

MAY 2021

# County of Santa Clara Food System Workplan

An assessment and roadmap for the development of a comprehensive  
Food, Restaurants, Agriculture, and Health Access Initiative



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# OVERVIEW



**O**n June 2, 2020, the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors approved a referral directing the County to develop a workplan for a comprehensive, system-wide **Food Restaurants, Agriculture, and Health Access Initiative**. The County of Santa Clara, Department of Agriculture and Environmental Management contracted with University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE) to develop a workplan for this Initiative. This food system workplan is the outcome of the research and stakeholder engagement effort led by UCCE in partnership with County agencies. It provides a roadmap for the development of the County’s Food, Restaurants, Agriculture, and Health Access Initiative that will guide County actions towards creating a more resilient, equitable, and sustainable food system.

While the regional food system involves a broad set of stakeholders, this workplan primarily focuses on the role of County government and actions it can take. However, we recognize that the County’s engagement in the food system takes place alongside and in partnership with the important and innovative work done by nonprofit

organizations, businesses, city governments, and other food system stakeholders. Therefore, the workplan also includes opportunities for other stakeholders to strengthen linkages within the food system and advance food system goals. The goals and recommendations of the workplan reflect findings from our interviews with food system stakeholders, conversations with food system collaborative groups and a review of existing research. The workplan serves as a framework for coordinating the efforts of diverse stakeholders and outlines seven areas where the County of Santa Clara can make progress towards building a food system that is more equitable, resilient, and sustainable.

### WHY FOOD?

Food is central to all of our lives. At the individual level, food impacts each of us every day. More broadly, it is a critical component of public health, social equity, economy, environment, culture, and quality of life throughout Santa Clara County. The type of food that is available, different communities’ ability to access and afford it, its quality and cultural acceptability all contribute to county residents’ health and

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well-being. Food is also an economic engine, employing tens of thousands of people and generating sales in the billions. Food enterprises contribute to the unique character of urban areas, where they can also encourage inclusive community development and promote economic opportunity in historically marginalized communities.<sup>1</sup> From an environmental standpoint, food production is a key feature of Santa Clara County's landscape, where over one-third of the land is farm or rangeland. Among the ecological services that the county's rangeland, grazed by beef cattle, and farmland provide are flood water protection, open space, carbon storage, and habitat for several threatened and endangered species. Thus, food connects us to a web of other issues: the economy, housing, labor, climate, and environment.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused rapid and drastic shifts in the food system, making it all too clear how essential, yet vulnerable our food infrastructure is—the resources, activities, and people that supply us with food.<sup>2</sup> Early in the pandemic, some of the most visible challenges of the unfolding public health and economic crisis were in the food system.<sup>3</sup> As many people found themselves suddenly out of work, food insecurity doubled. When eating outside the home plummeted, demand for groceries soared. Processors and distributors scrambled to repackage bulk food items as contracts with growers needed to be renegotiated. Shoppers had difficulty finding staple food items because

supply chains could not pivot rapidly enough to meet this massive shift in demand. Farm workers and meat and poultry plant workers, deemed essential, experienced disproportionate rates of infection.<sup>4</sup>

### CENTERING EQUITY

At the heart of many of the challenges presented by the COVID-19 crisis are long-standing inequities in our food system. Across the food supply chain, communities of color and low-income communities have disproportionately borne the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, compounding existing inequities.

**Farmers:** In California, and nationally, farmers of color “own less land, make less money, and receive less government support” than white farmers.<sup>5</sup> In 2015, people of color made up 62 percent of California's population, but 99 percent of farm laborers and only 21 percent of farmers.<sup>6</sup> In Santa Clara County, Indigenous peoples—today represented by the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band and Muwekma Ohlone Tribe among others—were the region's original land stewards and food producers. Subsequent to colonization, much of the county's current agricultural industry was built by Japanese, Filipino, Italian, Portuguese, Chinese, and Mexican immigrants. Despite these origins, policies such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1892, the Alien Land Laws of 1913 & 1920, and the Internment Acts of



1942 have contributed to the dispossession and exclusion of people of color. The precarious situation of agricultural workers from Mexico and Central America, many of whom continue to face the threat of deportation, severely limits their economic opportunities, including the ability to start their own agricultural operations.<sup>7</sup>

**Food and farm workers:** Nationally, an estimated one in six people work in the food industry: from farmworkers to meatpacking and processing workers to warehouse workers to restaurant and food retail workers. The majority of farmworkers and food workers are people of color, are paid low wages, and experience high levels of food insecurity.<sup>8</sup> During the pandemic, farm workers and food system workers have been deemed essential, but they are among the most vulnerable. A study from UC Berkeley found that 13 percent of farmworkers in the Salinas Valley tested positive for COVID-19 between July and November 2020, compared to 5 percent of

California's population as a whole over the same time.<sup>9</sup> The pandemic has also drawn attention to farmworkers' living and working conditions, which transmit COVID-19 easily.

**Food insecurity:** An outcome of the structural inequities in the food system are poverty and food insecurity.<sup>10</sup> When factoring in the percentage of income spent on housing, it is estimated that 1 in 5 Santa Clara County residents lives in poverty.<sup>11</sup> Even before the pandemic, approximately 200,000 adults and children in Santa Clara County were food insecure.<sup>12</sup> But the situation has worsened significantly since COVID. New CalFresh applications increased by 96 percent between March and April of 2020.<sup>13</sup> For those hit hardest by the pandemic, Second Harvest of Silicon Valley has been another nutritional lifeline, serving 500,000 people—double the usual number—every month since the pandemic began.<sup>14</sup> Results from a recent San Jose State University survey of Bay Area residents found a 63 percent increase in food insecurity, which disproportionately affected Latinos, households with children, and those experiencing job disruption. Moreover, existing disparities were exacerbated: among survey respondents, 39 percent of people of color said they were food insecure after the pandemic compared to 21 percent of white people. Latino respondents were more likely to report experiencing food insecurity after the pandemic (50%) than non-Latino households (30%). Households with children under 18 years

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of age and those who had some form of job disruption—such as job loss, furlough or reduced work hours—were also more likely to experience food insecurity.<sup>15</sup>

Communities that struggled with food insecurity before the pandemic are now the communities at increased risk of severe illness hospitalization and death from COVID. In Santa Clara County, East San Jose and Gilroy had the highest concentrations of poverty prior to the pandemic and have had the highest COVID-19 infection rates. Diet-related conditions, which were America’s greatest public health challenge before COVID, disproportionately affect Black, Indigenous, and Latino communities, also making them more susceptible to contracting COVID-19 and experiencing negative outcomes.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, prior to the pandemic, people with disabilities were twice as likely to experience food insecurity as people without disabilities and people with disabilities have been shown to be disproportionately impacted by disasters.<sup>17</sup> Programs like Meals on Wheels, which has been providing more than 14,000 meals per week in San Jose to older adults who have difficulty leaving home, are important services that help people with disabilities maintain their health, safety, dignity, and independence.<sup>18</sup> While not explicitly stated throughout the workplan, our definition of equity includes people with access and functional needs .

