

Placer 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.

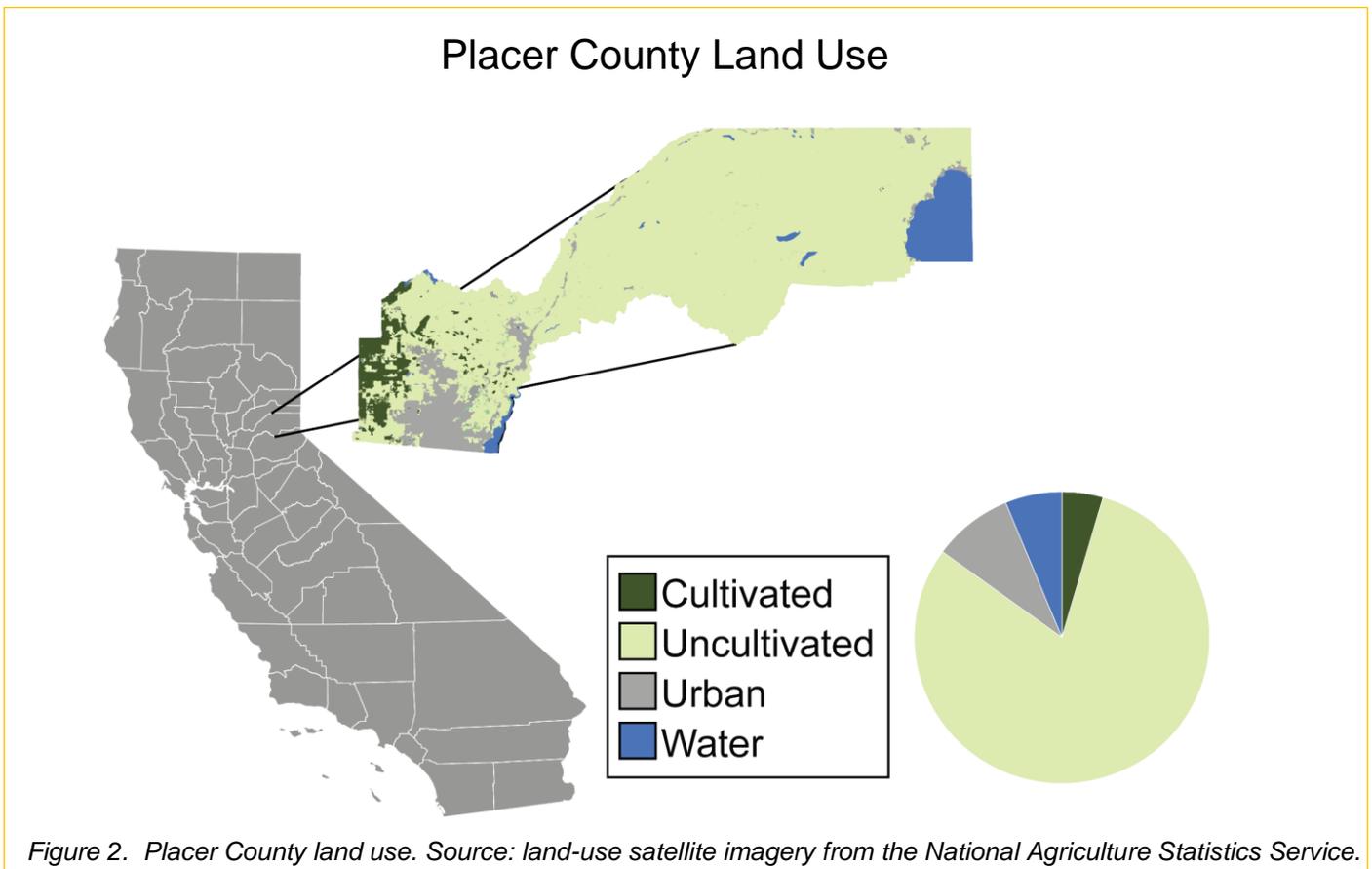


Figure 1. Tahoe City Farmers Market, on the shore of Lake Tahoe. Source: PlacerGROWN facebook page

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

Land and Population

Placer County is home to 398,329 people, of whom 8.3% are food insecure. The county has 118,537 acres of farmland, 12 percent of the total land mass (Figure 2). Most of Placer County's cultivated land is rice (13,473 acres) according to the National Agricultural Statistics Service. Its top three crops by value of production are cattle and calves (\$10M), nursery products (\$8.4M) and rice (\$8.3M) according to the California Agricultural Statistics Review (2017).



