

El Dorado County Community Food Guide

This guide is being created as part of an effort to update the Sacramento Regional Food System Action Plan (2021) and draws attention to the transparent marketing connections between farms and markets in the county. Often, markets and farms vocally endorse sustainable growing practices and policies that support the most vulnerable, including farmworkers, essential retail workers, and low-income consumers. Because regional pride and mutual support are core values in a transparent food system, farms and markets often celebrate their partnership. Farms advertise the markets where you can find their food. Similarly, farmers markets, grocery stores, restaurants and institutions proudly showcase the farms that sell or donate food to them.

This guide maps such transparent market connections, providing a food system assessment to help understand how the many farms and markets are connected, which are central to the network, and what types of marketing are dominant. To do so, we gather online information about farms that advertise where their products can be found. While the data we use does not include all farms and markets in the county, the map we have created draws attention to institutions and farms that are at the heart of the regional food system and are well positioned to share knowledge (as well as good food!).

These connections are important not only for creating a regional sense of place, but also the local economy and the many people who work in the food system as well as enjoy its bounty. Importantly, the coronavirus pandemic has disproportionately impacted low-income people and communities of color, increasing overall food insecurity, shifting food supply chains, and challenging farmers, restaurants and local economies. A better understanding of the food system can help policymakers and eaters learn how to support regional efforts.



Figure 1. Sunset over Delfino Orchards in Apple Hill. Source: Apple Hill Growers

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

Land and Population

El Dorado County is home to 192,843 people, of whom 9.1 percent are food insecure. The county has 91,006 acres of farmland, less than 0.1 percent of the total land mass (Figure 2). Most of El Dorado County's cultivated land is in pasture (nearly 76,000 acres) according to the National Agricultural Statistics Service. Its top three crops by value of production are apples (\$22M), wine grapes (\$9M) and cattle (\$9M) according to the California Agricultural Statistics Review (2017).

