholesale, retail, and institutional demand."[6]

Food insecurity:
Having "limited or uncertain access to adequate food."[7]

Food security:
"Access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life."[8]

Food system:
Food systems encompass all "the people and resources involved in producing, processing, distributing and consuming food and managing waste."[9]

Healthy food access:

Refers to the physical and financial ability to acquire healthy food. "Access to healthy food means having a variety of affordable, good quality, healthy food within one's community."[10]

Proximity, variety of food choices, quality of food, and affordability are all components of healthy food access.

Intermediated market:

Intermediated markets "include all marketing opportunities in the local supply chain that are not farmer-to-consumer transactions." Farmers sell to outlets (e.g., food hubs, grocers, restaurants, schools, or hospitals) that in turn sell directly to consumers.[11]

Land trust:

Land trusts are entities that protect farmland as well as natural resources by acquiring or helping other organizations to acquire land or conservation easements.

Local Agency Formation Commission:

Local Agency Formation Commissions (LAFCO) are "local agencies that oversee the boundaries of cities and special districts with the goals of discouraging urban sprawl and preserving agricultural and open space lands."[12]

Local (or regional) food system:

Low et al. (2015, 1) define local and regional food systems as "place-specific clusters of agricultural producers of all kinds--farmers, ranchers, fishers--along with consumers and institutions engaged in producing, processing, distributing, and selling foods." The distinction between local and regional foods is not well defined, or consistently applied, so the terms are used interchangeably.[13]

New entry farmer:

A person who is interested in farming, "but not currently securely established in a farming career in the US." New entry farmers can be any age and have a range of previous farm experience (e.g., young people with little background in farming as well as middle-aged immigrants with many years of farming experience).[14]

Regional (or local) food system:

Low et al. (2015, 1) define local and regional food systems as "place-specific clusters of agricultural producers of all kinds--farmers, ranchers, fishers--along with consumers and institutions engaged in producing, processing, distributing, and selling foods." The distinction between local and regional foods is not well defined, or consistently applied, so the terms are used interchangeably.[15]

Resource Conservation District:

Resource Conservation Districts (RCD) are special districts of the State of California. As a special district, RCDs are locally governed bodies designed to help communities meet their resource conservation goals, including conserving soil and water. "California RCDs implement projects on public and private lands, and educate landowners and the public about resource conservation."[16]

Right-to-Farm ordinance:

Right-to-Farm ordinances are required disclosures for real estate transactions in agricultural areas that alert homebuyers to the potential impacts of locating near a farm.

Peri-urban:

On the outskirts of a city. Peri-urban areas are often described as a transitional zone that have characteristics associated with both urban and rural areas, and are subject to urban pressures.[17]

Secure land tenure:

Land tenure describes how land is held and includes both owning and leasing agricultural land. Clarity, predictability, affordability, and long-term access are elements of secure land tenure arrangements.[18]

Small-scale farm:

In this report, we focus our attention on nonprofit or for-profit agricultural operations producing crops and/or livestock in urban and rural areas on parcels ranging from 0.1 to 40 acres. Often small-scale farms are defined more broadly as farming operations outside traditional commodity-based agriculture, such as highly diversified farms, farms with value-added products or locally marketed produce, and/or farms operated by limited-resource, beginning, and socially disadvantaged farmers.[19]

Urban agriculture:

The production of food in an urban setting for personal consumption, education, donation, or sale and includes the associated physical infrastructure, organizations, policies, and programs.[20] Urban agriculture takes many forms and can include home gardens, community gardens, commercial farms, educational farms, and rooftop farms among others.

Urban Service Area:

An urban service area is a boundary line that delineates the area outside a city that can receive city services such as water, sewer, fire, and police.

Williamson Act:

"The Williamson Act protects agricultural land by providing tax incentives to property owners who agree to keep their land in agricultural production for a 10-year period. Enrolled lands are assessed based on their agricultural value rather than the market value."[21]

Viability:

When focused on economic returns, farm viability can mean that a farm generates an acceptable rate of return over an extended period of time. Conceived of more broadly, agricultural viability includes farmers' ability to: maintain or increase their profitability; to keep the land in agriculture long-term; and steward the land so it retains its productivity.[22]

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