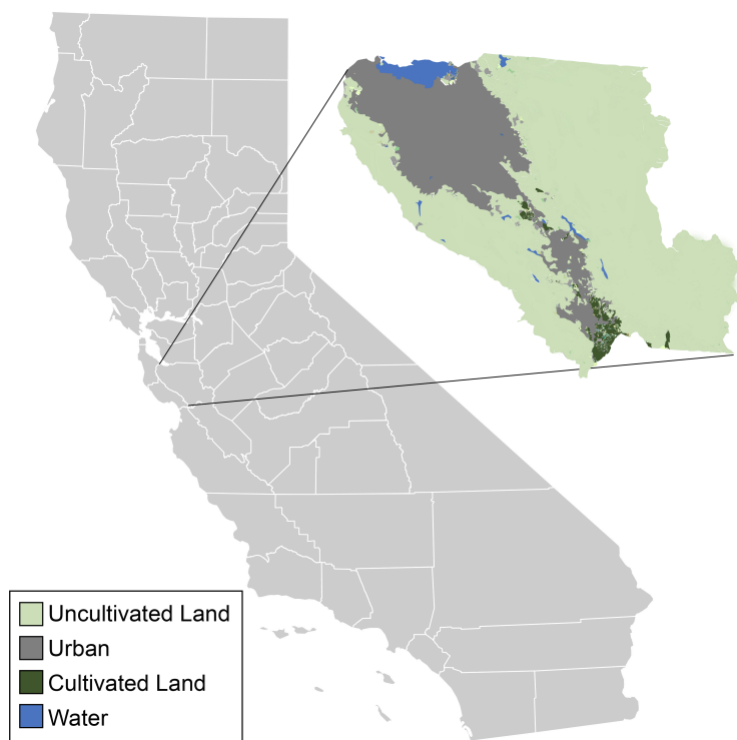


# Santa Clara County Community Food Guide

*This guide maps the community food systems in Santa Clara County and provides information on how to support them during the economic dislocation caused by COVID-19*



Santa Clara County Land Use

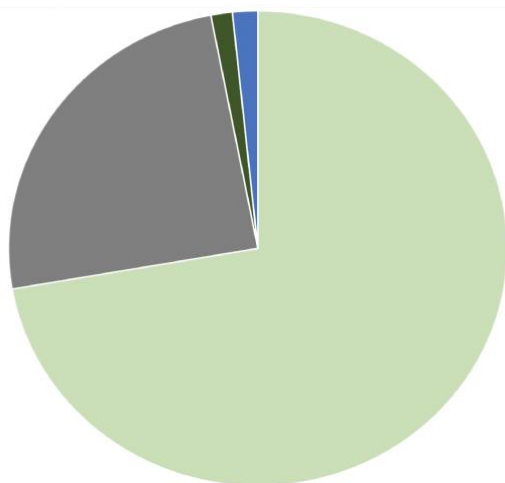


Figure 1. Santa Clara County Land Use. Source: land-use satellite imagery from the National Agriculture Statistics Service.

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), and form relationships with local restaurants and institutions committed to supporting the community's combined needs for a healthy diet, soils, and development patterns. 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.

Today, the state grapples with new challenges presented by the COVID-19 crisis. Low income and communities of color have been impacted most severely. Food insecurity has doubled and is continuing to rise. Many national food supply chains have been disrupted, and local farmers and ranchers are

pivoting their distribution channels to fill gaps. The resilience and adaptability of local food systems can be further strengthened with county planning efforts. The goal of this guide is to identify key hubs in Santa Clara's community food system both spatially and socially in order to inform county planning efforts.

## **Santa Clara's Land and Population**

Santa Clara County is the southernmost county in the San Francisco Bay Area and home to the Silicon Valley, a rapidly growing urban area famous for its role in the global tech sector. In Santa Clara County, as in many other counties across the state, agricultural land has steadily declined throughout the 20th century, decreasing by 45 percent in the past 20 years. Today the county is home to 1,927,852 people.