El Dorado County Land Use

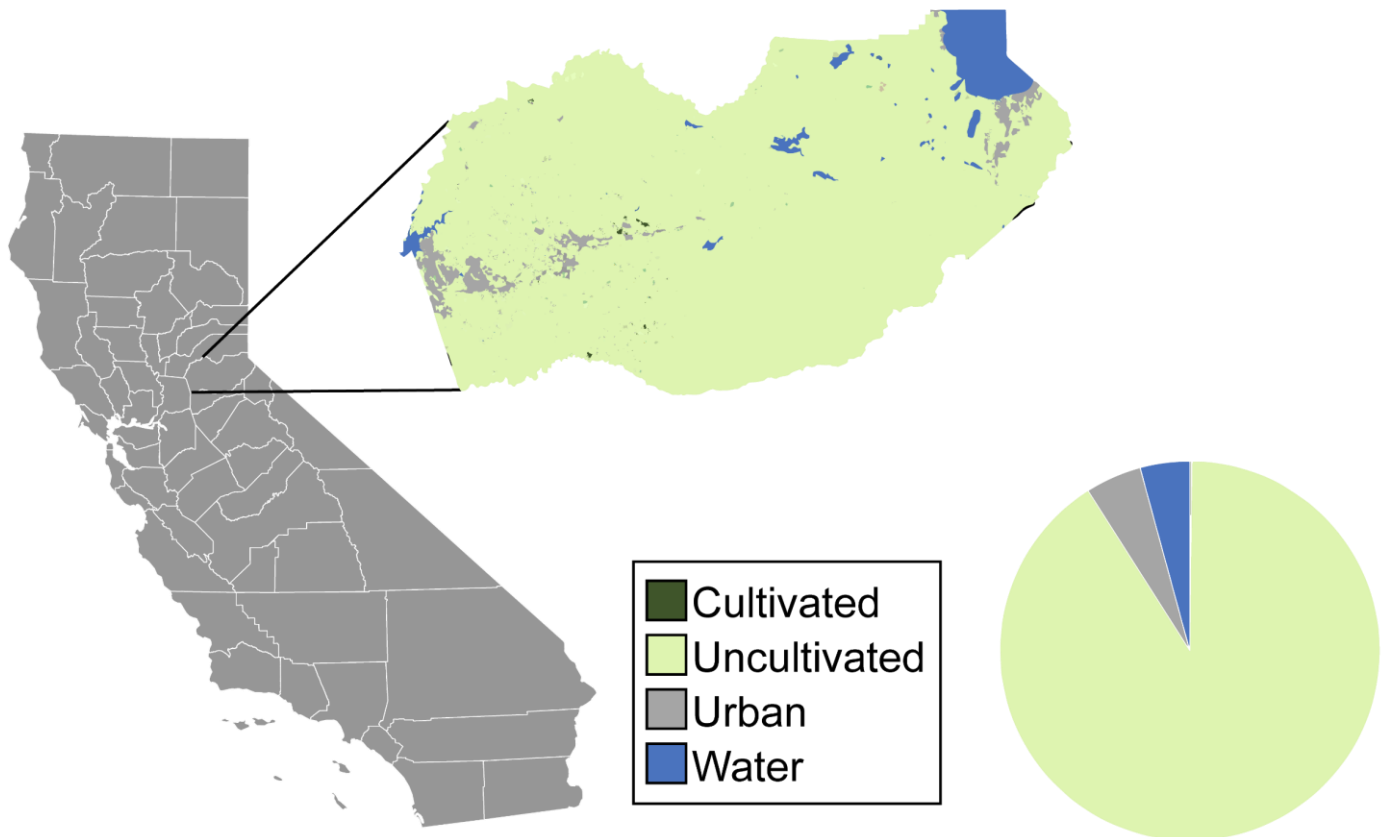


Figure 2. El Dorado County land use. Source: land-use satellite imagery from the National Agriculture Statistics Service.

Methods

To explore the connections between farms and markets (Figure 3) we gathered a novel dataset that includes information from farm websites and their first point of sale or donation for unprocessed fruits, vegetables, eggs, milk and meat. To be included, the farm, market or both needed to be located within the county and advertise their sales or donations online. Notably, many large farm operations grow by contract and do not advertise where their products can be found. Similarly, many small farms sell only through roadside stands or do not have a web presence. The network we show includes 110 farms found within El Dorado County that sell directly to markets and four farms from outside the county that sell to markets within the county. This figure compares to the 299 farms that reported selling directly to markets according to the 2017 USDA Census. As such, the data we present here are not the full cast of farms, markets or many supporting organizations involved in the El Dorado County food system, but only the transparent networks that are publicly listed online.

The network we present includes **114 farms and 100 markets with 244 connections between them**. The “other” category for contributors includes a CSA dropoff points (6) specialty stores (2), food hubs (2), and one caterer. The most connections are to farmers’ markets (86). The connections in the ‘other’ category are comprised of sales to caterers (36), u-picks (22), sales through farm stands (18), farm-to-farm sales (14), online sales (6), food hubs (5), specialty stores (3) and on-farm sales (2).

Next, we highlight the central contributors to the community food system. Farms and markets that are more central to the network offer important meeting spots for both building community and policy coordination. The general principle in understanding a network is that if ‘all paths lead to Rome’, Rome is an important hub that can influence the rest of the system. Conversely, while some farms may connect with many markets, they may not be as “central” to the community food system. Network centrality can be measured in many ways, and we use a measurement called “eigenvector centrality” in visualizing the central contributors. This measurement takes into account whether a contributor is connected to another contributor that is more central. For example, if you only know one person, but that person is the Governor of California, you would be considered more central in a network map of people in California. For more information about how the network was measured and a full list of farms and markets in the El Dorado County community food system, please visit the website link in the citation below.

On the following pages, we highlight the spatial and social orientation of the El Dorado community food network as well as the farms and markets that are central and those that focus on equity and food access.