To build a more resilient food system for the

future, increasing equity throughout the food supply chain will be essential. As food system educator Shorlette Ammons extolls us, “Instead of simply recovering from those shocks and stresses,” we must also adapt, so that although we continue to experience disruptions, we ensure that “they don’t have the same adverse effect on those who take the biggest hit during these crises.”<sup>19</sup>

As defined by the State of California, “the ‘access and functional needs population’ consists of individuals who have developmental or intellectual disabilities, physical disabilities, chronic conditions, injuries, limited English proficiency or who are non-English speaking, seniors, children, people living in institutionalized settings, or those who are low income, homeless, or transportation disadvantaged, including but not limited to, those who are dependent on public transit or those who are pregnant.”<sup>20</sup>

## **THE OPPORTUNITY**

COVID-19 has drawn attention to the food system like never before, even though the problems the pandemic exposed are not new. The pandemic has thrown into sharp relief the risks to public health, the economy, and equity in the way our food system currently operates. This moment makes clear not only the urgency of meeting present needs, but also of reimagining our food

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system, so it is more equitable, resilient, and sustainable for the future.<sup>21</sup>

County and city governments are well positioned to spearhead food system initiatives because, for several decades, the local level has been the epicenter of food system innovations and alternatives, which have been pioneered by local governments, nonprofits, businesses, and residents. While the pandemic has shown the negative consequences of our current food system, local innovations prior to and in response to the pandemic also show opportunities to change course. These innovations and collaborations shine a light on the food system's potential to be a lever for improved health outcomes, regional economic vitality, social justice, and environmental stewardship. Already, local farmers, ranchers, businesses, nonprofits, and residents are pivoting to fill the gaps that have emerged or widened during the pandemic. As the emergency food response during the pandemic has shown, local governments and their private and nonprofit partners can respond nimbly to changing food system conditions. With continued County leadership and committed coordination, the resilience, adaptability, and equity of local food systems can be further strengthened.<sup>22</sup>

### **THE VISION AND VALUES**

This workplan envisions a resilient and equitable food system that supports the health and well-being of all residents, economic prosperity

for communities throughout the county, and the stewardship of our natural and biological resources, while addressing a legacy of inequity and preparing for and mitigating long-term changes to our climate.

In this vision:

- All people have enough affordable, healthy, and culturally relevant food to meet their needs;
- The needs, aspirations, and leadership of county residents, particularly those most negatively impacted by the current food system, are centered in policy, planning, and programming;
- Diverse food traditions are recognized as assets;
- People working in the food system are fairly compensated and work in safe conditions;
- There are economic opportunities for small, independent food businesses as vehicles of wealth creation and prosperity for our neighborhoods and communities;
- There are abundant opportunities to grow food throughout the county;
- Aggregation, distribution, and processing infrastructure exists to connect small and mid-sized farm and food businesses with diverse markets and customers;
- Having integrated lessons from recent emergency food responses, Santa Clara County is more prepared for future disasters and moving toward longer-term food resilience.

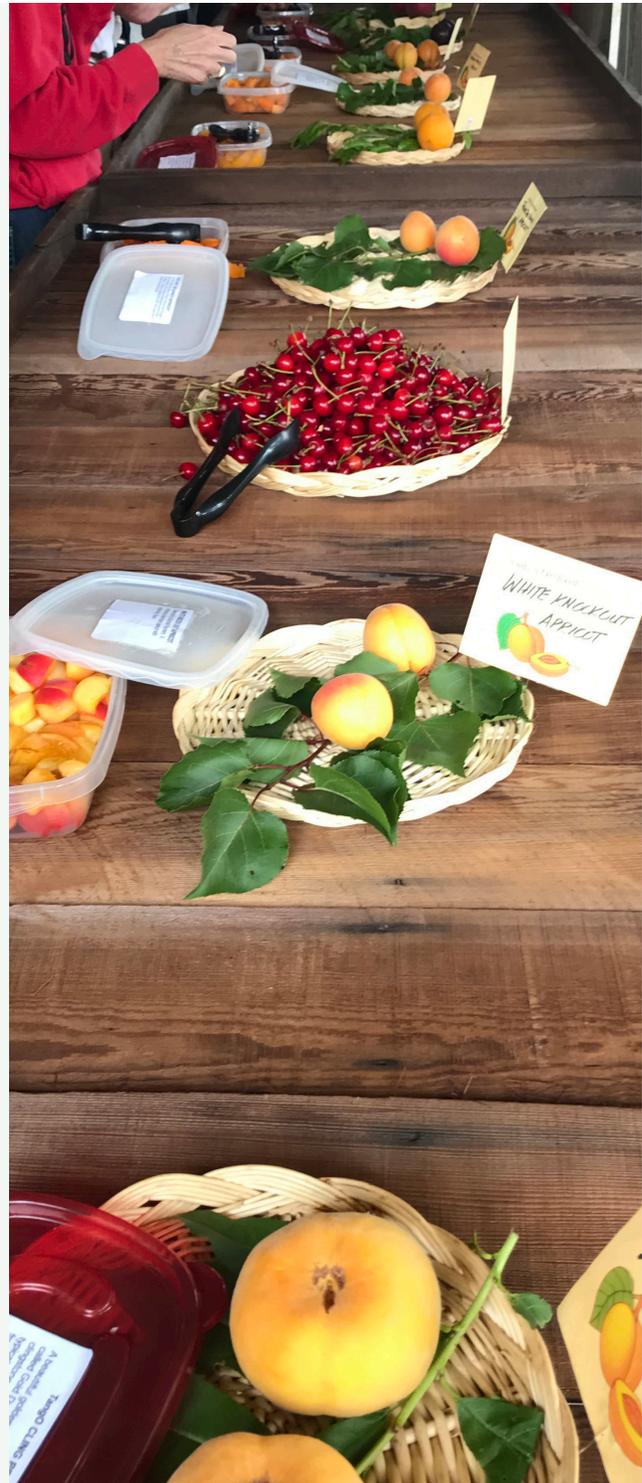
The following values guided the selection of the goals, recommendations, and strategies highlighted in this report:

Equity & Justice: A food system that **counters systemic racial, economic, gender, and ability-based disparities, so all can participate, prosper, and reach their full health potential**

Resilience: The **ability to prepare for, withstand, and recover from a crisis or disruption**, and to not return to the condition where the most vulnerable residents continue to bear the greatest risk and most impact from disasters

Food sovereignty: The **right of people to healthy and culturally appropriate food** produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their **right to define their own food and agriculture systems**

Ecological sustainability and climate mitigation: A food system that **conserves the productivity of water, soil, and ecosystems and reduces negative/harmful impacts to natural environment and human health**



