

Community Guide for Los Angeles County

This guide maps the community food systems in Los Angeles County and provides information on how to support them during the economic dislocation caused by Coronavirus

A community food system is one in which sustainable food production, processing, distribution and consumption are integrated to enhance the environmental, economic, social and nutritional health of a particular place (Garrett and Feenstra, 1999). Many farms connect directly with their communities at farmers' markets and through Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs), or form relationships with local restaurants and institutions committed to supporting the community's combined needs for a healthy diet and sustainable growing practices. These direct connections help make farming practices and consumer needs transparent, building a more just food system that meets the needs of ecosystems, farmers, farmworkers, and consumers.

The coronavirus pandemic has magnified inequality across the food system, highlighting the need to support the food insecure, homeless, jobless and essential workers. One in six Americans work somewhere in the food system, from the farm to the kitchen. As grocery store shelves have gone empty and some items are rationed, the community food system is reorienting to fill new gaps.

The Los Angeles County community food system has undergone drastic changes. From 1910 to 1950, Los Angeles County was the top agriculture producing county in the country. Urban development has replaced farms, but Los Angeles is still a place where chefs get their big break, farms innovate and urban gardeners fight for food justice.



Tapia Brothers Farm in Encino, CA. Photo: Rachel Surls.

Find out what your community food system looks like and how to support it!

The Los Angeles County Community Food System

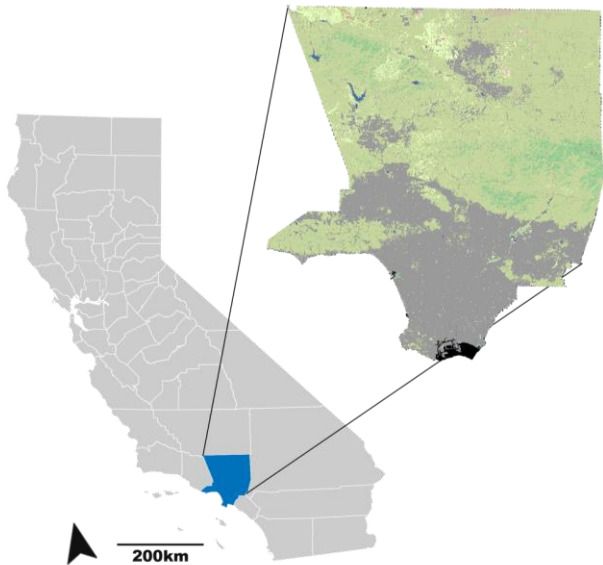
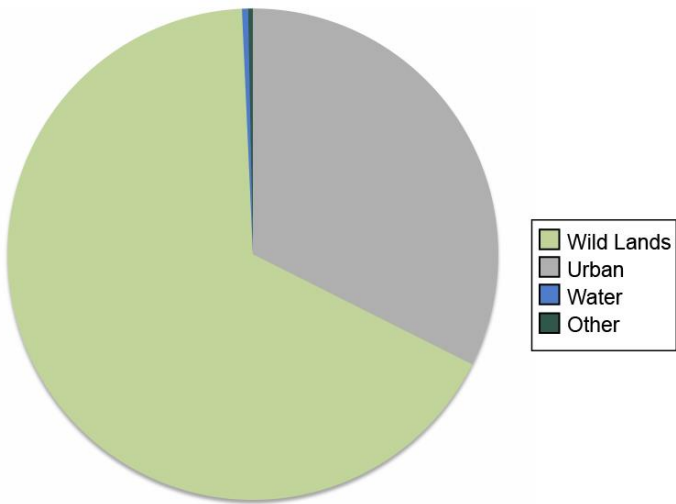


Figure 1. Los Angeles County land use. Data source: land-use satellite imagery from the National Agricultural Statistics Service
Los Angeles County Land Use