Contributors	
Farm	114
Grocery Store	22
Restaurant	10
Farmers’ Market	56
Institution	1
Other	11

Market connections	
Farmers’ Market	86
Restaurant	10
Grocery Store	31
CSA Pickup	9
Institution	2
Other	106

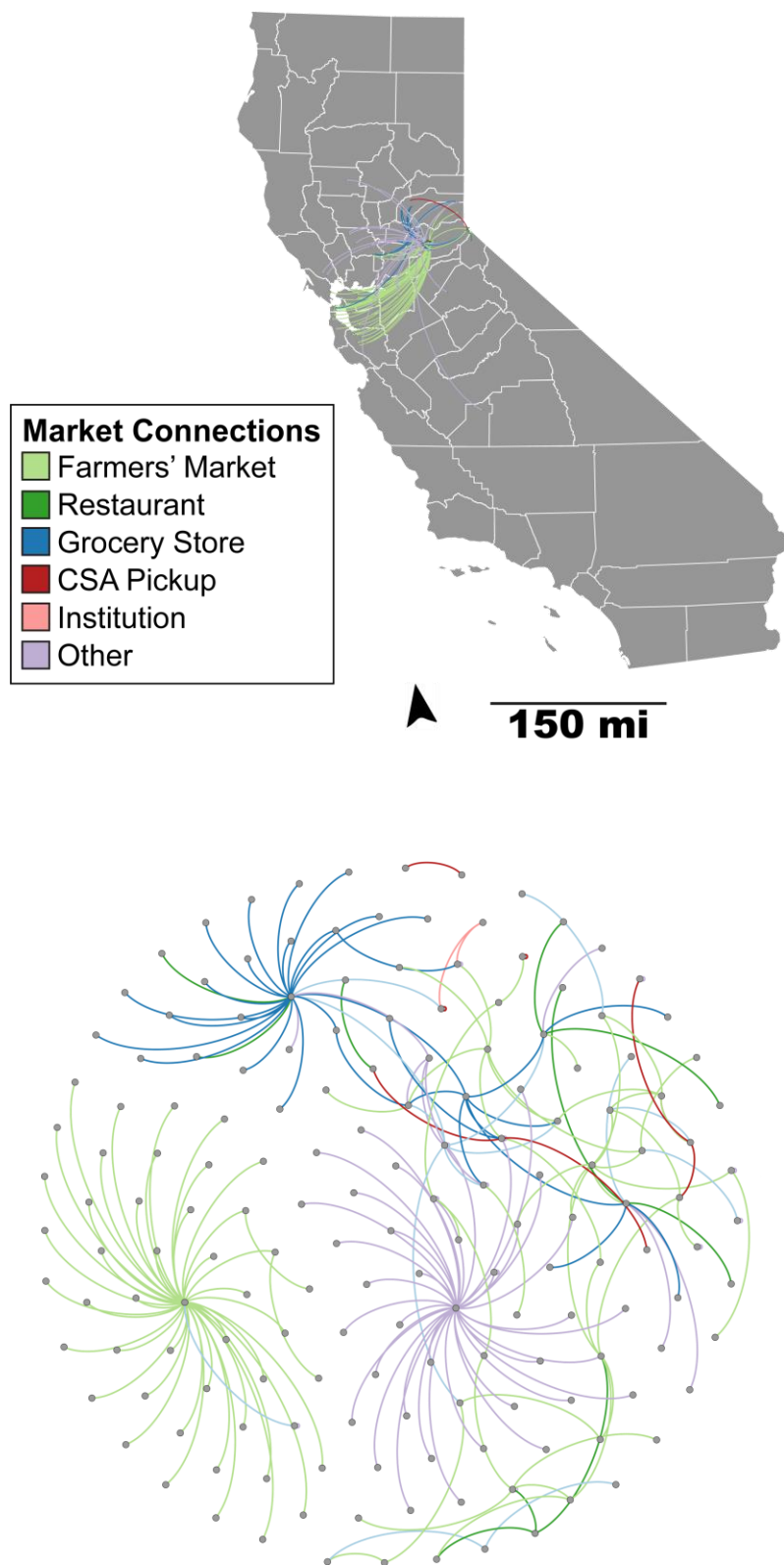


Figure 3. El Dorado County's community food network.

El Dorado County's Community Food Network

The types of marketing pathways are diverse, ranging from farms that specialize in sales to farmers' markets and farms that sell through a combination of farmers markets, restaurants and institutions, like schools and food banks. Most market connections are through farmers' markets (86 connections, 35% of connections) followed by caterers (15% of the connections), grocery stores (13%) and farm stands (7% of connections). Of the 114 farms and 100 markets, 110 of the farms are located in El Dorado County. Conversely, only 30 of the markets are in the county, indicating that many El Dorado County farms are traveling outside the county for the majority of their sales opportunities.