# SCC FOOD SYSTEM WORKPLAN

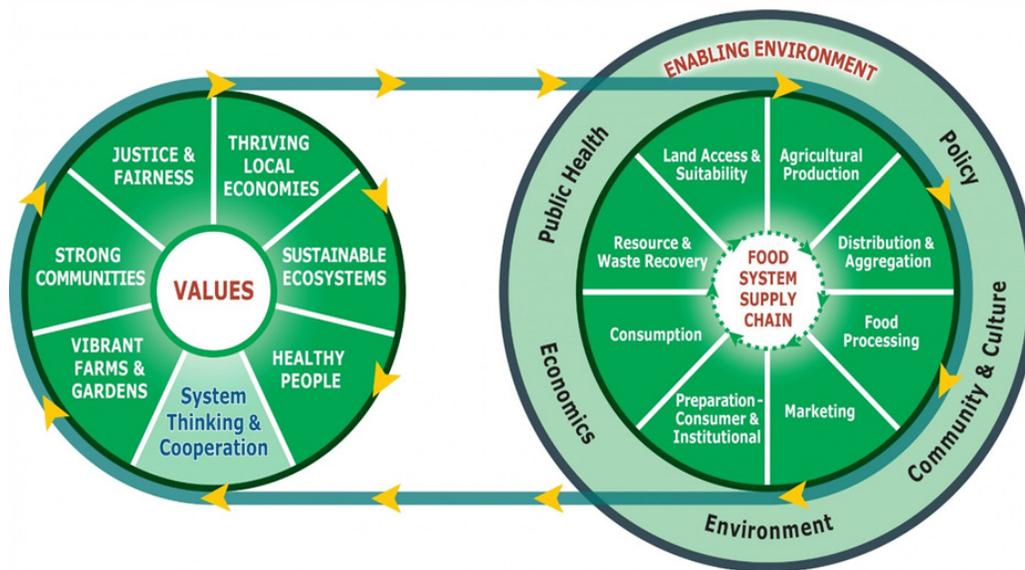
## BACKGROUND

### WHAT IS THE FOOD SYSTEM?

The food system encompasses the resources, activities, and people involved in bringing food from farms to our plates and then managing food waste. Food system activities include growing, harvesting, processing, packaging, transporting, marketing, and distribution. Farmers, ranchers, agricultural workers, and food service employees are just a few of the food system actors who power the food system. Yet, the food supply chain does not operate in isolation. Instead, it interacts with and is influenced by the larger social, cultural, political, economic, and environmental context. The environment in which the food system operates includes consumers, nonprofit organizations, government agencies, educational

institutions, and funders who provide support and aid in the development of local and regional food systems.

Some of the core values that motivate local and regional food system initiatives include equity, health, sustainability, thriving local economies, and systems thinking and collaboration. Figure 1 below illustrates the relationship between the food supply chain, its enabling environment, and values. The food system sits at the nexus of many complex and critical issues: climate change, health, immigration, labor, and disaster resilience. As a result, how local leaders and stakeholders approach the food system has real impacts on health, the environment, communities, and the regional economy.<sup>23</sup>



### COUNTY'S ROLE IN THE FOOD SYSTEM

The County of Santa Clara plays a significant role in the food system. County government is involved in many facets of the food system ranging from protecting and preserving our agricultural working lands to regulating food facilities and issuing health

**Figure 1.** Food system model from the University of Wisconsin Extension, Community Food Systems Toolkit.<sup>24</sup>

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permits to restaurants and mobile vendors as a means of ensuring safe food for consumers. Through the Department of Corrections and Santa Clara Valley Health and Hospital System, the County is also a meal provider, procuring food for and serving tens of thousands of meals daily. The County administers food benefit programs, provides nutrition education, and works to make healthy food more affordable and easier to access for vulnerable populations. The County also acts as a convener, bringing food system partners together to share information and best practices, as well as a funder of food system programs through contracts with other organizations. Departments and programs within the county that address different components of the food system include:

- The Social Services Agency - Senior Nutrition Program and Department of Employment and Benefit Services;
- Department of Agriculture and Environmental Management;
- Department of Environmental Health;
- Procurement Department;
- Public Health Department - CalFresh Healthy Living Program;
- Department of Planning and Development;
- Probation Department – Neighborhood Safety/Services Unit;
- Office of the Sheriff;
- Santa Clara Valley Medical Center Hospital and Clinics; and
- Office of Sustainability.

A Food, Restaurants, Agriculture, and Health Access Initiative will reinforce the County’s existing policy priorities. Some examples include:

- Increasing access to nutritious food corresponds with the County’s existing nutrition policies, including the Santa Clara County Nutrition Standards and Guidance for Food and Beverages and the County of Santa Clara Healthy Worksite Program, which is a toolkit for working with cities and other nonprofits to pass nutrition and physical activity policies.<sup>25</sup> The Health Element of the Santa Clara County General Plan also includes healthy eating, food access, and sustainable food systems.<sup>26</sup>
- Supporting children’s well-being through food policy aligns with the County’s Community Health Improvement Plan, and the Children’s Health Assessment, where food, nutrition, and exercise are highlighted in order to curb the rates of childhood obesity.<sup>27</sup>
- Creating improved opportunities for businesses across the food system, from production to processing to food service, corresponds with Santa Clara County’s General Plan, which includes social and economic well-being as one of its main themes.<sup>28</sup> Goals under this theme include a healthy, diverse economy and adequate employment opportunities.
- Diverting food from landfills reduces greenhouse gas emissions and promotes climate mitigation, which align with the

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County’s commitment to combating climate change through the Santa Clara County Sustainability Master Plan.<sup>29</sup>

- Preserving the county’s working agricultural lands and facilitating land access for urban agriculture align with the Santa Clara County Valley Agricultural Plan and the County’s Urban Agriculture Incentive Zone Ordinance, respectively.<sup>30</sup>

## PROCESS

The development of this food system workplan drew on four primary sources of information and feedback.

### Literature review and secondary data

**collection.** From November 2020 to January 2021, we reviewed 29 reports and papers on the Santa Clara County food system. We aggregated food system trends, available data, and previous recommendations to provide background on each sector of the food system and to identify current and successful work. Researchers at San Jose State University also shared their recent



work related to the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on food access and insecurity.

### Stakeholder

**interviews.** From November 2020 to January 2021, we

conducted interviews with local food systems stakeholders. We interviewed 39 people from nonprofit and public agencies about promising and successful programs in the county, as well as food system priorities, barriers to success, the impact of COVID-19, opportunities for collaboration, and practices related to enhancing racial equity. Additionally, we interviewed 15 businesses, including farms, restaurants, food processors, food manufacturers, and grocery stores about the impact of COVID-19, connections to other parts of the Santa Clara County food system, and their vision for the future.