Once known as the Valley of the Heart's Delight, the Santa Clara Valley produced a third of the nation's demand for cherry, apricot and prune crops in the early nineteenth century. Today, Santa Clara's agricultural community is centered in the southern end of the county. Land near the cities of Morgan Hill and San Martin in the Santa Clara Valley, along with Gilroy are home to small family farms as well as large multinational operations. Only a small percentage of Santa Clara's land is cultivated for crops, 34,273 acres with an average farm size of 55 acres (NASS USDA, 2017). However, over 30% (288,084 acres) of the county is farmland, mainly consisting of rangeland, which is grazed by cattle. Uncultivated lands covering the eastern part of the county provide forage for over 20,000 cows and calves with an average farm size of 957 acres (NASS USDA, 2017).

## **The community food system network**

The network maps in Figure 2 were created using a novel dataset that includes information from farm websites and their first point of sale or donation for unprocessed fruits and vegetables. The network captures only farms and markets that advertise their connections to one another online with either the farm or the market (or both) located in Santa Clara County. The network represents 32 percent of the total direct-sale farms in Santa Clara County according to the US Department of Agriculture's (USDA) 5-year survey of farms and productions. There are 59 wineries in Santa Clara County (American Wine Guide, 2020), many of whom sell directly. The data used to create the network maps did not include wineries. Because the USDA includes wineries in their tally of direct-sale farms, the data presented here is closer to 50% representative of USDA figures. For more information on the methods, please visit: [brinkley.faculty.udcavis.edu/santaclara](http://brinkley.faculty.udcavis.edu/santaclara)

The network map of Santa Clara County shows a richly interconnected community food system from farms to farmers’ markets, CSAs, grocery stores, and various other organizations (Figure 2; Table 1). We show 548 connections between farms and their first point of sale or donation for raw food products. Most of the connections in Santa Clara County are from farms to farmers’ markets (369 connections, Figure 2). Local farmers’ market organizations like the Pacific Coast Farmers’ Market Association (PCFMA) have created multiple opportunities for Santa Clara farmers and consumers to meet at farmers’ markets.

Table 1. Contributors to Santa Clara's community food system

Contributors	
Farm	202
CSA Pickup	52
Farmers' Market	45
Grocery Store	40
Restaurant	17
Other	17
Institution	9

Because of its relatively wealthy urban areas, Santa Clara County farmers’ markets are venues for farms in many neighboring counties. This network shows 202 farms in the network, 60 of which are in Santa Clara County (Table 2). Thus, county planning efforts should consider the regional nature of the community food system and partnerships with surrounding agricultural communities with shared policy objectives. The map in Figure 2 shows that farms from as far as 150 miles away will travel to Santa Clara County farmers’ markets, demonstrating the geographical draw of Santa Clara County’s community food system. The distance between farms and CSA pick sites is roughly half the distance that farmers travel to attend farmers’ markets, demonstrating the spatial aspect of different community food system marketing pathways.

Many Santa Clara Valley farms only sell their produce at farm stands or otherwise directly from the farm (total: 16, represented as points that are not connected to the broader network in the social network map, below, Figure 2). The hyper local nature and draw of on-farm sales highlights the unique agricultural landscape of Santa Clara County as a destination in its own right. Future planning efforts will want to consider how to balance the demand for land to be developed or preserved in agriculture.

