

Cuyama Valley Community Action Plan



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Executive Summary

The Cuyama Valley Community Action Plan is the result of years of work - through outreach and research - that establishes both current conditions and reports back “next steps” for furthering economic opportunity, rural resilience, and quality of life for Cuyamans.

This Community Action Plan’s process has the goal of:

Identifying shared community values and desires;

Identifying opportunities for investment in the community’s individuals, businesses, and local organizations;

Communicating these community desires and opportunities for investment to elected officials and resource holders; and

Outlining clear next steps for implementing actions that improve the vitality and economic opportunity of the Cuyama Valley.

Detailed within this report are seven community development opportunities. Each has been identified as an area of opportunity for attention and investment; some are already being addressed by local champions, while others are a widely held concern of the Cuyama community but have yet to gain momentum in addressing their needs and opportunities. In no particular order of priority, Cuyama’s community development opportunities are as follows:

- A. Townsites beautification and wayfinding
- B. Food action network
- C. Economic opportunity development and job creation
- D. School system support
- E. Water/sewer infrastructure improvement
- F. Rural broadband
- G. Housing stock improvement through repairs and renovations

In the report that follows, each priority is detailed with background validation, interested parties, goals, and action steps identified. Over time, it is expected the goals and actionable steps will evolve as more is learned and as other interested parties and resources are brought forward.

These opportunities were determined by the Cuyama community. Reports produced by entities serving the Cuyama Valley, responses from a community-wide survey, direct feedback collected via community meetings, and one-on-one outreach to local residents and stakeholders all coalesce to inform and validate these community development opportunities. All of this information is provided either within the narrative of this report or as an appendix.

As an unincorporated rural area at the confluence of four distinct county jurisdictions, the 300-square-mile Cuyama Valley is not easily defined. A variety of methods were used to define for ourselves the opportunities within Cuyama and garner input to this plan. However, even as these methods favored inclusivity of all Cuyamans, a community is made up of individuals, with each of the estimated 1,100 Cuyama residents having their own history, role in the community, and dreams for Cuyama’s future. This report is presented in good faith, with a confidence of both having incorporated what is known as of now along with the realization that there remains missing voices, critical components, and an ever-changing future affected by internal and external forces beyond what could be confidently predicted while maintaining a focus of priorities that this Community Action Plan requires.

As you read and use this report, we invite you to join with us. Should you be a government official, resource holder, business manager, or interested individual, we hope you will contribute your time and energy through critical feedback, connection to resources, joining a working group, or becoming a Cuyama advocate wherever you live. We look forward to hearing from you.

Introduction

The Cuyama Valley is distinct in its location, culture, and desires. As a rural, unincorporated place primarily within Santa Barbara County (but also Kern, San Luis Obispo, and Ventura Counties), Cuyama Valley community members have worked with local and regional organizations to create this document. We intend to provide information, data, and perspectives directly from the Cuyama community to stakeholders, elected officials, and policymakers, to better inform decision making and resource allocation from a community that is relatively isolated and sparsely populated, while serving as stewards of a vast land mass of beauty, resources, and opportunities for investment. Our hope is that this document provides validated data and desires, filling in data gaps and supplanting obsolete or anecdotal narratives.

The work undertaken to create this report has been supported largely by the County of Santa Barbara (led by District 1 Supervisor Das Williams) and Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC), a regional not-for-profit technical assistance organization with years of history working with the Cuyama community. Additionally, the California Coalition for Rural Housing (CCRH), a not-for-profit statewide rural advocacy organization, contributed to the report, contextualizing the assessments herein within a broader, statewide rural narrative.

Enterprise Community Partners is a national organization

that receives allocations from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to be used to assist in building the capacity of not-for-profit organizations. Enterprise provided a \$30,000 grant for an 18-month period of performance to Blue Sky Center, a Cuyama not-for-profit organization, to cover the direct costs of research and outreach for this project.

Through that grant, Blue Sky Center performed the following tasks:

- coordinated **connections** to local and regional resource providers and stakeholders;
- hosted ten (10) **community meetings** that engaged 73 unique Cuyama residents (outlined in Public Process);
- created and collected a Valley-wide **community survey** of 63 questions covering economic opportunity, health, demographics, industry, housing availability, and livability (a copy of the survey and its results appear in the Appendix) - this survey collected 143 responses representing 42% of estimated households and 42% of the estimated population living in the Cuyama Valley;
- coordinated the compilation of this **Community Action Plan**; and,
- created and distributed a **resource directory** specific to Cuyama’s needs and desires.

For the purposes of this report, unless otherwise specified, “the county” references Santa Barbara County. When referencing Census data unless otherwise specified, the American Community Survey (ACS) for the most recently available year (2017) for Santa Barbara’s Census Tract 18 will be the point of reference as it encompasses most of the Valley, as geographically defined. Although four additional census tracts merge in the Cuyama Valley, they are less representative due to the percentage of the Cuyama Valley they contain and due to their creation having a focus on communities beyond the Cuyama Valley.

Public Process

The public process for the development of the Cuyama Valley Community Action Plan began in September 2018 with a meeting held in Santa Barbara at First District County Supervisor Das Williams' office with members of staff and directors of Blue Sky Center. With the award of an Enterprise Community Partners HUD grant later that month, Blue Sky Center released a request for proposals (RFP) seeking entities to co-lead a creative community engagement process that included traditional outreach methods of community meetings, stakeholder

interviews, and community surveying along with non-traditional on-the-ground and one-on-one engagement with residents who might not be able, or want, to attend community meetings. Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC) was selected in December 2018 as a consultant for this project. Both California Coalition for Rural Housing and Joal Stein were selected in August 2019 through a second RFP for consulting specific to the development of this Cuyama Valley Community Action Plan.

A summary of the outreach of this public process is as follows:

- Ten (10) public community meetings that engaged 73 unique Cuyama residents
 1. March 7, 2019 (English), 1 to 5 PM - Project kick-off meeting
Cuyama Valley Recreation District Montgomery Hall, New Cuyama - 25 attendees
 2. April 3, 2019 (English), 9 AM to 4 PM - Recharge Our Community Economy Session #1
Blue Sky Center, New Cuyama - 14 attendees
 3. April 4, 2019 (Spanish), 5 to 8 PM - Project kick-off meeting
Cuyama Valley Family Resource Center, New Cuyama - 13 attendees
 - 4/5. May 30, 2019/ June 1, 2019 (Spanish) - Recharge Our Community Economy Session #1
Cuyama Valley Family Resource Center, New Cuyama - 1 attendee
 6. May 31, 2019 (English), 9 AM to 4 PM - Recharge Our Community Economy Session #2
Blue Sky Center, New Cuyama - 13 attendees
 7. July 12, 2019 (English), 2 to 7 PM - Recharge Our Community Economy Session #3
Blue Sky Center, New Cuyama - 15 attendees
 8. July 13, 2019 (Spanish) - Recharge Our Community Economy Session #2
Blue Sky Center, New Cuyama - 3 attendees
 9. September 6, 2019 (English), 9 AM to 7 PM - Graduation
Cuyama Valley Recreation District Montgomery Hall, New Cuyama - 34 attendees
 10. December 12, 2019 (English), 1 to 3 PM - Cuyama Valley Action Plan Stakeholders' Meeting - Blue Sky Center, New Cuyama - 25 attendees
- A community-wide survey in English and Spanish in print and online that received 143 responses representing 42% of the estimated Cuyama households
 - Distributed by USPS to every post office box and both rural mail routes in the Cuyama Valley, July 2019 (460 addresses)
 - Drop boxes provided at five (5) Cuyama Valley locations: Blue Sky Center (New Cuyama), Cuyama Buckhorn (New Cuyama), Cuyama Post Office (New Cuyama), Do It Best Hardware (Cuyama), The Place (Ventucopa)
 - Bilingual online survey posted multiple times on Cuyama Strong Facebook group and Blue Sky Center Instagram account