### Engagement with existing food system

**working groups.** Santa Clara County is home to several groups, committees, and collaboratives, whose work is related to food, agriculture, or nutrition. The project team participated in some of these food system groups’ meetings to inform their members about the food system workplan and to gather input on goals and recommendations. We provided updates about the food system workplan to the Santa Clara County Food System Alliance, the Social Services Agency-Second Harvest Emergency Food Partner meeting, the South Bay Food Justice Collaborative, the Santa Clara County Farm Bureau, Food Insecurity Response Subcommittee Team (FIRST) of the South County Youth Task Force, and CommUniverCity’s steering committee. We met with members of the Santa Clara County Food System Alliance and guests, the Social Services Agency-Second Harvest

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Emergency Food Partner meeting, and the South Bay Food Justice Collaborative to gather input. We also learned about County food system work and received input from County staff at two "Kitchen Cabinet" meetings. Additionally, in July 2020, SPUR and the Santa Clara County Food System Alliance hosted a Food System Convening to generate policy ideas for the Food, Restaurants, Agriculture, Health Access Initiative, and we drew on the resulting policy package as well.

**Recommendation input survey.** In January 2021, we used the results of report review,

interviews, and engagement with food system groups to generate a draft list of goals and recommendations for the workplan. We created two surveys asking respondents to identify important actions and provide additional feedback. The surveys were distributed in February and March 2021 and received 127 responses in total.

We were unable to collect feedback directly from members of the public during this phase of workplan development and we encourage their participation in future phases of this work (see Goal 2).

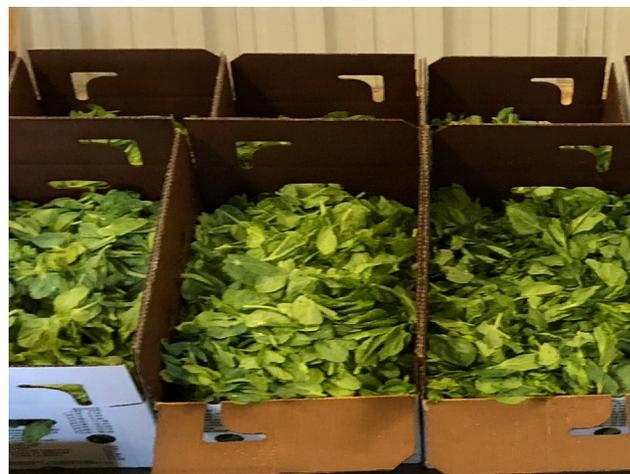


# GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## Goal 1. Enhance food system coordination and leadership

### BACKGROUND

For decades, food system issues have been treated as isolated problems, to be addressed by disparate government and non-governmental agencies.<sup>31</sup> However, there are several organizational structures that can help bring a more holistic and coordinated approach to food while engaging public, private, and community-based organizations. First, food system coordination is increasingly taking place within local governments. For example, Baltimore City has created a Food Policy and Planning Division to oversee implementation of the Baltimore Food Policy Initiative, which includes interagency coordination, a Food Policy Action Coalition, and Resident Food Equity Advisors. Under the leadership of a Food Policy Director, this division is staffed by a Food Access Planner, a Food Resilience Planner, and a Food Systems Planner.<sup>32</sup> Second, collaborative multisectoral bodies like Food Policy Councils, which connect local government and civic groups, have emerged as another way to holistically address issues within the food system. Through platforms of this nature, community actors and local government personnel are able to engage in coordinated action. Thus, establishing a permanent multi-stakeholder platform, which brings together local government and community organizations, can be an important stage in advancing food system



solutions. This structure for collaboration is key to building a joint vision for change, and ultimately advocating for policy that facilitates a more sustainable regional food system. Furthermore, the collaborative mechanisms at work in such bodies help to enhance communication across silos, create regional ties, and foster trust.<sup>33</sup>

### CURRENT CONDITIONS

There are many actors in Santa Clara County's food system: more than 1.9 million eaters, tens of thousands of people employed in food and agriculture industries, thousands of businesses, hundreds of nonprofits and community-based organizations, and multiple County and City agencies. Prior to the pandemic, there were a number of food system-related collaboratives and coalitions, whose members come together to

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learn and to maximize their impact. Many of these collaboratives focus on a particular area within the food system (e.g., food access, nutrition, or food waste), although some, like the Santa Clara County Food System Alliance, take a food system-wide approach. Existing collaboratives include, but are not limited to:

- the Santa Clara County Food System Alliance;
- the Santa Clara County Nutrition Action Partnership;
- the Food Insecurity Response Subcommittee Team (FIRST) of the South County Youth Taskforce;
- the Silicon Valley Food Recovery Council;
- Technical Advisory Council to the Recycling and Waste Reduction Commission;
- Child Nutrition Coalition;
- Senior Nutrition Program Providers Workgroup; and
- the South Bay Food Justice Coalition.



The recently formed Food Access Partner Convening, facilitated by the Social Services Agency and consisting of emergency food distributors, was created in response to the pandemic. In addition,

Collaborating Agencies' Disaster Relief Effort (CADRE), the Safety Net Coalition, the Cross Agency Services Team, the Bridge to Recovery Workgroup, the Si Se Puede Collective, City Challenge Teams, and the Santa Clara County After-School Collaborative address broader issues as well as improvements to the food system for their particular client base.

### **LESSONS FROM COVID - THE ROLE OF RELATIONSHIPS AND COORDINATION IN RESILIENCY**

Local public, private, and nonprofit partners' response to COVID-19's disruption of the county food system highlighted the importance of relationships among groups and food systems sectors. In interviews, stakeholders identified the ability of well-established partnerships and collaborations to pivot quickly to meet new needs for food as something that went well in the pandemic response. But they also noted where coordination and communication were lacking. Interviewees reported a need for better lines of communication between public, private and non-profit agencies working on food system issues. There was also a lack of understanding of the roles that different organizations were already serving and how they could be leveraged to address the increased need for food. Food providers and food rescue organizations identified connections to farmers as a gap. Overall, when stakeholders reflected on what could have been improved during the early months of the pandemic, better coordination and

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communication was a common theme.

Going forward, stakeholders identified a need for stronger relationships between all sectors of the food system and a structure for better coordination. Interviewees noted the following benefits of enhanced collaboration and coordination:

- Strong and trusted partnerships maximize individual entity's efforts;
- Increased communication between organizations and sectors avoids duplication of services and facilitates creation of innovative solutions that address existing gaps;
- Partners can more easily leverage resources and assets within the community;
- New organizations can be brought to the table who serve different segments of the population;
- Sharing best practices among sector partners can ensure services will be implemented quickly and efficiently;
- Uniform messaging can be created to develop awareness of food system issues and accomplishments; and
- Collective advocacy efforts can be employed to realize improvements across the food system.