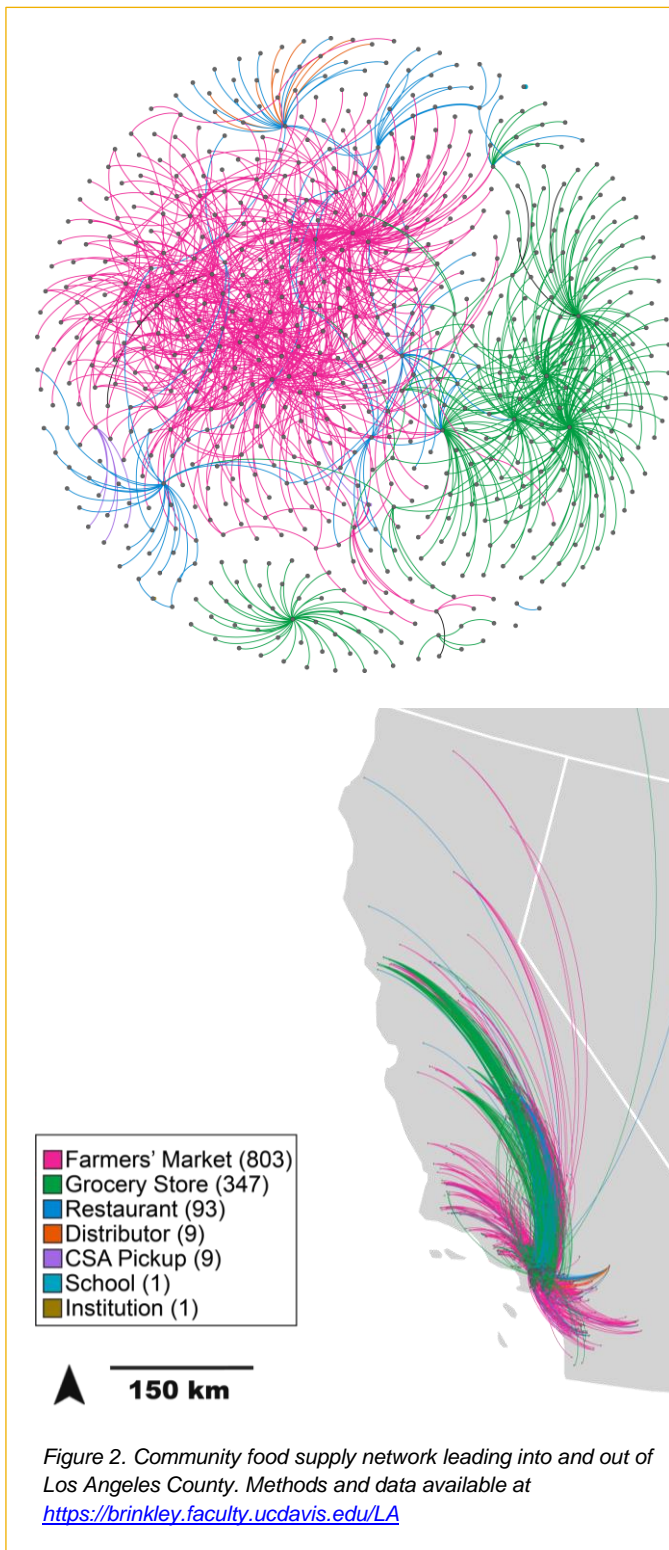


Contributors	
Farmers' Market	132
Grocery Store	211
Farm	309
Restaurant	54
Institution	2
Other	12

Los Angeles, home to over ten million people, is located in Southern California, and is the most populous county in the US. While Los Angeles County used to be one of the top agricultural grossing counties in the country into the 1960s, now the majority of Los Angeles County is covered by urban area and native shrub and forest.

Agriculture accounts for only 0.2 percent of land use with 1,035 farms occupying 57,809 acres (average farm size of 56 acres and a median size of 4 acres). The research we present is based on gathering farm and first point of sale or donation information from the internet. Findings are an under-representation of the full network as many farms and markets do not provide information online. Methods are described further here: <https://brinkley.faculty.ucdavis.edu/la/>. The network includes a total of 719 farms and markets with 1,234 marketing connections. A majority of the 319 farms that participate in the Los Angeles community food network are outside of the county. Only 43 are in Los Angeles County. The USDA Agricultural Census notes that 210 Los Angeles County farms (of 1,035 total farms) engaged in direct sales in 2012. Thus, this network map represents 20% of the community food system, the rest of which does not advertise their sales or donations online.