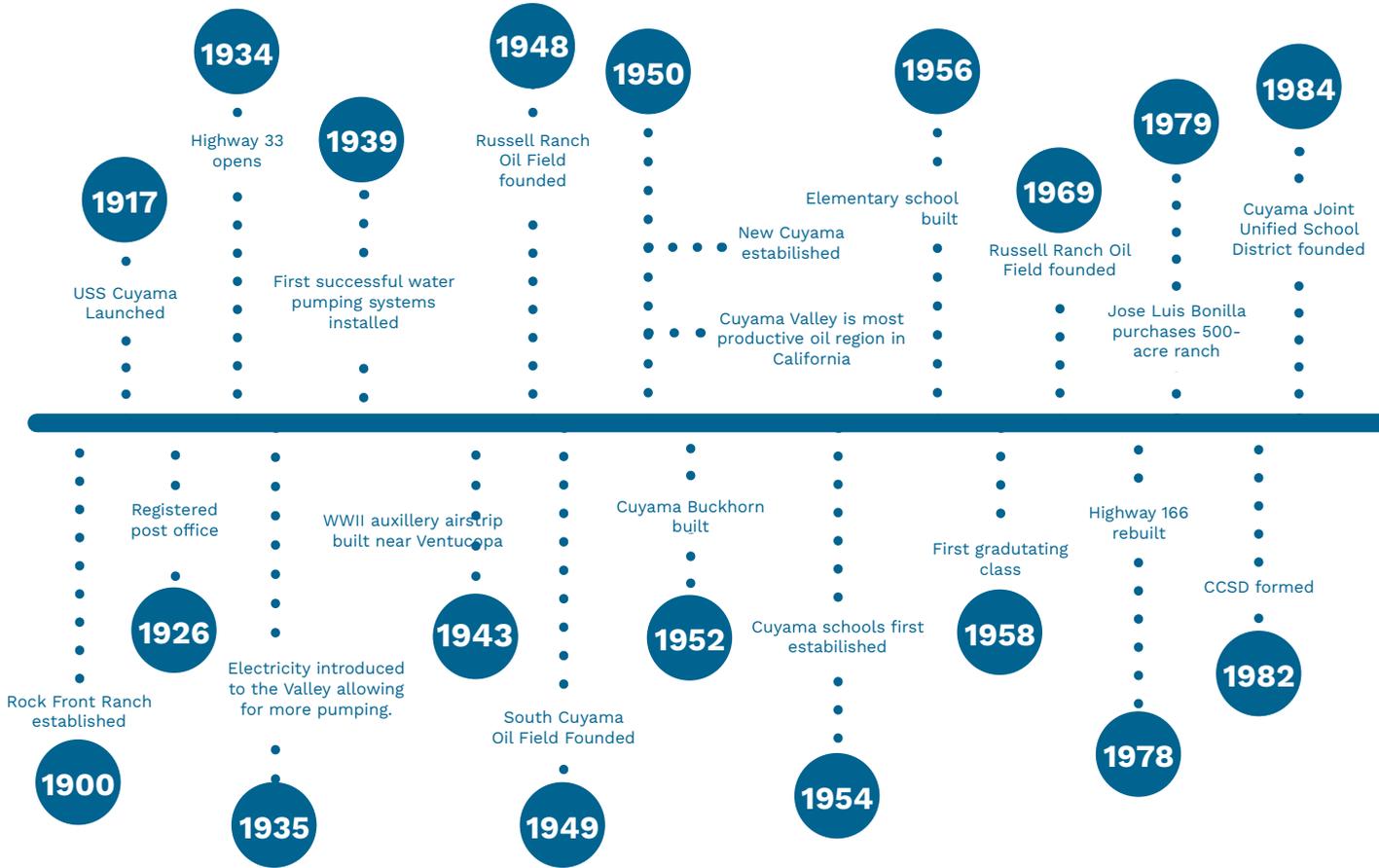
- Tabled at four (4) community events:
 1. August 17, 2019, 4 PM - Cuyama Exchange Club's Summer Fest
 2. August 30, 2019, 7 PM - Cuyama Valley High School football game
 3. September 1, 2019, 10 AM - Immaculate Conception Parish's Kermes event
 4. September 6, 2019, 7 PM - Cuyama Valley High School football game
- A casual barbecue dinner hosted at Blue Sky Center, New Cuyama, April 3, 2019, 6 PM - 25 attendees
- A community event hosted at Blue Sky Center, New Cuyama "Lunada" dinner and stargazing - May 31, 2019, 6 to 10 PM - 86 attendees
- Engagement with 29 unique organizations that have a stake in the success and understanding of the Cuyama Valley (county officials, statewide-serving agencies, higher education institutions, local organizations, resource providers, rural experts, and the like) through in-person discussions or visits to Cuyama, discussing Cuyama Valley issues at conferences
- Distribution of preliminary survey data and drafts of the Action Plan's proposed "next steps" at a Blue Sky Center Open House event on October 22, 2019, 3:30 to 6PM
- Two (2) one-on-one meetings with local residents discussing the Action Plan's proposed "next steps"
- Presentation of the draft Action Plan at five (5) existing community meetings and events:
 1. November 20, 2019, 6:30 PM - Cuyama Valley Community Association regular meeting, Cuyama Valley Family Resource Center, New Cuyama
 2. November 25, 2019, 5PM - Cuyama Joint Unified School District Advisory Committee regular meeting, Cuyama Christian Academy, New Cuyama
 3. December 8, 2019, 9 AM - Tabled at the Annual Christmas Bazaar at the Cuyama Valley High School, New Cuyama
 4. December 11, 2019, 7PM - Cuyama Community Services District board meeting, CCSD Offices, New Cuyama
 5. January 8, 2020, 6 PM - Cuyama Valley Exchange Club regular meeting, The Place, Ventucopa
- Artist-in-residence (photographer and conversationalist) Noé Montes made multiple trips throughout 2019 accounting for 36 days spent in the Cuyama Valley to photograph and interview residents about their histories in the Cuyama Valley, lead workshops within the schools, and develop an art exhibition and accompanying artist talks at the Bakersfield Museum of Art September 2019 through January 2020
- Panel discussion led by Blue Sky Center at Housing California's Annual Conference discussing issues of rural data gaps that result in under-resourcing rural communities like the Cuyama Valley: "Breaking Down Biases Affecting Rural California" - April 16, 2019, 10:45 AM to 12:15 PM - Sacramento, CA - 5 panelists, 78 attendees
- Attendance and Cuyama-focused discussions with attendees, officials, and resource holders at the San Joaquin Valley Housing Conference 2018, Housing California Annual Conference 2019, and Rural Housing Conference 2019



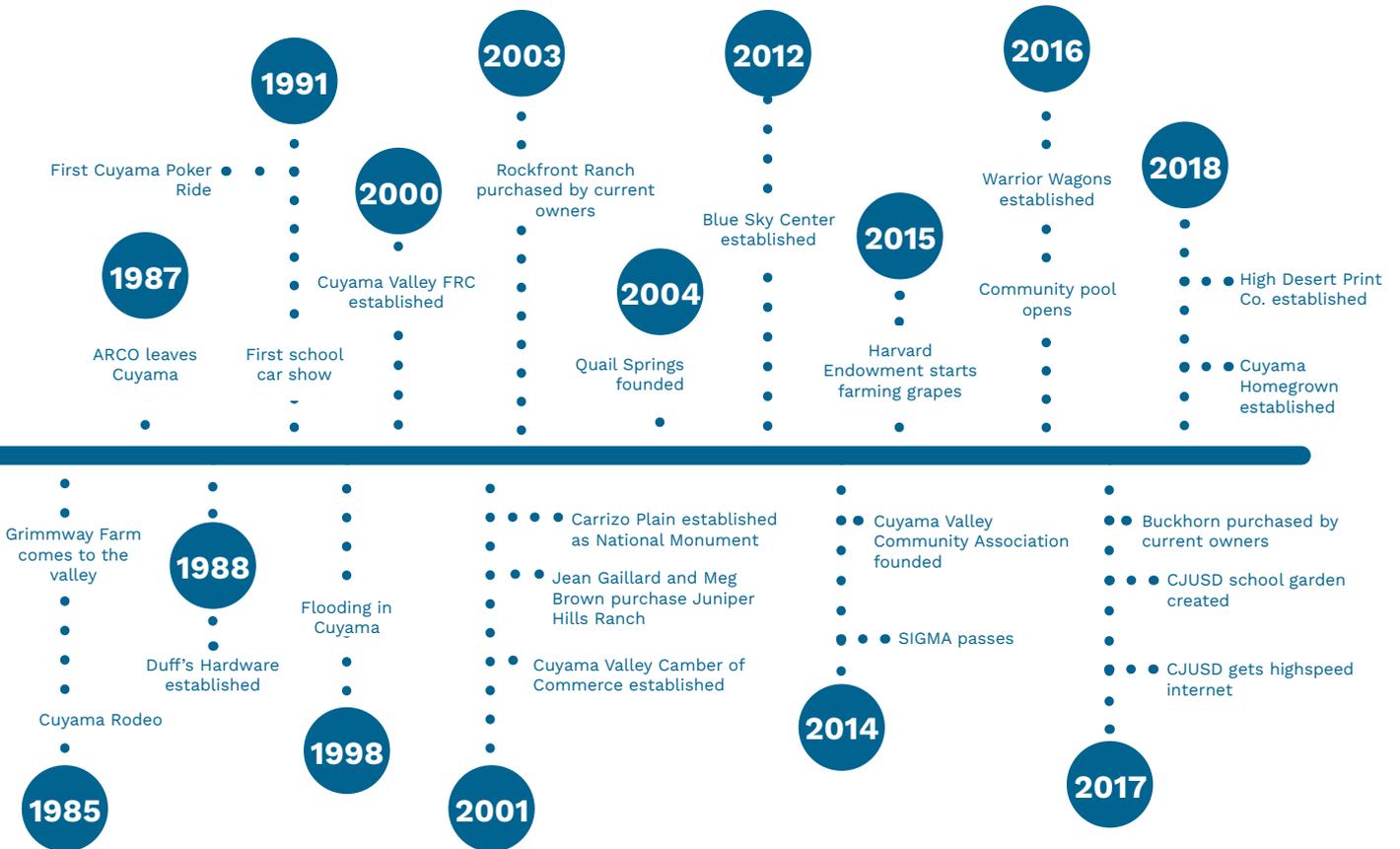
Definition of the Valley

HISTORIC DEFINITION

Cuyama is a Chumash word meaning “clam.” The Cuyama River (now dry most of the year) hosted these freshwater mollusks as evidenced in the fossil record. Since recorded history including Native use, the Valley was used as a thoroughfare, connecting the coast to inland, with sparse settlement. In the early 1800s, European and Mexican settlers divided the land into parcels to form two large ranches, using the land primarily for cattlegrazing. By the early 1900s, water pumps brought water from deep aquifers to allow for irrigated agricultural land. The townsites of Ventucopa and Cuyama were established. Oil was discovered in the late 1940s, and with that came Richfield Oil Company (now Atlantic Richfield Oil Company, or ARCO). ARCO built the townsite of New Cuyama (five miles west of Cuyama) in its entirety, including housing, infrastructure, commercial spaces, schools, and an industrial campus. By the 1960s and 1970s, the oil cache was proven less than anticipated. New Cuyama as a “company town” existed from 1950 to the late 1970’s, when ARCO finished selling off its ownership in the properties to private citizens and businesses. Many direct ARCO employees and ancillary business people that depended on ARCO left the Valley. New Cuyama continues to serve as a hub of activity for the Cuyama Valley, with about half of the Cuyama Valley population residing within the New Cuyama townsite. Agriculture and cattle grazing remain to this day a prominent land use. Of late, large industrial-scale organic farms (namely Grimmway Farms, Bolthouse Farms, and Russell Ranch) have become the largest landowners in the Valley to this day, collectively owning over 50% of the land in the Cuyama Basin Water District. With water pumped from below the land surface for almost all water needs, many smaller farms rely on watering best practices to reduce the amount of water needed to grow crops. Major agricultural exports are carrots, lettuces, onions, grapes, pistachios, olives, apples, hay, and cattle. Even as Cuyama is known primarily as a farming and ranching Valley based on land use, many Cuyamans make this valley their home outside of the agricultural sector.