Though existing collaboratives serve an important purpose, stakeholders agreed that coordination among them could be strengthened and improved. General suggestions to facilitate

greater coordination within the food system were:

- Expansion of organizational networks to include a greater variety of public, private and non-profit partners, including more school food service directors and county regulatory departments;
- Development of stronger relationships between food system sectors (e.g., between charitable food distribution providers and agriculture);
- Establishment of localized working groups within certain communities or cities to meet specific community food collaboration needs (e.g., replication of the South County FIRST Subcommittee);
- Funding that supports collaboration between partners and includes it as a deliverable; and
- Training on more effective methods of collaboration and use of a racial-health equity framework for delivery of services and developing partnerships.

Overall, three forms of coordination were



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identified: 1) stronger coordination between County of Santa Clara internal agencies, 2) increased connection between the County and existing collaboratives, and 3) increased connection between residents, particularly from the most vulnerable neighborhoods, and the County. The first two are outlined below and the third is described in the next section on community engagement and food sovereignty.

### **INTERNAL COUNTY COORDINATION**

Food issues are often assigned to specific agencies that address only the aspects of the food system that fall within their silo. Stakeholders recognized that food and agriculture issues are spread out across County agencies, with multiple interviewees noting the value of having the County establish a position dedicated to the food system. This position or team would institutionalize knowledge of the food system and lead coordination across disparate agencies and programs to identify gaps and take action. In other metropolitan areas, such as Seattle, Baltimore, and New York, initial efforts to develop food system initiatives have focused on establishing the institutional infrastructure to carry out this work, for example dedicated staff or an Office of Food Policy.<sup>34</sup>

As a result of the Food, Restaurants, Agriculture, and Health Access Initiative Referral, a new working group, or “Kitchen Cabinet,” was created, composed of County agencies whose work involves various aspects of the food system

from nutrition to food waste. While the workplan was being developed, this group met to share information about County programs that address food system work. Participants in the Kitchen Cabinet see benefit in continuing to meet and have identified that further internal collaboration has the potential to facilitate:

- Greater efficiency and effectiveness of County services;
- Increased awareness about County programs;
- Greater coordination between County agencies and department programs to help those in need get access to, and benefit from, County services;
- Increased opportunities to secure new or leverage existing departmental resources/funding;
- Opportunities to contribute expertise and support County food advocacy efforts at the local, state or federal level; and
- Increased opportunities to address gaps in services through cross-department projects.

A more firmly established Kitchen Cabinet could be convened by a Food System Manager, who would lead food system coordination efforts and oversee implementation of the food system workplan. Through quarterly meetings and subcommittee work, the Kitchen Cabinet could foster ongoing communication, assess opportunities for greater collaboration among County programs, evaluate barriers to food

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system work, and leverage existing resources for food system work.

### **COORDINATION OF PUBLIC, PRIVATE, AND NONPROFIT PARTNERS**

A Food System Leadership Collaborative would convene existing collaboratives or coalitions, utilizing a constellation model,<sup>35</sup> which brings together multiple sectors within the food system to work toward a joint outcome. This model would eliminate the need to create a new organization and instead, encourage leadership from different organizations through a subcommittee structure. Existing collaboratives or coalitions that currently meet in the county could form the basis of these subcommittees, since many of these groups already have specialized focus areas within the food system. Subcommittee could focus on workplan goals and take the lead on the proposed recommendations and strategies.

The constellation model takes an activity-led approach through collaboration within subcommittees and balances the load among partners. It focuses on groups' core competencies and expertise, allows for leveraging funding that individual organizations already have, and can help coordinate partners to seek new funding to support additional collaborative efforts. Subcommittee would meet monthly and the Food System Leadership Collaborative would meet quarterly. Leads or co-leads from the subcommittees would comprise the Leadership

Collaborative.

### **PREPARING FOR FUTURE DISASTERS**

Drawing on the lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic to be better prepared for future disasters was a recurring theme in interviews and focus groups. Many interviewees identified a need for formal agreements between the County and cities and between local government and community partners that could be activated the next time disaster strikes. They also emphasized that emergency food planning should consider various disaster scenarios (e.g., wildfires, power outages, flooding), prioritize equity and cultural competency, and integrate access and functional needs. Stakeholders identified the development of a food system specific resilience plan as a strategy to encompass these various components and to ensure the security of the County's food supply during and following future disasters. While plans with food system elements already exist within the county, there is a need for one cohesive document which provides a framework for emergency response protocols and establishes structures for coordination during such scenarios.<sup>36</sup>

### **CONNECTING FOOD WORK TO OTHER SECTORS AND OTHER LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT**

While significant progress can be made through local food system policy and planning, interviewees were quick to point out the connections between food issues and other

sectors, like housing, transportation, healthcare, and education. Thinking about food through the lens of social justice has helped to broaden the domain of food policy to include issues like affordable housing, worker protections, transportation, and broadband access, which can help to address the structural causes of food issues. In turn, this has enabled new cross-sector partnerships to broaden the coalition working towards food system reform.<sup>37</sup>

Similarly, food system stakeholders noted that many important policies affecting farming, labor, and food assistance are made at the state or federal level. To address the most serious challenges to an equitable food system, it is important to work at multiple levels of government. In interviews, stakeholders recommended food policy be a part of the County’s legislative advocacy priorities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Increase the capacity of County government to support and lead food system change**

- 1.1** Create a full-time Food System Manager position to lead implementation of workplan
- 1.2** Institutionalize internal collaboration through the creation of a “Kitchen Cabinet”

### **Strengthen the capacity for food system coordination among public, nonprofit, and private food system stakeholders**

- 1.3** Guide the establishment of an external Food System Leadership Collaborative
- 1.4** Develop a food system resilience plan
- 1.5** Collaborate across industry sectors (e.g., housing, health care) to further the reach of food system work

### **Promote regional food system development in other sectors and at other levels of government**

- 1.6** Advocate for policies at all government levels that advance food system goals and reduce food insecurity
- 1.7** Embed food system planning and implementation in county policies, plans (i.e., food in all policies)

For a complete list of next steps, partners, and metrics for each strategy, see Appendix 1, “Goals, Recommendations, and Strategies.”

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## Goal 2. Increase community engagement in the food system toward greater food sovereignty

### BACKGROUND

“Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally-appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies.”<sup>38</sup> Food sovereignty goes beyond the goal of food security (i.e., ensuring that all people have enough food for a healthy life) to thinking about how to shape systems, so people can determine their own food choices and address the structural inequalities that produce food insecurity. As an approach, food sovereignty focuses on providing people the opportunity to take control of their own food choices and make changes that create a more just and sustainable system.<sup>39</sup> Ultimately, food sovereignty aims to address the need for a more democratic food system, so that those who eat, produce, and work in the food system have a say in what it looks like.<sup>40</sup> In practice, food sovereignty can include both formal governance structures

that increase residents’ say in food system issues as well as projects, such as community gardens and farms, that give participants the opportunity to produce and obtain food that aligns with their values.