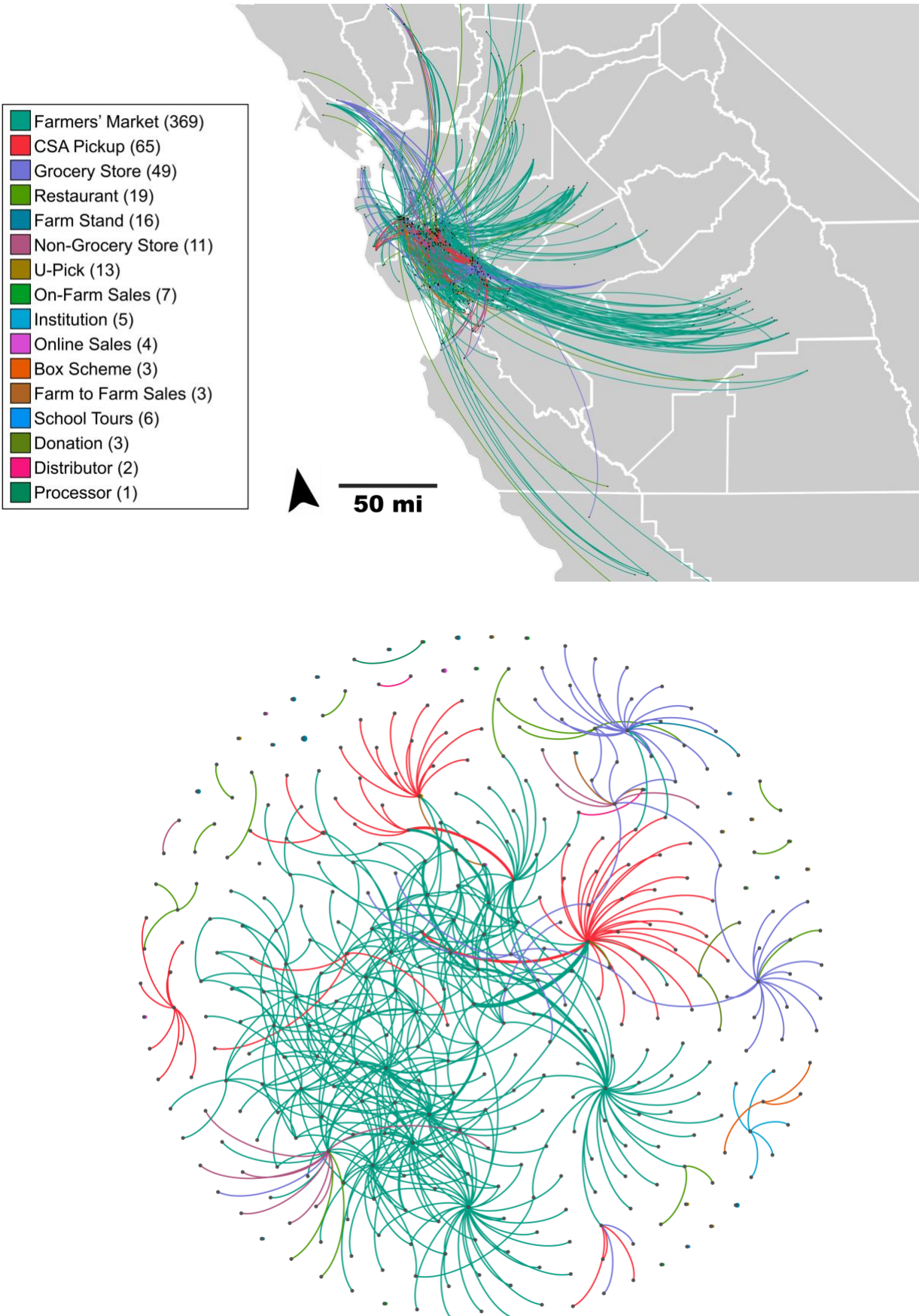


Figure 2. Santa Clara's community food network. Methods available at [brinkley.faculty.udcavis.edu/santaclara](http://brinkley.faculty.udcavis.edu/santaclara).

The diversity and redundancy of marketing types provides resilience in a community food system, particularly in a time of crisis. Many of the farms attending markets in Santa Clara County attend more than one farmers' market per week. If one farmers' market closes, there are alternative marketing pathways. Connections to farms through CSAs and grocery stores are also prominent pathways in Santa Clara County. The network includes 69 CSA drop-off connections and 49 marketing relationships with grocery stores (Figure 2). Many farms that sell at farmers' markets also offer CSA boxes (Figure 2, below). To a lesser extent, farm-to-restaurant connections also overlap with marketing to farmers' markets, grocery stores and CSAs (Figure 2, bottom). The redundancy and variety in marketing typologies can be a strength during crises, like COVID-19 where food marketing channels need to rapidly switch. For example, many restaurants closed during shelter-in-place or switched menus to offer take-out options. Farms needed to rapidly switch marketing as demand shifted from catering and eating out to grocery stores and dining in. The multiple marketing pathways for Santa Clara County farms shows how farmers could more easily ramp up sales through CSAs, for example, and decrease sales at a venue with less demand.