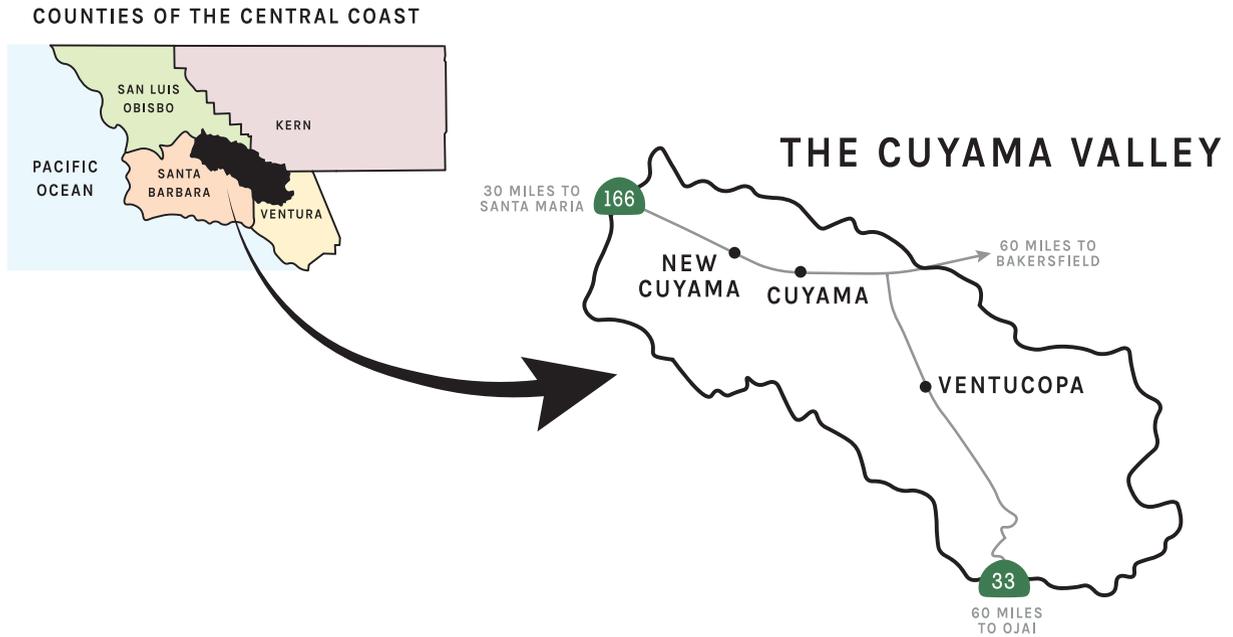
Attendees of RCAC’s Recharge Our Rural Economy workshop series created this timeline of significant historical events within the Cuyama Valley.



GEOGRAPHIC DEFINITION

The Cuyama Valley is defined primarily by its geography. With a land area of about 300 square miles, the extents are bound by the La Panza and Caliente Ranges on the north and northeast and the Sierra Madre Mountains on the south and west. These mountain ranges cause the high desert climate of the Cuyama Valley (at an elevation between 2,000 and 3,000 feet), which only receives on average about five inches of rain per year. The east-west California Highway 166 connects the Cuyama Valley to Santa Maria and the Pacific Coast on the west and the southern end of the Central Valley (Maricopa) on the east. California Scenic Highway 33 connects the Valley to Ojai and Ventura to the south, and Taft, to the north.

The Cuyama River follows the path of Highway 33 northwest then west to, eventually, the Twitchell Reservoir beyond the Valley. Most residents live in the Valley's lower elevations that the Cuyama River passes nearby, within the unincorporated townsites of New Cuyama (pop. 551), Cuyama (pop. 80), and Ventucopa (pop. 92). Many residents live on ranches and farms outside the townsites and into the foothills of the mountain ranges.



POLITICAL DEFINITION

Geographic boundaries make the most sense to the way Cuyamans talk about their home. Political, invisible boundaries, however, affect a Cuyaman's identity too. The Cuyama Valley is at the confluence of four counties: primarily Santa Barbara County, but also San Luis Obispo, Kern, and Ventura Counties. Depending on the location of your home or work, you are subject to different zoning and licensing, have access to different resources and elected representation, and may be suddenly eligible or ineligible from a neighbor across the street.

Census tracts are another way to identify the Cuyama Valley. At 1,160 square miles, Census Tract 18 in Santa Barbara County comprises most of the Cuyama Valley along with a significant area beyond the Valley. Of the 108 census tracts in Santa Barbara County, Tract 18 alone is 42% of the total land area of Santa Barbara County.

This tract is 362nd largest census tract in the country (which has a total of 74,002 tracts). That puts the Cuyama Valley's tract in the top 1/2 of 1% of the country based on land area. A large majority of the land is uninhabitable terrain - due to the mountains and due to it being federal land, namely the Los Padres National Forest. This national forest surrounds the Valley on the east, south, and west. To the north, the Valley is bounded by the Carrizo Plain National Monument. Santa Barbara's Census Tract 18 is home to 941 residents and 342 households, well below the optimum and minimum standards set by the Federal Register (minimums of 1,200 residents, 480 homes, 1,200 jobs). According to the Federal Register, areas not meeting these minimums "may not meet current analytical and policy development needs for statistically reliable data."

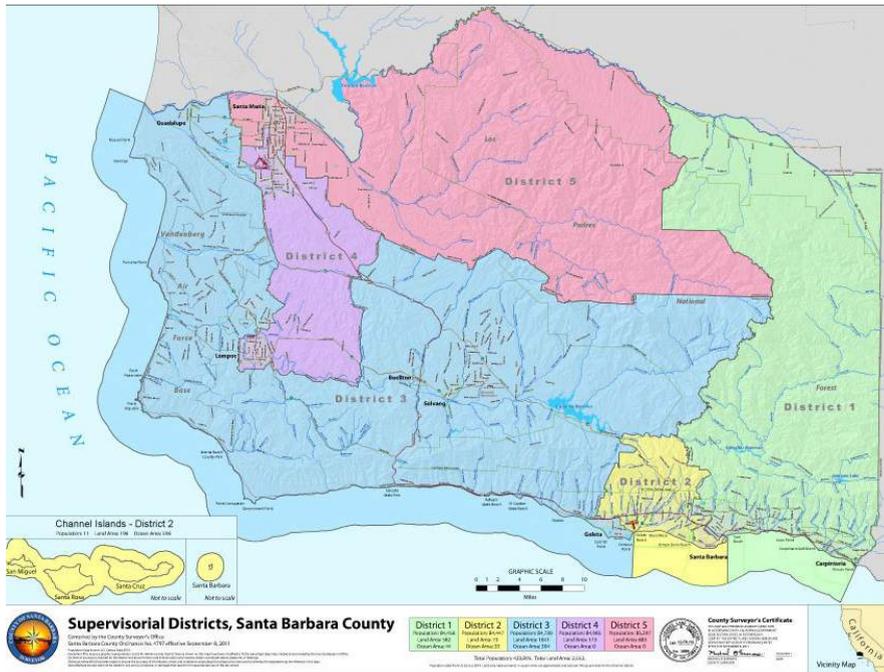
[Reference [TABLE 1](#)]



The area highlighted in yellow is US Census district Santa Barbara Tract 18, while the area overlaid in orange is the geographic boundary of the Cuyama Valley basin according to the Cuyama Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency.

Santa Barbara County is divided into five representational districts, each with an elected supervisor. The three townsites of the Cuyama Valley (New Cuyama, Cuyama, and Ventucopa) exist within the 1st District. The 5th district contains the western part of the Valley but is primarily known for encompassing and representing Santa Maria, the county’s largest city.

The 1st District contains Carpinteria, on the coast, along with Montecito, just outside of the city of Santa Barbara. A drive from the Cuyama Valley to the county seat in Santa Barbara - either west through Santa Maria or southeast through Ventura County and Ojai - takes about two hours, one way.



Supervisor Districts of Santa Barbara County. The townsites of New Cuyama, Cuyama, and Ventucopa - and most of the Cuyama Valley - are located in District 1 (shown in green), with the western smaller portion in District 5 (red).

SOURCE: Santa Barbara County Surveyor’s Office

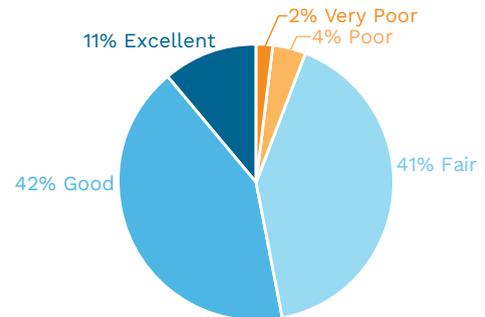
RESIDENT SELF-DEFINITION

Results from the 2019 Cuyama Valley Community Survey

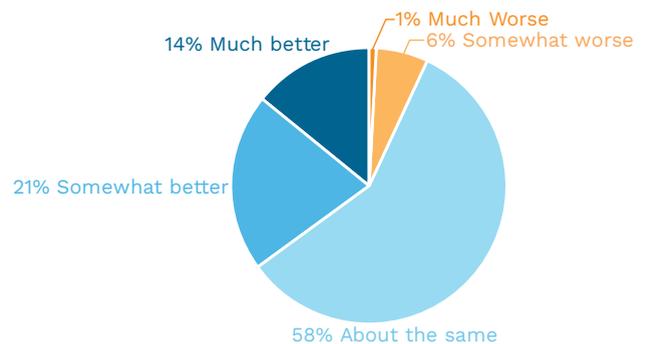
Beyond the historical, geographic, and political definitions of the Cuyama Valley, local residents have their own perceptions of opportunity within the Valley and their quality of life. In the summer of 2019, a Valley-wide survey of all residents was undertaken. Surveys were sent by USPS mail to every post office box and rural route mailbox; surveys were also available online and promoted regularly on social media; and staff attended community meetings and tabled at local events to solicit responses. By late fall of 2019, a total of 143 responses accounted for 393 residents, or 42% of the estimated population of the Cuyama Valley. A copy of the survey is included as an appendix to this report, as is a report that shows the collective answers to each question. In the section that follows here, results of many of the questions are presented in narrative and graphic form so as to provide a basis of understanding of the quality of life, residents perceptions, and self-reported opportunities for community and economic development.