Food system governance can be understood as the structures which influence a region’s systems of food production, distribution, and consumption. Under traditional governance models, government actors influence the food system through programs, policies, and budgets which are—for the most part—internally designed and prioritized. Alternatively, community-based participatory models are grounded in the goal of placing power into the hands of the communities affected by local food system decisions. Citizens and community groups play an active role in priority setting as well as co-creating solutions

to problems on the ground.<sup>41</sup>

The use of participatory governance models in food systems is advantageous for a number of reasons. Foremost is community members’ lived





experience; their daily interaction with local food environments provides invaluable insights that can be translated into relevant, impactful solutions. In the traditional model of governance, decision makers alone may not have a complete picture of local conditions, values, or priorities. Participatory models are also lauded for their potential to contribute to citizen empowerment and community capacity building, which have been shown to improve local resilience to economic and social challenges, as well as increase regional pride and satisfaction. Additionally, participatory models encourage a more transparent decision making process, ultimately cultivating trust between government and constituents.<sup>42</sup>

### **CURRENT CONDITIONS**

Across the country, a small, but growing, number of initiatives have emerged to facilitate citizen participation in food system governance at the local level. Baltimore City, for example, has

introduced a Resident Food Equity Advisors program, an effort which brings together cohorts of Baltimore residents to collectively propose food-related policies grounded in principles of equity and inclusion. Cohorts are intentionally selected to reflect the demographics of Baltimore City, while being inclusive of different backgrounds and age groups.<sup>43</sup>

In Santa Clara County, a variety of organizations provide platforms for community engagement in food-related issues as well. La Mesa Verde, a program of Sacred Heart Community Service, and Valley Verde both provide low income residents of San Jose with materials and educational workshops so they can grow their own produce. These programs cultivate both food self-sufficiency and community involvement in local food matters. Veggielution Community Farm engages food entrepreneurs in East San Jose through its Eastside Grown program. The East San Jose PEACE Partnership is a work

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group-based program, staffed by the Public Health Department, which brings together residents and local organizations to identify avenues for improved local health equity. The program is grounded in ideals of collaboration, empowerment, and community activism. Within the Probation Department, the Neighborhood Safety/Services Unit focuses on community engagement and leadership development in two zip codes. One outcome of these collaborative efforts has been the Valley Palms Unidos resident-run food distribution, done in partnership with Second Harvest of Silicon Valley.<sup>44</sup> These examples also highlight the important role that community-based organizations can play in supporting and facilitating projects that address food insecurity and food sovereignty, particularly in communities most impacted by lack of access to fresh food.<sup>45</sup>

how opportunities for civic engagement and lifting up local voices can foster community engagement toward increased food sovereignty. Still, stakeholders were clear that to center equity in food system work, resident food leaders should be engaged in food system policy and planning and have a place in structures for increased collaboration. In interviews and conversations, stakeholders requested the development of resident-led food and agricultural projects that further support community members' capacity to define solutions for food system issues and participate in the decision-making process. Investing in community-based organizations and their work incubating collaborative, community-led and designed projects can increase community engagement in the food system and plant the seed for a food landscape which places community priorities at its core.

Models such as these are valuable examples of

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Foster connections between community food leaders and local government officials**

**2.1** Create a Resident Food Equity Advisory Council for food system issues

### **Strengthen the capacity for neighborhood-level food sovereignty work**

**2.2** Invest in community-based organizations to facilitate community involvement through food system leadership training and development of collaborative, community-led projects

For a complete list of next steps, partners, and metrics for each strategy, see Appendix 1, "Goals, Recommendations, and Strategies."

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## Goal 3. Maintain farmland, increase agricultural opportunities, and enhance farm viability

### BACKGROUND

Santa Clara County is fortunate to have rich soils, a well managed groundwater basin, and a temperate climate that can support a wide array of agricultural crops, including fruits and vegetables as well as livestock production. Agricultural products grown in Santa Clara County are consumed locally and globally. They are integrated through regional, national and international supply chains to provide food for our communities.

Protecting the County’s working lands (farm and grazing land) is essential not only to support the current agricultural economy but also to preserve its resource values. These include a myriad of ecosystem services provided by the landscape such as clean air and water, wildlife habitat, flood risk reduction, groundwater recharge, erosion control and climate protection and resiliency. Sustaining and growing our agricultural lands in the County over time will retain and enhance these important and valuable regional ecosystem services. Agricultural land-uses also support numerous cultural services such as viewsheds and increased access to greenspace, agricultural jobs, the preservation of foodways and potential for increased food security.



### THE STATE OF AGRICULTURAL LAND AND AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION IN SANTA CLARA COUNTY

In 2019, vegetable crops had a gross value of nearly \$200 million of the total agriculture production value of just over \$300 million. Production is shifting towards higher value crops such as nursery crops, mushrooms and vegetables, however the overall amount of cultivated acreage has decreased since 2000. Just over 20,000 acres of land, primarily in the southern part of the county is cultivated. Over the last 35 years, Santa Clara County has lost more farmland than any other Bay Area County and the agricultural area from south San Jose to Gilroy continues to be very vulnerable to development.<sup>46</sup>

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Santa Clara County is home to a diverse set of large, mid-size, small and urban agricultural producers. Seventy-eight percent of the farms in Santa Clara are 50 acres or less and of these 47 percent are less than 10 acres in size. Ninety-two percent of the farms in the county are considered to be small farms (gross cash farm income under \$250,000). Nevertheless, Santa Clara County remains home to large-scale agricultural production. It is in the top five counties statewide for production of garlic, bell peppers, and sweet corn and in the top two counties statewide for mushroom production.<sup>47</sup> In 2019, Santa Clara County farmers produced 31,624 tons of bell peppers with a value of more than \$12 million. Santa Clara County farmers, including more than 100 Asian farmers, also produced 14,760 tons of Asian vegetables, such as bok choy, ong choy, and Napa cabbage, valued at more than \$9 million.<sup>48</sup>

Another trend is the increasing utilization of urban land for food production in urban farms and gardens. These sites are typically small (from ¼ to 10 acres) and surrounded by non-agricultural land uses. The largest land use in the county



is livestock grazing, which occurs on over 30 percent of the county's land (288,084 acres), mostly in the Diablo Range on a mix of private and publicly owned rangeland. Grazing supports 20,000 cows and calves on naturally growing plants with an average farm size of 957 acres.<sup>49</sup>