As the map of connections (top, Figure 3) shows, many of the farmers' market and catering market connections bring El Dorado County food closer to Bay Area consumers, offering opportunities to share not only food, but policy discussions.

As the social network visualizations shows (Figure 3, bottom), while many farms specialize in one type of marketing practice (eg. sales to farmers' markets), the heart of the network is made up of farms and markets that connect across numerous different marketing modalities, CSA sales, catering, farmers' market efforts and sales to grocery stores.

Spotlight Contributors

Next, we highlight the farms and markets that are central to the El Dorado County community food network. El Dorado County is home to several apple farmers, united under the marketing trademark **Apple Hill Growers**. Apple Hill serves to highlight these farms and promote their farm business as well as the farm sites' other businesses, such as cafes, pastry shops, and pumpkin patches. The purpose of this branding is to promote local farms and bring business to local farmers. In the fall, the roads of Camino and surrounding towns are packed with cars full of families eager to take in the fall bounty. The farm members of Apple Hill and many businesses along the way all benefit from the marketing campaign Apple Hill provides. **Rainbow Orchards** is a member of Apple Hill Growers in Camino, CA. They grow apples as well as blueberries and stone fruit at farmers' markets throughout Northern California. **Smokey Ridge Ranch** is a farm and winery, and a member of Apple Hill Growers in Placerville, CA. The farm offers u-pick apples along with a variety of other tree crops, and hosts farm-to-table lunches and wine tastings.

In addition to a thriving apple-growing tourism, the farms and markets that grow diverse products are also central to the community food network. **24 Carrot Farm**, in El Dorado's county seat of Placerville, operates as a working farm that sells produce. In addition, the farm is a food hub for farmers in the area, through a farm stand selling 24 Carrot's produce as well as produce from many other farms nearby. The farm stand is also available online. **Local Yolk** is an egg farm in Pilot Hill, CA. Their hens have full access to the outdoors and non-GMO, organic feed. Local Yolk sells their eggs throughout northern California, mainly within 50 miles of the farm with a few outlets as far away as San Francisco. **Mama Earth Farm** is in Somerset, CA. The farm offers a CSA subscription and sells at local farmers' markets and grocery stores. **Beals' Orchard** has been in Placerville for three generations. Their produce is available at all the El Dorado County farmers' markets. **Collina di Mela** is an olive farm and olive oil producer in Placerville, CA and an Apple Hill Grower. Their olive oil has been award-winning several times over the years.

In addition to several local farms central to the network, many markets are also central to the community food network. **Table Nectar** is a catering company based in Diamond Springs, CA that offers their services throughout the foothills area. Their focus is on farm-to-table catering and source much of their produce from local farms, as well as list their producers by name. **Placerville Food Co-op** is a cooperatively-run grocery store in Placerville, CA. The co-op self-identifies as socially responsible and offers many locally grown or made products. **Tahoe Food Hub** is a non-profit organization based in Truckee, CA. They act as a distributor for local food producers and showcase their local producers on their website. Their aim is to increase food access to the North Tahoe area while supporting regenerative farming practices. They also promote healthy eating through their Farm 2 School program and donate produce boxes through the Giving Box.

Take Away

Despite only a small amount of farmland, El Dorado County provides an engaging community food system and multiple agritourism opportunities where people can visit working farms. Restaurants, cooperative stores and farmers markets connect with nearby county farms, creating many opportunities to learn from food system entrepreneurs and farmers that have operated farms for multiple generations.

You can support your community food network. For example, the Farmers Guilds and Community Alliance with Family Farmers chapters (caff.org) are local groups of small farms and farm advocates that gather to network, share resources, provide peer-to-learning and, in some cases, advocate for local policy changes to benefit sustainable agriculture, family farms and local food systems. You can also use your purchasing power to advocate for greater equity in the food system and learn from the network of growers and retailers whose policies can help support the environment, farmworkers, and fellow consumers. 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 local nonprofits and food banks (including some of those listed above) and the California Alliance of Farmers' Markets (farmersmarketsalliance.org) that have a long history of working to preserve California's productive farmland, share its bounty and showcase its beauty.