The 2019 community survey indicated that 53% of respondents rated their quality of life as either “good” or “excellent,” with only 6% rating quality of life as “poor” or “very poor.” With a perspective of overall quality of life today as compared to a year ago, 58% rated it the same and 35% indicated a better quality of life; only 7% rated their quality of life as worse today than it was a year ago. As a tight-knit community, 63% of respondents stated that their relationships with people in the community were either “very important” or “extremely important.” As to the main reasons residents chose to live in the Cuyama Valley, 39% chose “rural” and 42% chose “quiet” in their top three selections from a list. Nearly 75% of respondents rated the Cuyama community as a good, very good, or excellent place to raise children, with only 4% rating it as a poor place to raise children.

How would you rate the overall quality of life in the Cuyama Valley?



How would you rate your current overall quality of life today, compares to a year ago?



One in three respondents indicated they would like to see the population stay where it is now, while another one in three would like it to double (to a population between 2,000 to 3,000). One in five indicated a desire to see the population rise to 3,000 to 4,000. Just 13% desired the population to grow to more than 4,000 residents.

The community survey garnered results from all ages and backgrounds. Significantly, 53% of the responses were from residents that had lived in the Cuyama Valley for over 15 years. Most of the responses came from New Cuyama (62%), the largest townsite in the Valley. Responses came from all across the community, including Old Cuyama, Ventucopa, Scheideck, and areas outside townsites along Highways 166 and 33.

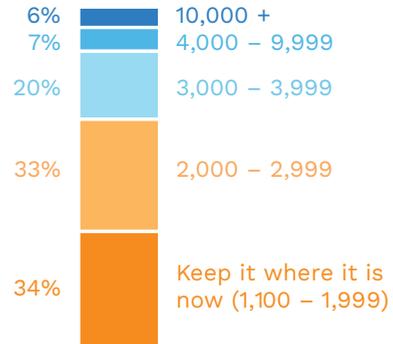
English was the primary language for 79% of households responding to the survey. Spanish as the primary language was 14%, with another 7% indicating both languages were used regularly. This tracked closely with a separate question which inquired if any member of the household has difficulty accessing resources due to a language barrier (in a community that publicly favors English fluency), with 15% answering “yes.”

Without public transit or rideshare companies serving Cuyama, of the working population, 60% drove their personal vehicle to get to work and 10% walked. Of those traveling to work, workers drive 27 miles (or 31 minutes) on average, ranging from 0 to 200 miles each way, with a median reported distance of 10 miles (or 15 minutes).

In total, one-hundred and thirty-two (132) respondents said that they live in the Cuyama Valley. Of that total, 78% of respondents said they work in Santa Barbara County, 3% of respondents said they work in San Luis Obispo County, 12% of respondents said they work in Kern County, and 7% of respondents said they work in Ventura County.

For those working in Santa Barbara County, the average

If the Cuyama Valley is to grow, to what population would you like to see it grow?



one-way commute for respondents was 21 miles or 24 minutes. For those working in San Luis Obispo County, the average one-way commute for respondents was 43 miles or 47 minutes. For those working in Kern County, the average one-way commute for respondents was 62 miles or 60 minutes. For those working in Ventura County, the average one-way commute for respondents was 4 miles or 6 minutes.

Of every response, not one respondent (0%) indicated they most often shop for groceries in New Cuyama (the location of Cuyama’s only market). Most people are driving an hour or more to Santa Maria or Bakersfield for regular grocery shopping, with responses showing that 85% of respondents do less than 10% of grocery shopping within the Cuyama Valley. Over 63% of respondents indicated they spend 30% or more of their monthly household budget on groceries; 65% of respondents indicated they make 90% or more of their meals at home.

Of respondents responding “yes” or “no” to the question about opportunities for young adults (post higher education) in the Valley,

96% of respondents say that there are not sufficient opportunities for young adults in the Valley.



Water quality and availability rated as the most important issue facing the Cuyama Valley in the next five years, with

75% of respondents rating water and sewer services as just “fair” or “poor.”



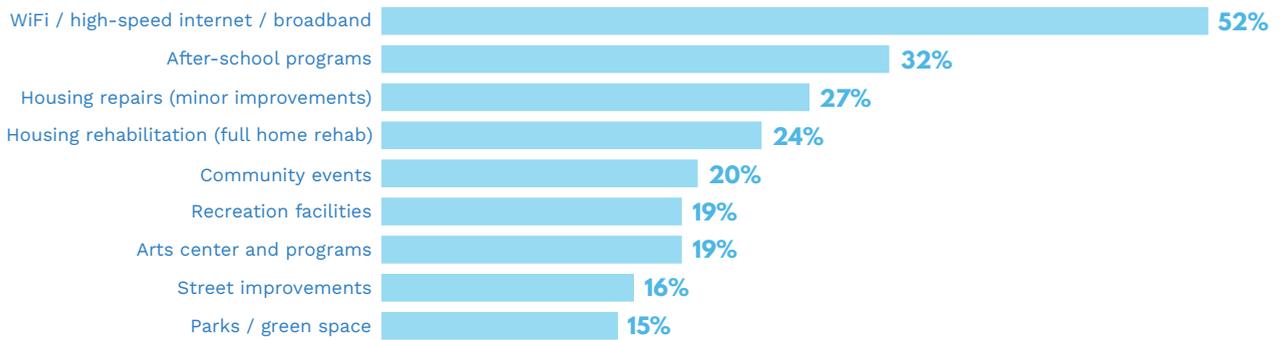
Street and sidewalk maintenance was rated by 68% of respondents as only “fair” or “poor.” Regarding roads, bridges, and public buildings,

79% responded that making improvements would be “somewhat” or “very helpful” toward improving the economy of the Valley.

Internet in rural communities is often unreliable or absent completely. One in four respondents indicated they have no internet access at home, with most that do have internet using their cell phone data for internet service. For a question that asked if there was money available for services, projects, or infrastructure that the respondent could direct funds toward, by far the

highest recipient from a list was high-speed internet/broadband, receiving 52% of votes from a list of 16 choices with an opportunity for respondents to choose their top three. A separate question reaffirmed this need expressed by respondents, with 44% stated their level of need for internet access as “very needed” and another 17% stating it was “somewhat needed.” Only 39% responded internet access was not needed.

If there was money available for services, projects, or infrastructure, what would you choose to direct those funds towards? (Check your TOP 3 choices)



Top three opportunities from a list of 16:

52% rural broadband

32% after-school programs

51% either housing rehabilitation or repair

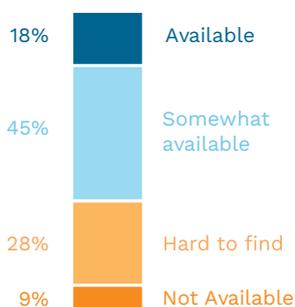
Beyond rural broadband internet, respondents indicated a need for investment in after-school programs (32%) and housing rehabilitation and repairs (24% and 27%, respectively). A majority of homes in the Cuyama Valley are three-bedroom (54% of responses); just 16% were homes with more bedrooms. Regarding what housing types residents are living in, 87% stated they lived in a traditional house, with another 7% indicating a mobile home (trailer). Under 2% of respondents indicated their housing type as multi-family (as in an apartment or duplex/triplex/fourplex). Just over 2% indicated they were currently living with family or friends, and under 2% were living in a “fifth wheel” (or other recreational vehicle). Under 1% indicated they were currently experiencing homelessness. (Responses from a separate question indicated 6% of respondents had experienced homelessness sometime within the past three years.) Regarding ownership, 63% of respondents owned their place of residence, 23% rented, and 14% neither owned nor rented. This is correlated to the Census data, which nearly matches with 66% owning and 34% renting. In answering a question that asked if housing availability was sufficient, 26% strongly disagreed and 33% disagreed (59% in total disagreed). Specifically, the availability of affordable, adequate

housing to buy, 18% rated it as “available” and 45% as “somewhat available,” with 37% rating housing to buy as “hard to find” or simply “not available.” But as to the availability of affordable, adequate housing to rent, just 9% rated it as “available” and 32% as “somewhat available,” with 59% rating housing to rent as “hard to find” or simply “not available.” A similar reinforcing response was found to the question of rating the condition of available housing, with 79% rating it as “poor” or “fair.”

When prompted a situation where Cuyama’s population grew, housing options of single family homes, multi-family homes/apartments, and affordable rental houses specifically were rated as a higher need than that of industrial, retail/commercial, agricultural, and recreational land/space; 56% of responses indicated single-family housing was “very needed” in the case of growth, 40% indicated multi-family homes were “very needed,” and 54% indicated affordable rental homes as “very needed,” all coming in at higher rates of need than the lower options of “somewhat needed” or “not needed.” When asked to rate the availability of affordable, adequate housing of any type to move into, 22% responded that housing was simply “not available” and 40% indicated it was “hard to find.” Only 7% rated affordable, adequate housing as “available.”