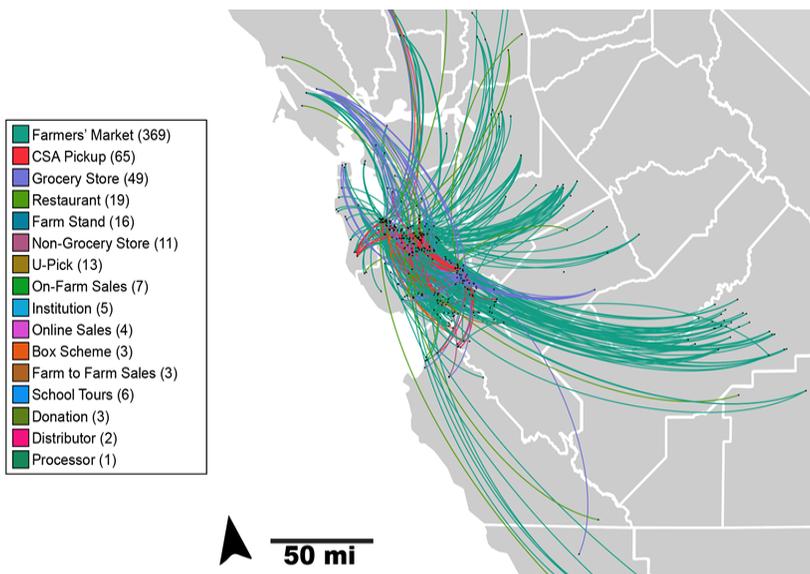
### **THE SANTA CLARA COUNTY COMMUNITY FOODSHED - EXCERPTED FINDINGS FROM THE SANTA CLARA COUNTY COMMUNITY FOOD GUIDE <sup>50</sup>**

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. Many farms connect directly with their communities at farmers' markets and through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), 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. The UC Davis Land, Environment & Policy lab analyzed Santa Clara County's community food system network based on visible farm-to-market connections, namely 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. Key findings

from the report are included here; the full report is available at [brinkley.faculty.ucdavis.edu/santaclara](http://brinkley.faculty.ucdavis.edu/santaclara).

The network map of Santa Clara County shows a richly interconnected community food system with farms selling through farmers' markets, CSAs, grocery stores, and various other organizations (Figure 2; Table 1). The analysis found 548 connections between farms and their first point of sale or donation for raw food products. Two-thirds of the connections in Santa Clara County are from farms to farmers' markets (369 connections, Figure 2). Farms from as far as 150 miles away travel to Santa Clara County farmers' markets, demonstrating

the geographical draw of Santa Clara County's community food system. 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). The distance between farms and CSA pick-up sites is roughly half the distance that farmers travel to attend farmers' markets, demonstrating the spatial aspect of different community food system marketing pathways. Sixteen Santa Clara Valley farms only sell their produce at farm stands or otherwise directly from the farm. 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.



**Figure 2. Santa Clara County's community food network.** More information and methods available at [Brinkley.faculty.ucdavis.edu/santaclara](http://Brinkley.faculty.ucdavis.edu/santaclara).

The diversity and redundancy of marketing types provides resilience in a community food system, particularly in times of crisis. Many farms that sell at farmers markets also offer CSA boxes (Figure 2). To a lesser extent, farm-to-restaurant connections also overlap with marketing to farmers' markets, grocery stores and CSAs (Figure 2). The variety of marketing types can be a strength during crises, like COVID-19, where food marketing channels need to rapidly switch.

**Table 1. Contributors to Santa Clara County's food system.** Network contributors may be located in Santa Clara County, have a direct connection to a farm or market in Santa Clara County, or both.

CONTRIBUTORS	
FARM	202
CSA PICKUP	52
FARMERS' MARKET	45
GROCERY STORE	40
RESTAURANT	17
OTHER	17
INSTITUTION	9

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Because of the prominent role of farmers' markets in the Santa Clara County community food system, future plans should consult farmers' market groups while also considering how to nurture less represented marketing pathways and build greater equity into the community food system.
- The community food system analysis identified 202 farms in the network, 60 of which (or roughly 30 percent) are in Santa Clara County (Table 1). Thus, county planning efforts should consider the regional nature of the community food system and partnerships with surrounding agricultural communities with shared policy objectives.
- Several farms included in this analysis, such as Magaña Farms, show an important path to equity in community food systems,

and policies that wish to focus on lifting up growers of color or reparations should include representatives from farmers who have experience.

- There is little evidence of direct connections between local farmers and Santa Clara County restaurants. Farms in neighboring counties describe stronger connections to restaurants in San Francisco, the East Bay, and Santa Cruz. This indicates that with buy-in from Santa Clara chefs and restaurateurs, as well as appropriate infrastructure and help facilitating connections, there is great potential to grow a farm-to-table restaurant movement in Santa Clara County.

According to the 2017 Agricultural Census there are currently 191 Asian producers in the county. Based on communications with 67 of these farmers we found that 21 farmers sold directly



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to grocery stores (50 percent or more of their sales to grocery stores, and remaining sales to wholesale), 43 growers sold to grocery stores through brokers (these brokers were usually either family or extended family, and other Asian producers in the region), and the remaining 3 growers sold primarily to wholesalers. Because these regional connections are generally not advertised online, they are not visible in the community food system analysis above.

### **COVID-19 IMPACTS TO SANTA CLARA COUNTY AGRICULTURE**

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has varied for the county's farmers depending on their typical markets and the security of their land tenure. For most farmers, there was a sudden disruption in March of 2020, later compounded by illness and insecurity within the workforce. Those relying on sales to food service outlets, such as restaurants and school cafeterias, reported a contraction in those outlets, some citing losses of up to 40 percent during the early pandemic period.

COVID-19 had a large financial impact on Asian farmers in the county. In a UC-led survey of Asian growers, 91% of survey respondents reported loss of sales and 82% of respondents reported surplus or unsold product. All respondents who experienced unsold product had to partially or fully dispose of it. None of respondents who experienced unsold product were logistically and financially able to donate to food banks or had

access to produce buyback programs available in other parts of the state. COVID-19 also affected these growers' communities. Sixty-two percent reported that a family member lost their job and 24% reported that a family member's health was compromised. Respondents' workers were impacted as well, with 94% reporting that their workers experienced a loss of income, 41% reporting that a workers' family member lost their job, and 24% reporting that their workers' had at least one family member whose health was compromised.

As seen across the nation, COVID-19 has exacerbated longstanding and systemic issues with farmworker safety, including insufficient sick-leave, a lack of personal protective equipment (PPE), inadequate housing, and concerns about job security that result in spread within the workforce. Access to vaccines has been challenging for non-English speaking farmworkers or those without routine internet access to utilize online appointment systems. However, County agencies have collaborated to offer vaccinations at multiple sites specifically for farmers and farmworkers.

Such conditions exacerbate a pre-existing dearth of farm labor, noted by many producers throughout the County. In addition to family members, a number of small farmers within the county rely on migrant farm workers from China, as well as Central and South America. With restrictions on travel into the country during

the pandemic, several of these farms have lost farm workers. As a result of labor shortages and other workforce disruptions, farmers have had to adjust crop production schedules and, in some cases, delay making critical infrastructure improvements.