### Spotlight Contributors

Hubs in social networks can be measured many ways. The general principle is that if 'all paths lead to Rome', Rome is an important hub that can influence the rest of the system. Similarly, a central hub in a community food system can be a place to raise awareness about a policy issue or share knowledge about growing and marketing practices. Indeed, many farms and markets that are central to community food systems have a long history of being involved in food and agriculture policies and innovation.

When looking at betweenness centrality in the undirected network, Spade and Plow is the most central node, followed by two Palo Alto farmers' markets, the California Ave Farmers' Market and the Downtown Palo Alto Farmers' Market. Amen Bee Products, a local honey producer, and the Creekside Farmers' Market also join the list. **Spade and Plow's** centrality in the network indicates the impact that locally-owned farms embedded in their community can have on a community's ability to have access to fresh foods. Spade and Plow was the first farm to partner with **Veggielution** on their Eastside Connect produce box, donating produce to families in the Santa Clara Valley. They also operate a CSA which serves the Santa Clara area. The next more central actor is the **California Avenue Farmers' Market**, which is run by Urban Village, a regional farmers' market operator with markets throughout the Bay Area, mostly in Santa Clara County. Urban Village's aim is to support healthy communities by facilitating direct economic and social relationships between farmers and eaters. The **Downtown Palo Alto Farmers' Market** began as a response to the closure of the last grocery store in downtown Palo Alto, and has been in operation for 40 years. It is run entirely by volunteers, and the market has donated over 500,000 dollars to their partner **Avenidas**, a nonprofit that supports independent living for older adults. **Amen Bee Products**



has been stewarding honey production in Santa Clara county for almost 40 years and sells to markets throughout the region. The **Creekside Farmers' Market** is operated by the Pacific Coast Farmers' Market Association, the largest farmers' market operator in the Bay Area.

In summary, the most central contributors to the Santa Clara network are a mix of farmers' markets and local farms. The majority of the farmers' markets are operated by regional organizations with markets and headquarters throughout the Bay Area, with the exception of the Downtown Palo Alto Farmers' Market, which has been independently run by volunteers for 40 years. Farmers' markets are essential to the community food network in any county, but the local farms and the direct impact they have on their communities provide a direct way for local eaters to have access to fresh produce and the community that arises around the fight for food security, especially in crisis times.

Many farms also play an important role in the community food system, particularly in times of crisis. **Veggielution** is a six-acre farm in the heart of San Jose, serving members of the Mayfair and East San Jose communities. Their programs include curriculum for schoolchildren and a business incubator supporting local food entrepreneurs. In the early weeks of the pandemic, Veggielution created a free produce box program in partnership with Spade and Plow. Through a partnership with **Off the Grid** and **Fresh Approach**, the farm box model has expanded to include other pantry staples and to serve thousands of families who have become food insecure after the loss of jobs and other income related to Covid-19. **Santa Clara University's Forge Garden** and **BUG (Bronco Urban Gardens) program** provide produce for on-campus food insecurity initiatives, like the **Bronco Pantry**, as well as for community members through their new **Resiliency Bag** program implemented with the onset of Covid-related restrictions. The BUG program has transitioned their on-site garden education program to a virtual one, providing take-home science kits to local students. Produce is also donated to a local women's shelter. These farms' proximity to the communities they serve puts them in a unique position to be able to respond quickly to the community's needs in a sudden crisis like Covid-19, and indicates how important local farms are to community food systems to be able to adapt to any challenge.

## Take Away

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. 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 Famers and the California Alliance of Farmers' Markets (more info: [farmersmarketsalliance.org](http://farmersmarketsalliance.org)) that have a long history of working to preserve California's productive farmland, share its bounty and showcase its beauty.