Spotlight Farms and Institutions



Because the majority of Los Angeles County is urban, connections with farmers typically occur when farmers travel to urban areas to sell at farmers' markets (803 connections, 62% of the network, in pink) or sell products through intermediaries, like grocery stores (299 connections, 30%, in green). These two, large, inter-related marketing practices overlap with farms that sell directly to restaurants, making up 7% of the network connections (in blue). Unlike counties that have more agricultural land, Los Angeles has few connections through Community Supported Agriculture. As the map shows, Los Angeles' network puts LA eaters in contact with farms throughout the Central Valley of California, making them part of farm and food conversations throughout California.

The most central hubs to the Los Angeles County community food network are farmers markets and farms outside the county that have been instrumental in making LA the eating scene it is today. We highlight a few central hubs below.

Kenter Canyon Farms is the most central to the network though it is located in Ventura County. This farm originated in a Berkeley backyard. After partnering with Alice Waters to produce salad greens for Chez Panisse in the 1980s, Kenter Canyon moved to the LA area and began producing salad for restaurants like Spago, the flagship restaurant of the Wolfgang Puck Fine Dining Group. As their business grew they relocated to land in Ventura county where they now produce greens, vegetables, citrus and avocados for the direct market and for retail and wholesale as far as Hawaii. Multiple farmers markets are also central to the network.

Hollywood Farmers' Market was established in 1991 when farmers' markets were scarce in California. Today it is one of the largest and most-

visited markets in the Los Angeles area and has 160 vendors. Their clientele include individual shoppers as well as restaurant chefs. **Santa Monica Farmers' Market** was established in 1981 and is the largest and most well-known farmers' market in the LA area and features only vendors who sell fresh produce, not value-added or prepared goods.

While urban farms are few, they have exerted a large impact across the Los Angeles community food network and beyond. Urban gardener **Ron Finley** prompted the city to change its laws on urban gardening less than a decade ago. His TED talk on the mental and physical benefits of urban gardening has been viewed by nearly 4 million people and is sparking conversations about food justice in urban neighborhoods across the world. **Alma Backyard Farms** operates four urban farms that reconnect the formerly incarcerated and their families. Their food is sold to restaurants and via their farm stand. Perhaps what is most striking is the impact of an urban garden that is no longer in the network because it was forced to close. The **South Central Farm** was a 14 acre community garden in a warehouse district that was founded in 1992 and fed 350 family farmers, largely Black and Latino families who emphasized traditional growing methods. This urban farm was one of the largest in the nation, and was sold by the city for redevelopment in 2006. Though community efforts are still rallying to rebuild the farm, the network inspired further work. Remaining families established the **South Central Farmers' Health and Education Fund** and its subset, the **South Central Farmers Cooperative**, a grassroots, non-profit organization "dedicated to community self-reliance through urban and rural agriculture". The South Central Farmers Cooperative is in the top 6% of central connections in the network, representing an important hub of activity focused on equity in the Los Angeles Community food system. They offer a CSA with pick-up locations at **With Love Market**, a social enterprise grocery store founded in 2016 and committed to employing 75% or more of its staff from the South L.A. community. The community room hosts free classes around healthy eating, child development, exercise and other life skills. **Co-opportunity Market** in Culver City and Santa Monica is another grocery store central to the Los Angeles community food network. This cooperative sources from across California and emphasizes organic and sustainably produced food.

Take Away

Los Angeles is a large, urban area that is tied to farming communities throughout California. The celebrated restaurants in Los Angeles prepare food grown in nearby counties and those throughout the Central Valley. Farmers come from all over the state to sell their produce directly to LA area residents through the county's many farmers' markets. Acknowledging these transparent ties makes clear the alliances between Los Angeles eaters and California farmers and farm workers. The powerful connections have led to the growth of farms from backyard scale to global marketing, as demonstrated by Kenter Canyon farms. The local connections through urban gardens are essential to the food network as well, giving communities the opportunity to have more agency over the source of their food.

Use your purchasing power to advocate for greater equity in your the food system and learn from the network of growers and retailers which policies can help support the environment, farmworkers, and fellow eaters. Engage with community groups working to transform the local food system, like the **Los Angeles Food Policy Council**. Learn more about food safety during coronavirus at [https://ucanr.edu/Coronavirus and COVID-19](https://ucanr.edu/Coronavirus_and_COVID-19). Also consider supporting organizations like the Community Alliance with Family Farmers and the California Alliance of Farmers' Markets (more info: caff.org, farmersmarketsalliance.org) that have a long history of working to preserve California's productive farmland, share its bounty and showcase its beauty.