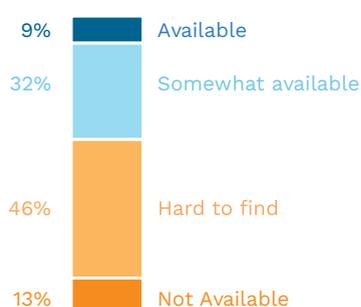
AVAILABILITY OF HOUSING:

House to buy

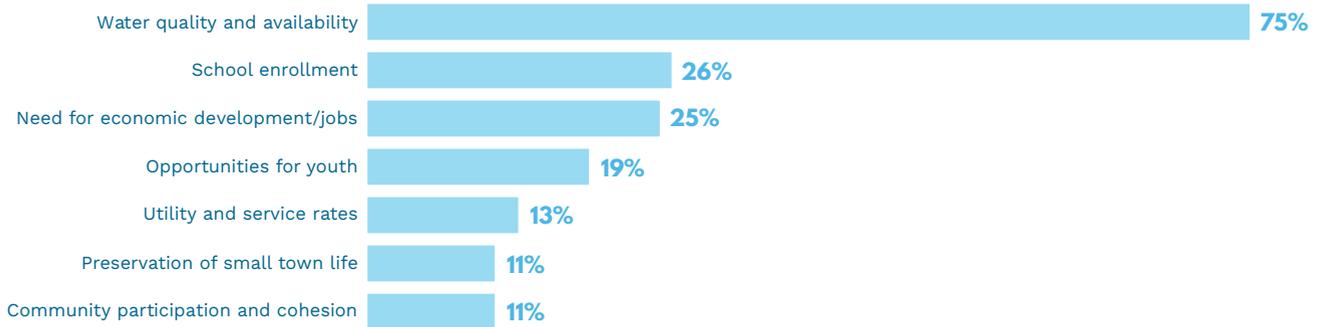


AVAILABILITY OF HOUSING:

House to rent



Which are the TOP 2 most important issues facing the Cuyama Valley during the next five years? (Check your TOP 2 choices)



Water quality and availability remains of high concern for Cuyamans, with 75% of respondents choosing it as a top two most important issue facing the Cuyama Valley in the next five years. The next highest response (school enrollment) was at 26%, followed by 25% expressing a need for economic development (jobs).

After water availability and school enrollment, the need for economic development and jobs was rated as most important by Cuyamans. Regarding the economy in the Valley, just 26% of respondents rated the Cuyama economy as “good” or “excellent.” With a perspective of the last five years, nearly half of respondents (47%) indicated the Valley has mostly stayed the same, with 21% saying it had gotten better and 32% saying it had gotten worse. On an individual household level, 52% rated their financial situation today - as compared to a year ago - as the same, 35% rated it as better, and 14% rated it as worse. This indicates a sense of inward optimism in that Cuyamans feel as though they are better off financially than the broader community. In terms of rating the local economy, 50% of respondents rated economic/job/skill-building opportunities as “poor,” with only 14% as “good” or “excellent.”

From the community survey, 17% indicated they were retired and 2% indicated they were a full-time student. Of the employed respondents, 50% were employed full-time, 21% part-time, 24% self-employed, and 4% seasonally employed. Most employed respondents (60%) worked solely in the Cuyama Valley, 21% worked both in and outside the Cuyama Valley, and 19% worked outside the Valley. Santa Barbara County was the location of primary work for 72% of employed respondents, followed by 11% working in Kern County, 7% in Ventura, and 3% in San Luis Obispo, with 7% working somewhere other than these four immediate counties. One in three (33%) of employed respondents worked for a for-profit company, 19% for a government entity, 22% were self-employed (including farm owners), and 16% worked for a not-for-profit organization (10% indicated an “other” type of employer). For employment tenure, 32% indicated they had worked in their present position for more than 10 years, 7% for 8-10 years, 17% for 4-7 years, 23% for 1-3 years, and 20% for less than a year.

DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS

Typical to California, the percentage of the population that are children in the Cuyama Valley is about a quarter (27%). The Census figures show that Cuyama is consistently below state averages for the age groups of 20 through 64, with a higher percentage for ages 65 to 84 (typically retiree ages). The Cuyama Valley Community Survey did not focus on respondents under 19 years of age, which skews the percentages for the respondent age groups. However, the bulk of the respondents (69%) were from the age groups of 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, and 65-74, which tracks with the Census estimates for three of the top four age groups (excluding those under 19 years). The only age group significantly underrepresented within the survey results otherwise is the 25-34 age group.

[Reference [TABLE 2](#)]

The Census estimates a current Hispanic or Latino/a/x percentage of total Cuyama population at 46%. Respondents from the community survey represented 36% of the responses. School enrollment (representing those age 5-18), however, exhibits a trend toward a more Hispanic or Latino/a/x population at 79% of the school enrollment (2018/2019 school year).

[Reference [TABLE 3](#)]

EMPLOYMENT, WAGES, & INCOME

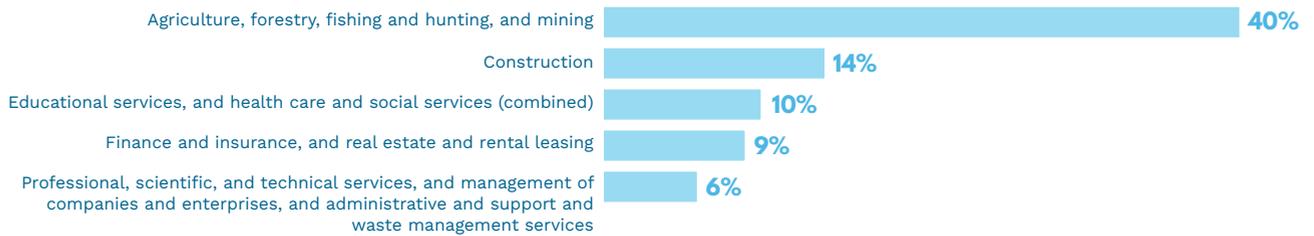
The Median Household Income (MHI), according to the Census, for the SB-18 census district is \$50,208. The respondents of the community survey represented a lower MHI at \$41,193. The categories for the community survey were based on federal (HUD) income classifications (using an estimated average household size of 4) for Santa Barbara County (HUD's narrowest income evaluations are county-wide, not by census tract). For the county of Santa Barbara, the median household income (of all family sizes) is \$79,600, much higher than the SB-18 census district. Of the community survey respondents, 81% reported gross annual incomes of less than \$80,300, which is classified by HUD's county-level classifications as "low income" (for a 4-person household), meaning that these households earn 80% or less than the median household income for the County of Santa Barbara. Just 6% of respondents indicated an annual gross income of \$80,293 to \$95,484 (a "moderate" income classification at 80-120% of county MHI), and 9% reported earning \$95,485 or more per year, considered "above moderate" (above 120% of county MHI). Because HUD's income classifications are a county level estimation, and because the Cuyama Valley primarily rests within the County of Santa Barbara (an affluent county), the results of the survey correlate with typical rural communities that are situated within a mostly urbanized and affluent county population.

[Reference [TABLE 4](#)]

The US Census estimates agricultural employment as the sector employing the most workers (at 40% of the working population 16 years and over). The community survey, however, resulted in a percentage of just 19% of total employed respondents working within the agricultural industry. The Census and the community survey have the top five industries as the following:

CUYAMA VALLEY'S TOP INDUSTRIES

Federal Census Data



CUYAMA VALLEY'S TOP INDUSTRIES

Community Survey Data



Beyond the agricultural sector, most other industries track closely between the Census estimates and the community survey, with the following exceptions:

- “Arts, entertainment, recreation, accomodation, and food services” has a Census estimate of just under 2% while the community survey has it at over 7%.
- “Educational services, health care, and social services” has a Census estimate of just under 10% while the community survey has it just over 19%.
- “Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing” has a Census estimate of 9% while the community survey has it under 1%.
- “Construction” has a Census estimate of just under 14% while the community survey has it just under 5%.

[Reference [TABLE 5](#)]

LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

The average enrollment from school years 1985/86 to 2019/20 is 281, with an all-time high (335) in school year 1993/94 and all-time low (193) in 2019/20. The past 10 years represents the lowest 10 years of enrollment recorded.

[Reference [TABLE 6](#)]

The ethnicity of students averages to 62% Hispanic or Latinx, 37% White (non-Hispanic or Latinx), and 2% combined other ethnicities (excluding 2009 and 2010 for data inconsistency). In the past eight years, Hispanic/Latinx students have increased to 79% of the total enrollment, White students have decreased to 19%, while combined other ethnicities remains at 2%. Decreasing nearly every year since the all-time recorded high of 177 White students in school year 1985, school years 2017 and 2018 represent an all-time low of White student enrollment at 34 and 35 students, respectively, while 2018 is the lowest since 1994 for Hispanic or Latinx student enrollment at 158 students (which peaked in 2005 with 231 Hispanic/Latinx students).

[Reference [TABLE 7](#)]

The Cuyama Joint Unified School District has a 2019 enrollment of 147 children (grades K-12, ages 5-18). Of the total, 56% are eligible for free or reduced meals. This eligibility is based on federal standards wherein children in households with incomes at or below 185% of the federal poverty level are able to receive free or discounted school breakfasts and lunches (schools are reimbursed for each meal served). In Cuyama, these are households with an income of \$47,638 or less per year (based on a family size of four; add/subtract \$4,420 for family sizes larger/smaller). Source: Federal Register, February 2019

[Reference [TABLE 8](#)]

Results from the Cuyama Valley Community Survey indicated that 85% of respondents agreed that higher school enrollment would benefit the entire community.

Rural Context

There is no single definition of what makes a rural community. At both the state and federal level, departments and programs use different and sometimes conflicting definitions of what constitutes a rural area depending on factors such as population density, population size, urbanization, commute distances, and land use patterns. The vastness of California's counties contribute to the difficulty of accurately capturing data on the demographics or investment patterns in rural areas, as many counties have both substantial urban populations and a sizable number of rural residents spread across a broad geographic area. Contradictory definitions across funding programs also make it difficult to focus investment. The three definitions used by the U.S. Census, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and California Tax Credit Allocation Committee are most relevant to housing development.