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 134 farms found within Placer County that sell directly to markets, compared to 306 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 Placer County food system, but only the transparent networks that are publicly listed online.

The network we present includes **154 farms and 156 markets with 375 connections between them**. Almost 90 percent of the farms in the Placer County network are within the county, indicating a potential for strong connections in immediate Placer County communities. The majority of connections are from farms to grocery stores (79), closely followed by farmers’ markets (78). The contributors in the ‘other’ category consist of specialty stores (11), farm stands (2), food hubs (2), and a caterer. The other category of marketing connections are diverse, and include sales to food hubs (51), on-farm sales (36), farm stands (29), farm to farm sales (18), online sales (15), specialty stores (10), u-picks (7), distributors (2), a processor/distributor, and a caterer.

On the pages following we highlight the spatial and social orientation of the community food network as well as the farms and markets that are central and those that focus on equity and food access. 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. 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 community food system, please visit the website link in the citation below.

Contributors	
Farm	154
Grocery Store	77
Restaurant	20
Farmers’ Market	28
Institution	11
Distributor	3
CSA Pickup	1
Other	16

Market connections	
Farmers’ Market	78
Restaurant	25
Grocery Store	79
CSA Pickup	12
Institution	11
Other	170

Placer County's Community Food Network

Placer County's spatial diversity (urban and rural) creates opportunities for farmers to support and be supported by their local communities. The connections between farmers and eaters are diverse, with many types, including on-farm sales, farm to farm sales, food hubs and online sales. The highest percentage of market connections are through grocery stores and farmers' markets, both with only 21% of connections. Farmers' markets and grocery store connections are followed by food hubs, (13% of the connections), on-farm sales (10%) and farm stands (8%).

That no marketing type makes up more than 21 percent of the total connections points to the myriad types of marketing pathways local farmers use in Placer County. A majority of Placer County farmers use more than one method to market their produce, creating a richly interconnected network with a high proportion of overlapping connections. This multiplicity of connections creates robustness and resiliency in the local food system and allows for more opportunities to connect with local food and farmers, supporting a network that is well-prepared to weather market shocks like the ones created by COVID-19.