Cuyama Valley's Future

RURAL CALIFORNIA TRENDS

Statewide, California's population is growing. In the 2010 Census, the state gained population from 2000, as did nearly every county. Unlike many other states, California's rural communities and nonmetro counties have tended to gain residents as well. Between 1980 and 2018, the population living in Census-defined rural areas increased 68% compared to 60% across the state.¹ This growth is driven in part by immigration and high birth rates of immigrant families, particularly immigrants from Mexico. Rural California's Hispanic population is nearly 90% of Mexican origin, in comparison to 82% of California's population as a whole.² Rural California's population growth is also influenced by the movement of retirees and former urban residents seeking more affordable and less congested communities. Housing Assistance Council characterizes rural and small town areas based on housing density measures and Census tract level commute patterns. About 8% of Californians live in these types of communities. The rural and small

town residents are more likely to be over 60 years old, living in married households, and own their homes than the state as a whole.³ The majority of rural seniors desire to age in place, making healthcare access, transportation, and walkability even more critical factors for livability.

As California's affordability housing crisis reaches further into rural areas, however, there is also a growing trend of rural Californians moving out of state in search of a lower cost of living.⁴ Rural counties in California have higher poverty and unemployment rates than the state as a whole. People who live in rural California are more likely to be overpaying for housing whether they rent or own their home and are also more likely to live in substandard and/or overcrowded housing.⁵

1 USDA Economic Research Service State Fact Sheets

2 HAC Tabulations of the Census 2010 SF1 Population Counts accessed via Rural Data Portal

3 HAC Tabulations of the Census 2010 SF1 Population Counts accessed via Rural Data Portal

4 <https://www.next10.org/sites/default/files/2019-06/California-Migration-Final2.pdf>

5 HAC Tabulations of the ACS 2012-16 Economic Data accessed via Rural Data Portal

CUYAMA BASIN GROUNDWATER SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

In response to California's Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), the Cuyama Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency (CBGSA) was formed in 2017. The CBGSA is a joint-powers agency that is comprised of representatives from Kern, Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, and Ventura Counties, the Cuyama Community Services District, and the Cuyama Basin Water District. The main objective of the CBGSA is to begin implementing and monitoring a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) in January 2020 that will ultimately help this critically overdrafted basin to achieve sustainability by 2040.

Water extraction throughout the Cuyama Valley will need to be reduced in the coming years. The Groundwater Sustainability Plan will require pumping extraction fees for non-de minimis users - that is non-residential

users which pump more than 2 acre feet of water per year. While necessary to ensure the groundwater sustainability of the basin, the restrictions and fees on pumping will undoubtedly reduce the existing commercial agriculture in the valley. Under the current GSP, groundwater pumping will be reduced by 40,000 acre feet per year and irrigated acreage will contract by 11,300 acres by 2040. The CBGSA's continually increasing operating budget will be compounded by a decrease in agricultural value of \$261,000,000 in the Cuyama Valley Central Subbasin by 2040. As it currently stands, residents of the Cuyama Valley will have to adapt their current practices to comply with the GSP, and farmers and ranchers will have an increase in their annual overhead due to the implementation of extraction fees.

RECHARGE OUR COMMUNITY ECONOMY

Workshop Visioning the Future of Cuyama

In 2019, Cuyama Valley residents participated in community workshops led by Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC), in collaboration with the County of Santa Barbara and Blue Sky Center. Over the course of the four (4) workshops, a total of seventy-three (73) community members ranging from large to small business owners, farmers, school administrators, retirees, and community advocates addressed issues related to housing, economic strength, recreation, and culture. Through a common goal to improve and strengthen the economic environment, they identified local resources and value chains, which would focus on building a more self-reliant and robust community economy.

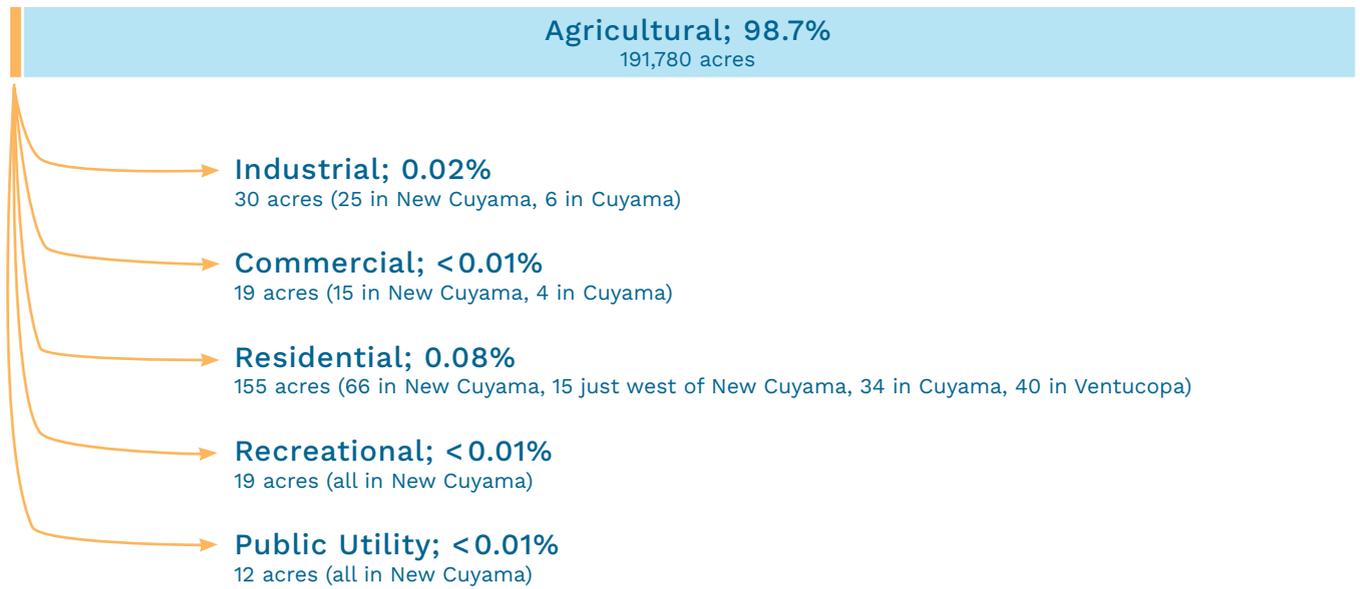
Three (3) community led groups formed out of the series, the first being a Town Beautification and Wayfinding group, which among many things is working on a map of the town and valley overlaid with available resources, be it recreational (Los Padres National Forest and Carrizo Plain National Monument), economic (The Place, Cuyama Buckhorn), health related (community health services), or service based (local contractors, electricians, plumbers, etc.). The town and valley map endeavors were born from a discussion about how local businesses could be promoted and visitors could become more aware of the resources and services available in the valley. The maps will be coupled with a resource directory for residents. Incrementally increasing New Cuyama's aesthetic appeal from the highway in order to boost exposure for local businesses and capitalize on passers-by has also been a main focus of the group. Second, is the Cuyama Food Action Network, focused on connecting local farmers directly to consumers as well as residents with businesses centered around value-added agricultural products. Much of the agriculture in the Cuyama Valley is transported out of the valley, which forces Cuyamans to drive substantial distances for healthy, affordable food options. The Cuyama Food Action Network seeks to eliminate the paradox of being surrounded by agriculture that is for the most part inaccessible to the residents that need it most. Finally, the Cuyama Swap Meet was conceived, organized, and executed by participants of the workshops. The intention of the organizers was to create a replicable event that could be coordinated by passionate community members and would both celebrate and promote local craftspeople. At the first event in September 2019, 131 people came by to visit thirteen (13) local vendors. This group is working to develop a community champion that will coordinate Cuyama Swap Meets at a regular interval.

ZONING BARRIERS & OPPORTUNITIES

The vast majority of the land of the Cuyama Valley is zoned as agricultural (specifically, AG-II-100, meaning that each parcel cannot be subdivided below a minimum size of 100 acres). Only within the three unincorporated townsites of New Cuyama, Cuyama, and Ventucopa are there any locations zoned as residential, commercial, or industrial.

Cuyama Valley (Santa Barbara County)

Total land area: 300 sq mi or 192,000 acres



In the Cuyama Valley, 99% of the land is zoned as agricultural. The lack of land now zoned for any use other than agricultural - along with the agricultural parcel subdivision restrictions - constrains opportunities for development, limiting the locations where homes can be built, businesses established, or production carried out. Additionally, with the townsites surrounded by AG-II-100 parcels, the opportunity to grow at the townsite boundary is restricted. Development, if it were to occur (and excluding land use changes), must therefore happen within the existing townsites.¹

¹ <https://www.arcgis.com/home/webmap/viewer.html?webmap=fa3545a29dac49ae-acc81669b956e3e5&extent=-120.9142,34.093,-118.9408,35.4355> (Choose "Content," then "Color-Coded Zoning")

HOUSING NEEDS

Rural housing development faces many obstacles, including cuts to the Federal rural housing budget, insufficient state and local funding, failing or absent infrastructure, a lack of developable land, lack of local government capacity to plan for and facilitate housing development and, in some cases, local resistance to affordable housing and government restrictions. Although some State funding programs have rural set-asides or targets, many state housing programs are designed for larger cities and disadvantage rural communities through their definitions of density and infill; measurements of distance to work or health care; inaccurate indices of opportunity or disadvantage; and infeasible local leveraging and staffing requirements. Rural communities are also disadvantaged by statistical measures that assess eligibility at the Census tract level. These difficulties combine to leave rural communities with a shortage of affordable and available units, underdeveloping housing, and more likely to be dealing with substandard, aging housing stock. Rural communities also face an incredible need for farmworker housing.

The County of Santa Barbara's 2015 Housing Element (a part of the county's Comprehensive Plan) document provides for an eight-year plan (through 2023). According to the document, it "contains housing goals, policies, and programs for the unincorporated areas of Santa Barbara County. The Housing Element is based on an assessment of the County's current and projected housing needs and provides an inventory of sites available for housing construction. It also details market, governmental, and environmental factors which may constrain housing production, and identifies actions to enhance housing production consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and state housing element law."

As a 100% unincorporated area, the Cuyama Valley is subject to the jurisdiction of the four counties it resides in. Within Santa Barbara County, the Housing Element describes a housing need for unincorporated areas that it proposes is - at least in part - is resolved by locating new housing development within the Cuyama Valley. Cuyama is one of five "housing market areas," defined as "a geographic area that generally provides the social and economic services to the community and provides its population with facilities such that commuting to another housing market area in order to work or shop is elective. The boundaries of the HMAs are based on the County Census Divisions." The county's plan explains that the "Cuyama HMA provides the most affordable housing units largely because it is an isolated rural farming community."

The Housing Element included a public participation process in 2014 of public meetings (planning commission meetings, board of supervisors meetings, and stakeholder meetings, and public workshops) and an eight-question housing survey. All but one of the public meetings were held at the county offices in the city of Santa Barbara (one workshop was in Santa Maria). The housing survey received a total of 51 responses, nine (9) of which were coded as "from North County" (of which Cuyama would be considered).

The Housing Element proposes the placement of new housing to meet

affordable housing needs within unincorporated areas of the county. Nine (9) such vacant, available sites for new housing development are identified within the townsite of New Cuyama (SBC Housing Element Map B-17) and twenty-one (21) sites are identified in Cuyama (SBC Housing Element Map B-16). (Certain sites may be able to accommodate multiple units of housing on a single lot.) As the plan states, “sites located within the Cuyama HMA are anticipated to accommodate an additional 60 units affordable to very low and low-income households based on exceptionally low median home sales prices in this area.” (SBC Housing Element p. 6-10)

However, 60 units of housing within eight years would be a dramatic change for Cuyama, increasing the total number of homes by 18% (currently estimated at 342 homes in the whole valley). The capacity of the infrastructural services is a concern, as is - from the community - who would live in these new houses. There is colloquially - and from direct experience - an existing need for housing for existing residents as children grow up and want to stay or as families expand. There is a need for community outreach to allay any concerns about who the new housing units would be developed for and to help in the design of any new units so that they fit the cultural context and needs of the current and potential future population.

From the Cuyama Valley Community Survey, housing repair and housing renovation rose to the top of responses as community desires (as quantified earlier in this report). Due primarily to distance from resource providers and traditional financing (banks) along with licensed contractors that charge higher rates or decline jobs in Cuyama, housing units in Cuyama are susceptible to deferred maintenance. Additionally, the majority of the houses were built (in 1951-1953) for smaller family unit sizes than currently exists today, resulting in conversions of garages and porches to bedrooms. These immediate local concerns are echoed in a broader North County context with the county’s 2015 Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice reporting, “In North County, focus group participants expressed concern over the condition of affordable housing and the shortage of affordable housing to accommodate larger families” (p. 10). Additions and renovations that may not have followed the cumbersome process of building permitting and inspection result in uninspected spaces that are more likely to be dangerous and unhealthy. These factors serve to negatively affect housing durability in the long term.

According to the New Cuyama Housing Assessment (2017), 76% of homes in the New Cuyama townsite were in need of minor or major repairs, with an additional 5% in need of complete rehabilitation. The same report used historical and county records to quantify that 94% of homes were built between 1950-1953, putting virtually all houses with an age of near 70 years old. The New Cuyama Home Value Report (2018) followed up with more data and analysis from publicly available housing sales information, indicating an average Cuyama home sales price in 2018 at \$98,667.

Resources that provide incentives and financing for the improvement of existing housing or the development of new housing are available due to the county’s designation of Cuyama as an area of both housing need and opportunity. One example is the Santa Barbara County’s Inclusionary Housing Ordinance (IHO), which “reduces costs by contributing funds from the pool of in-lieu fees collected from market rate developments to help subsidize affordable housing projects. The in-lieu fees are pooled with state and federal funds, including Community Development Block Grant (CDGB) funds, to help offset development costs.” (SBC Housing Element p. 3-7/8). However, to date, neither the IHO funds or other governmental resources (such as the Low-income Housing Tax Credit [LIHTC] program) have been deployed within the Cuyama Valley. Beyond a lack of local or regional housing developer interest, a barrier to the use of such funds is the very rural nature of Cuyama and an unclear definition of community need and desire to warrant new construction of multi-unit developments. The findings of the 2019 Cuyama Valley community-wide survey indicate a preference for single-family housing. Within the Action Plan’s “next steps” detailed below, there is an opportunity to further identify barriers and opportunities for affordable workforce housing along with a public engagement process to define need and desire for what type of housing - if any - is appropriate. From the community survey and outreach process, it is clear that a large majority (66%) desire population growth for the Cuyama Valley, 60% of respondents indicated housing availability was either “hard to find” or simply “not available,” and 70% rated the condition of available housing as either “poor” or “fair.” Even for current conditions - and certainly in any scenario of population growth - some housing is going to need to be built.



Next Steps / Implementation

The process undertaken to date has led to community consensus on some tangible strategic outcomes we as a community collectively seek. Concurrent outreach and planning over the course of 2019 - led by Rural Community Assistance Corporation and the County of Santa Barbara District 1 Supervisor's Office - has also helped to identify both community-aligned projects and interested stakeholders to lead those projects. Each desired implementation step is provided below, with identified goals, strategies for meeting those goals, and stakeholders. The community development opportunities, in no particular order of priority, are as follows:

Townsites beautification and wayfinding

Food action network

Economic opportunity development and job creation

School system support

Water/sewer infrastructure improvement

Broadband internet

Housing stock improvement through repairs and renovations

PRIORITY A: TOWNSITES BEAUTIFICATION AND WAYFINDING

Rationale: Tourism to the Cuyama Valley results in income to the community businesses from outside sources. Providing a welcoming atmosphere through physical improvements to the roadsides, marketing the Valley's amenities, and connecting visitors to local businesses result in a return on investment for local businesses, individuals, and organizations.

Goals:

- Increased consumer spending in the Cuyama Valley.
- Increased tourism in the Cuyama Valley.
- Sustained revenue for Cuyama communities.
- Increased community pride.
- Increased involvement in workshops from community members.
- Improve quality of transportation infrastructure (roads, sidewalks, trails) and increase maintenance schedules.

Strategies:

- Hold regular monthly meetings with the established Tourism Value Chain working group to establish, refine, and meet goals.
- Report out on progress made at monthly CVCA meetings.
- Plan and execute short, medium, and long-term goals for community beautification projects along CA 166 and CA 33 that improve Cuyama's visibility and attract people to stop, shop, and explore what our Cuyama Valley communities have to offer.
- Develop community wayfinding (signage, maps, possible visitors' center) for the Cuyama Valley.
- Market local businesses and craftspeople by - for example - hosting periodic Cuyama Swap Meet events and featuring locally made work in retail shops.
- Improve awareness of and access to local businesses and services by developing and keeping updated a community directory.
- Develop partners, attract funding, and implement projects.

Responsible parties: Cuyama Valley Community Association (CVCA), Cuyama Buckhorn and other local hospitality-focused businesses, County of Santa Barbara District 1 Supervisor's Office, Economic Vitality Team of Santa Barbara County, County of Santa Barbara Arts Commission, County of Santa Barbara Conference and Visitors Bureau

PRIORITY B: FOOD ACTION NETWORK

Rationale: The Cuyama community is classified as a “food desert” (as defined by the US Department of Agriculture’s Food Access Atlas) meaning that residents must travel a significant distance to the nearest supermarket. Yet, Cuyama grows a significant amount of food for export to other communities across the nation, with many small and medium size farms and ranches able and interested in supporting a local food network to both provide fresh food to Cuyamans and building their own revenue sources (such as agro-tourism) to help sustain their operations.

SOURCE: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/go-to-the-atlas/>

Goals:

Improve access to food for all Cuyamans.

Market Cuyama Valley raw and value-added products to a wider regional audience.

Support small and medium size farms with technical assistance and best practices training.

Strategies:

Hold regular monthly meetings with the established Food Action Network Value Chain working group to establish, refine, and meet goals.

Connect local producers to buyers and processors to distributors through community investment, network capacity building, and Cuyama Valley product branding and distribution.

Outline opportunities, partnerships, and a step-by-step pathway for a more resilient food system, such as:

- increasing agro-tourism,

- developing a community food market,

- increasing classes that focus on growing and preparing food, and/or

- developing a farm to demonstrate agricultural best practices and job training curriculum.

Bring in a technical assistance provider to implement a model in the Cuyama Valley.

Build leadership development pathways for our Latinx community.

Gain input from our community youth.

Connect with “Big Ag” producers for investment and resources.

Define unique data on livelihood and opportunities for farm workers.

Support the local school garden and school district initiatives.

Identify the opportunities and barriers to establish a local grocery store or other type of food commons hub.

Responsible parties: Local farmers and ranchers, Blue Sky Center, Cuyama Elementary School Garden, Santa Barbara Food Bank, Santa Barbara County Food Action Network, White Buffalo Land Trust, USDA Rural Development

PRIORITY C: ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JOB CREATION

Rationale: Well-paying, stable jobs are a cornerstone of a local economy. Opportunities for advancement within positions provides for stability and higher incomes over time for workers.

Goals:

Increase the quantity, quality, and diversity of jobs in the Cuyama Valley.

Expand vocational and agricultural training within the local school system.

Strategies:

Develop more vocational training curriculums within the local school system.

Connect workforce members to resources for adult education and training (GED, ESL, workforce development) opportunities.