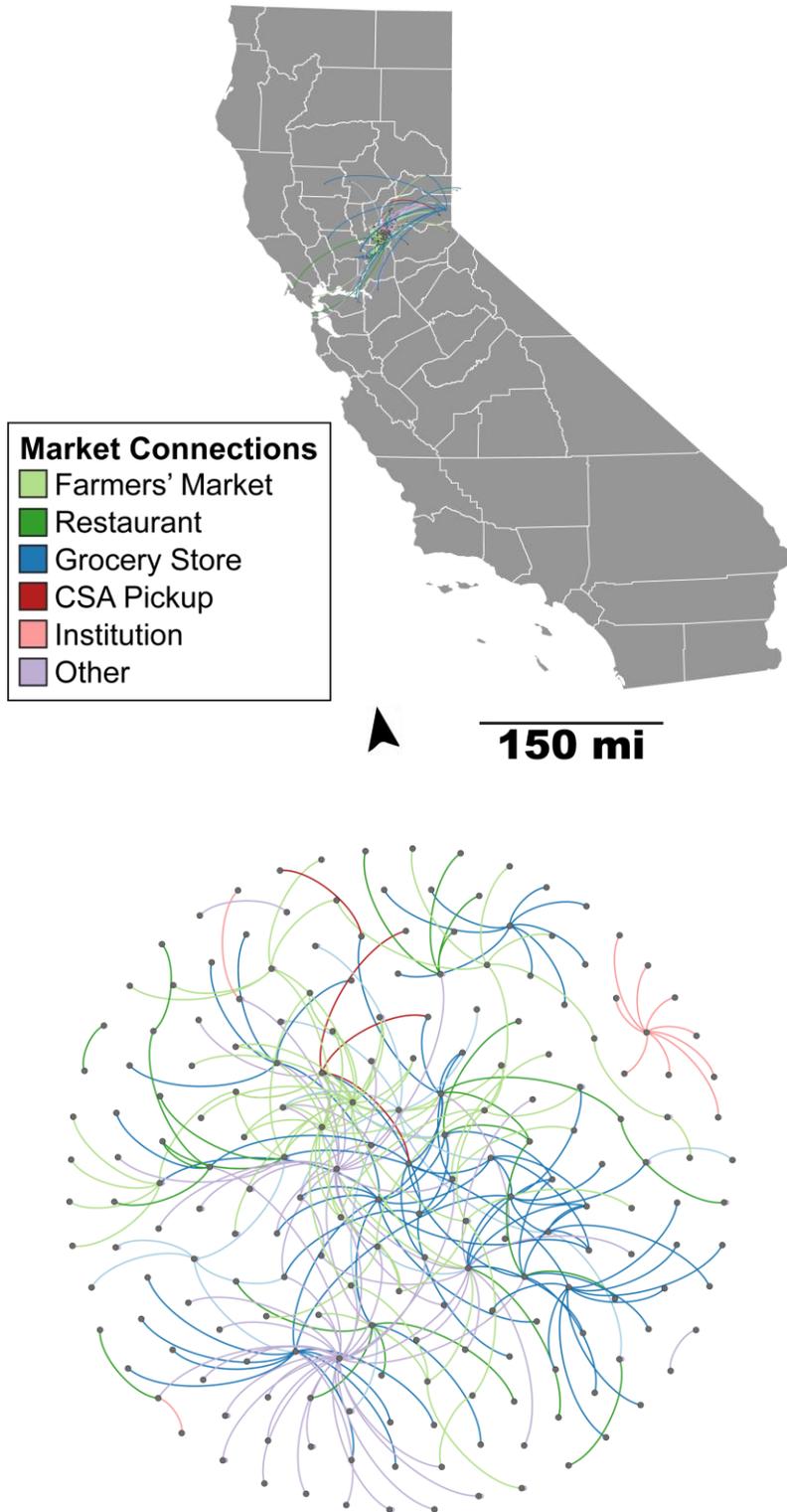


Figure 3. Placer County's community food network. Methods available at brinkley.faculty.ucdavis.edu/Placer

Spotlight Contributors

Placer County's community food network is unique in its diversity of market pathways and boasts the highest relative proportion of connections through a food hub in the state. Two food hubs in the county make up these connections, and both nodes focus on supporting local producers, creating a key alternative pathway for small family farms in the area and promoting local, short-chain connections. One such food hub is **The Farmers Marketplace**, based in Placerville, was founded by a local farmer. The goal of the Farmers Marketplace is to 'create an efficient and profitable way for local farmers and artisan producers to market, sell and distribute their products while providing our community with convenient access to locally produced food'. The Marketplace was uniquely positioned to step in and facilitate connections between farmers and consumers during the COVID-19 crisis, pivoted from a primarily pick-up model to an expanded delivery model, and provided a crucial market outlet for local farmers that lost much of their restaurant business. Another local food hub is the **Tahoe Food Hub**, a non-profit organization based in Truckee, CA. The Tahoe Food Hub acts as a distributor for local food producers as well as showcases 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. Between The Farmers Marketplace and the Tahoe Food Hub, nearly every resident of Placer County can either have a local produce box delivered or pick one up near their home.

In addition to the two local food hubs serving the county, there are several farmers' markets throughout the county and the region. The two most central markets to the Placer County network are both within the county: the **Old Town Auburn Farmers' Market** and **Fountains at Roseville Farmers' Market**, run by Placer County Grown. PlacerGROWN aims to connect Placer County's residents with local producers, while providing a market for local, regenerative, family-owned farms. They host markets throughout the county on almost every day of the week, and showcase local producers on the PlacerGROWN website. There are also Placer County farms that are central to the network. **Baroness Olive Oil** is a family-owned farm in Newcastle, CA producing local olive oil and olive leaf tea. Baroness connects to local eaters through a variety of methods, including at local farmers' markets and through on-farm sales, and sells their oils and teas at local stores throughout the region. **Feast & Fire** is a family farm in Granite Bay, CA specializing in heritage-breed animals and meat. Along with heritage meat products the farm produces and sells freshly baked breads and pastries as well as canned goods and herbs sourced from produce on the farm. In addition to their produce and meat operation, they are developing a homestead education series to help educate new farmers. **Twin Peaks Orchards** has been in Newcastle, CA since 1912. The orchard is home to more than 35 varieties of white and yellow peaches, 20 varieties of white and yellow nectarines as well as plums, pluots, apricots, and prunes. The farm uses exclusively organic farming methods and produces jams from their orchard. Twin Peaks sells their organic stone fruit at farmers' markets in lower Placer County as well as in the Tahoe area, and to local restaurants. You can also find their produce at their farm stand, located on-site.

Take Away

While some counties' community food systems are characterized by far-reaching connections throughout the state, Placer County's network is primarily focused in the county, depicting a robust network of support for local farmers. 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.