Start, nurture, and expand local businesses and entrepreneurs that are developing value-added products and systems that support Cuyamans and celebrate the Cuyama Valley.

Carry out and support the “Start, Grow, Revive Your Business” curriculum from RCAC and its partners that supports local businesses and entrepreneurs through technical assistance.

Review potential zoning amendments for increasing economic opportunity.

Responsible parties: County of Santa Barbara District 1 Supervisor’s Office, Small Business Administration, Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC), US Department of Agriculture (USDA), US Department of Labor (DOL), US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Blue Sky Center

PRIORITY D: SCHOOL SYSTEM SUPPORT

Rationale: The local school system is the backbone of the local community. Without a robust and attentive school system, families will move away thereby depleting the population and decreasing vital community event opportunities.

Goals:

Increase school enrollment at Cuyama Joint Unified School District.

Increase diversity of the school curriculum.

Retain quality school teachers, staff, and administrators.

Create new earned revenue streams.

Strategies:

Establish a local working group.

Work to make Cuyama a more attractive place for young families.

Support opportunities for parent/guardian involvement within the school system.

Support school teacher and staff professional development.

Identify student desires for curriculum content.

Responsible parties: CJUSD, Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), Cuyama Booster Club, FFA and other student clubs, Cuyama Valley Exchange Club (CVEC), District Advisory Committee (DAC), and others

PRIORITY E: WATER/SEWER INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENT

Rationale: Water quality and availability rated as the most important issue facing the Cuyama Valley in the next five years.

Goals:

- Support water systems in Old Cuyama and Ventucopa.
- Create back-up systems for the water/sewer system in New Cuyama (back-up power and a second well).
- Improve domestic water systems and delivery infrastructure throughout the Valley.

Strategies:

- Support CCSD's efforts to develop infrastructure back-up/redundancy systems.
- Assess leaks in current system and replace portions as needed.
- Replace water meters (including the service line).
- Replace portions of distribution pipelines.
- Complete a leak detection study.
- Repair/replace water tanks.
- Replace chlorine and ferric chloride pumps and gauges (for arsenic removal).

Responsible parties: Cuyama Community Services District, RCAC-Environmental Department, County of Santa Barbara District 1 Supervisor's Office, Santa Barbara County Public Works Water Resources Water Agency, Integrated Regional Water Management, Department of Water Resources, California State Water Resources Control Board and Division of Drinking Water (DDW)

PRIORITY F: BROADBAND INTERNET

Rationale: More than half of respondents indicated their preference to direct funds to improve internet access and speed.

Goals:

- Bring in reliable communications infrastructure including fiber, licensed microwave systems, etc.
- Bring in permanent network infrastructures.
- Bring rural broadband to the Valley for all residents.

Strategies:

- Coordinate with the Cuyama Joint Unified School District and the Kern County Superintendent of Schools in continuing to make progress on the telecommunications tower located at Cuyama Valley High School.
- Identify a telecommunications or public entity partner.
- Explore grant funding options through USDA and the California Public Utilities Commission.
- Communicate the Cuyama Valley's need for broadband infrastructure to the Broadband Consortium of the Pacific Coast.
- Consult Caltrans to more efficiently install broadband infrastructure.

Responsible parties: County of Santa Barbara District 1 Supervisor's Office, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Broadband Consortium of the Pacific Coast, California Public Utilities Commission, Cuyama Joint Unified School District, Kern County Superintendent of Schools, Applied Technology Group, Digital West, Caltrans

PRIORITY G: HOUSING STOCK IMPROVEMENT THROUGH REPAIRS AND RENOVATIONS

Rationale: Housing availability and affordability are requirements for supporting a vibrant and diverse local population. Cuyamans expressed their desire for support programs that improve the quality, durability, and efficiency of the existing homes within the Valley. Any growth in the housing stock will support local businesses, organizations, and provide more students for the local school system (see Priority D).

Goals:

- Improve the existing housing stock of Cuyama.
- Improve housing affordability.
- Identify and mitigate access barriers within the Cuyama Valley.
- Improve awareness of and access to available housing resources by developing and continuing to update a housing resource guide.

Strategies:

- Review potential zoning amendments for future development.
- Utilize available resources such as the USDA housing preservation grant and single-family housing repair loans and grants.
- Consider developing a Cuyama Valley community land trust.
- Work with the county to develop legal non-conforming standards specific to the Valley.
- Work with the county to reduce permit processing periods.
- Raise awareness of new state legislation and improve understanding of accessory dwelling units (ADU's).
- Preserve as well as encourage any new construction projects within New Cuyama to conform with the mid-century design aesthetic that currently exists.
- Hire a local project manager to work with, or for, the Santa Barbara County Department of Housing and Community Development.

Responsible parties: County of Santa Barbara Long-Range Planning Department, County of Santa Barbara District 1 Supervisor's Office, Santa Barbara County Department of Housing and Community Development, Rural Community Assistance Corporation, Blue Sky Center, USDA Rural Development (502 and 504 home loan/grant programs), GRID Alternatives (solar installation), Self-Help Enterprises, People's Self-Help Housing, U.S. Department of Labor, Habitat for Humanity, county-based Community Action Commissions/Partnerships, and more

Conclusion

This Cuyama Valley Community Action Plan - through its depth of study, research, and community involvement in its process - is best used going forward as a road map. Coming from the voice of Cuyama, this report can be used as a validated source of data and consensus, communicating to elected officials, stakeholders, and resource-holders our shared intentions and desires for which we seek support. Each action item outlined above will require the development of local champions to create and keep momentum that results in real change that can only be accomplished through duration. Some items are already underway, with active working groups meeting regularly. Some items need more definition and Cuyamans to take up the mantle; this too may take time. Each action item is shown as a snapshot in time of “here and now”; in the coming months and years, conditions will inevitably change to affect what short, medium, and long-term goals should be worked toward. By first working together as a community and recognizing our own Cuyama expertise, we have the opportunity to bring in advocates and resources that further our own community goals, directing county and state resources and political will toward the priorities we have established together, based on the facts and conditions we have self-documented. As a remote, rural community, we have the abundance of the Cuyama Valley to draw from to work together despite our surface-level differences, engaging in the debate and compromise of a true civil society that values what we each can bring to the table.

Ideally, this Cuyama Action Plan can serve its highest purpose of coalescing the Cuyama community to do as we’ve always done: work together to improve the quality of life for all of our neighbors.

Acknowledgements

Use of this report:

This report may be referenced, directly quoted, or included as an appendix by anyone.

Survey limitations:

A community-wide survey inherently depends on those that respond to inform the results. With a 42% response rate (based on estimated total households, and assuming one survey submitted per household, as was instructed) and the breadth of ages, ethnicities, and general self-reported locations that responded, the authors feel the respondents represent closely the on-the-ground perceptions of the make-up of the Cuyama Valley's residents. Surveys were mailed through USPS's Every Door Direct Mailing (EDDM) to every post office box and mailbox within the Cuyama Valley, with the opportunity to return the surveys anonymously both by mail or at drop boxes across the Valley. Additionally, the surveys (both in English and Spanish) were available online via Survey Monkey. Regular Facebook posts on the community forum encouraged participation and staff attended community meetings and gatherings to encourage response and provide assistance. No personally identifying information was included within the surveys. For those surveys completed online, no location-identifying information was collected. Human error is possible for both the entry of the data and the representation of the data as it is translated from physical to digital and across platforms. Anonymized survey data and graphic representations - in the form of Excel and Adobe Illustrator files - are made available by written request, and requests approved for the purposes of research and community advocacy.

Participating Entities:

The District 1 Supervisor's Office of the County of Santa Barbara provided direction for this project and participated in the process. More at countyofsb.org.

Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC) is a nonprofit that provides training, technical and financial resources and advocacy so rural communities can achieve their goals and visions. RCAC provided direct technical assistance for this project. More at rcac.org.

Since 1976, California Coalition for Rural Housing (CCRH) has been working to ensure affordable housing opportunities for low-income and rural households. CCRH contributed as a co-author to this report. More at calruralhousing.org.

Blue Sky Center (BSC) is a rural, place-based nonprofit organization with the mission to strengthen our rural communities within the Cuyama Valley by supporting entrepreneurs and building our regional creative and economic resources. We envision resilient, thriving, and inclusive rural economies. BSC coordinated this project, served as the primary author of this report, and served as the fiscal sponsor for this project. More at blueskycenter.org.

AmeriCorps VISTA national service members serve as a catalyst for change, living and working alongside community members to meet our nation's most pressing challenges and advance local solutions. VISTA members - hosted by Blue Sky Center - provided capacity building service for this project. More at nationalservice.gov.

Enterprise Community Partners (ECP) has a mission to create opportunity for low- and moderate-income people through affordable housing in diverse, thriving communities. ECP provided the pass-through funding for this project along with technical assistance to Blue Sky Center. More at enterprisecommunity.org.

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Inquiries, questions, or feedback can be directed to Blue Sky Center, 1000 Perkins Road, PO Box 271, New Cuyama, CA 93254, hello@blueskycenter.org.



Appendices

- A: [Reference Tables \(2020\)](#)
- B: [Summary of the Cuyama Valley Community Plan Survey Results \(2020\)](#)
- C: Cuyama Valley Community Plan Survey (as released) - [Cover Page](#) / [English](#) / [Spanish](#)
- D: [Made in Cuyama Report \(2019\)](#)
- E: [New Cuyama Housing Assessment \(2017\)](#)
- F: [New Cuyama Home Value Report \(2018\)](#)
- G: [Housing Element, Santa Barbara County \(2015\)](#)
- H: [Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing, Santa Barbara County \(2015\)](#)
- I: [Direct Economic Impact Analysis of the Cuyama Groundwater Basin Groundwater Sustainability Demand Management Program \(2019\)](#)
- J: [Cuyama Water Census, Casey Walsh, UC Santa Barbara \(2020\)](#)

All appendices are available online at blueskycenter.org/action-plan.