Adapting to the pandemic has also entailed increased expenses related to the rapid issuance of new regulations at the federal, state, and county level, as well as the purchase of PPE and costs associated with employee training. Farmers also note costs associated with changes in packaging or processing as well as delays in infrastructure or farm system upgrades and repairs. Others still have noted the financial impact of delayed visits by third-party certifiers in light of stay-at-home orders and associated concerns about cross-county movement.

On a positive note, demand for local agricultural products within Santa Clara County spiked in the wake of California's Shelter in Place order. Some farmers with strong direct-to-consumer relationships and the appropriate systems and infrastructure were able to respond and take advantage of supplemental market opportunities. For example, two Santa Clara County farms with existing CSA programs were inundated with new members; one sold 150 shares over just two days in March 2020.<sup>51</sup>

Local farmers note the buffering effect of engaging multiple sales avenues during pandemic-related market disruptions. Those selling only through wholesale channels required a more substantial pivot than those with both direct and indirect sales avenues.



Rapid innovation of alternative market models, such as the development of food hubs, stand to bolster farmer capacity to engage multiple, diverse market channels. Through the aggregation and distribution of produce from farms unable to meet the strict volume, sort and pack requirements of

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larger more conventional distributors, food hubs are increasingly cited by Santa Clara county food system participants as an unmet need.

Increased demand for food assistance and other programs addressing food insecurity provided an opportunity for increased connection between local farms and vulnerable communities within the county. This included support by local farms of programs such as Veggielution's Eastside Connect produce box and Santa Clara University's on-campus food insecurity initiatives, including its Bronco Pantry and Resiliency Bag.

Network analysis focused on the Santa Clara county food system showed that as COVID-19 broke down existing relationships between farmers and eaters, farms and community organizations quickly pivoted to forge new relationships. These relationships facilitated connections for farmers in need of a market and community members in need of food through sales and donations. Farmers with strong pre-existing relationships to community-based organizations appeared to demonstrate an improved capacity to pivot.

### **LAND TENURE AND RESILIENCY**

The lack of secure land-tenure—a major challenge for small and mid-scale agricultural producers pre-pandemic—has continued to affect farmers' ability to respond to the crisis. Lease terms of greater than one year at rates appropriate to the scale of production are two core elements

of secure land tenure that not only help farmers succeed in an already challenging industry, but have been shown to improve land stewardship. In the face of major disruptions, like COVID-19, a lack of secure land tenure significantly impacts the ability of farmers to make business decisions that might otherwise improve their resiliency. For instance, shouldering additional crop production costs, hiring employees and providing additional training, and investing in new farm infrastructure are all costs that farmers have incurred as they adapt to new pandemic-driven markets. These costs are fundamentally linked to the availability of farmland, an increasingly rare and tenuous land-use in counties like Santa Clara with rapidly growing urban areas.

As local farm Spade & Plow described in a blog post from March 2020, land insecurity restricted their ability to take on new CSA members due to a lack of confidence that such an expansion could be accommodated on farmland without secure land tenure.<sup>52</sup> Kitchen Table Advisors, a nonprofit organization that offers business support to small-scale, often non-English speaking farmers, noted similar impacts of land-insecurity. Those with stable land access were able to ride out the first few months of market fluctuations, while those with less stable land arrangement found themselves relocating to new farm sites just as the market disruption hit. These untimely shifts forced farmers to pivot on multiple fronts simultaneously.

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## **TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND DISASTER RELIEF**

Language barriers are yet another obstacle exacerbating the impacts of the pandemic on already vulnerable populations. Not only are non-English speaking farmers typically less able to leverage online marketing opportunities or social media, they may also have difficulty accessing state and federal agricultural and disaster relief programs. In Santa Clara, the UCCE Small Farm Program stepped in and provided technical assistance to growers, helping non-English speaking farmers to submit over 200 applications for relief funding between April-December 2020. These applications provided growers with \$3.1 million in emergency aid. Growers use these funds to help pay for gas and labor to maintain delivery to stores even with reduced volume of sales per delivery. It has also allowed the growers to maintain normal production (buy seeds, fertilizers, etc.) to ensure vegetable produce during and after the pandemic.

Similarly, the UCCE Small Farm Program in Santa Clara County worked in partnership with the County Department of Agriculture and Environmental Management to coordinate distribution of 200 COVID-19 kits containing reusable and N-95 masks, hand sanitizer, bilingual Cal OSHA guidelines and a resources sheet listing where to buy supplemental PPE. UCCE also worked to notify small-scale local farmers regarding shelter-in-place rules and delivered COVID-19 safety information in their

primary language.

## **WILDFIRE IMPACTS ON RANCHERS**

The SCU fire, which started in mid-August 2020 from lightning strikes, consumed nearly 400,000 acres including over 100,000 acres of rangeland in Santa Clara County. Though infrastructure losses were minimal and there were no human casualties, losses to the county's livestock industry were significant, estimated to be \$26,072,000.<sup>53</sup> Producers lost ranching infrastructure including hundreds of miles of fencing, tons of forage, and in some cases livestock. Losses on grazed lands occurred from wildfire and fire suppression activities such backfires and the creation of fuel breaks. While grazed lands reduced fire fighting risks and supported fire suppression, state lands with



Cattle grazing reduced spread of SCU fire in Santa Clara County, Fall 2020

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little management had high fuel loads which hampered firefighting efforts and exacerbated poor air quality. Using conservation grazing on state lands could provide multiple benefits by supporting conservation, reducing catastrophic wildfire risk, and providing access to forage to support livestock production.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

The following is a summary of key take-aways related to agricultural production in Santa Clara County during the COVID-19 crisis:

#### Impacts

- Farmworkers, particularly undocumented and non-English speaking workers have been disproportionately impacted. This has rippled through the agricultural system as a whole, creating increased vulnerability with regard to labor availability.
- State and local shelter-in-place orders and the resulting large-scale closures within the food service sector directly or indirectly impacted nearly all producers in Santa Clara County.
- Beyond market contractions, most farmers have experienced significant additional costs attributable to the health of employees, PPE, and new supplies and infrastructure associated with new markets and deferred maintenance or improvements. In particular, farms have struggled to track and implement a bevy of new health and safety regulations originating at all levels of government.
- In addition to lost revenue, farm families have

been doubly impacted by family members experiencing job losses.

- Some farms with multiple and diverse marketing avenues, for instance both wholesale and direct market outlets, have been able to address rapid shifts in demand. However, the majority of the Asian farmers in the county with similar multiple and diverse marketing avenues (including retail, restaurant, and wholesale sales) have seen reduction in sales and only four of these farms have been able to shift to direct to consumer marketing.
- Well networked direct-market and urban farms have played an important role in rerouting food in support of overall community food security.
- Demand for locally grown foods has increased during the pandemic as consumers seek out shortened supply chains and seek to bolster the local food economy.
- Land insecurity has adversely impacted the ability of farmers to make decisive changes to production and marketing programs necessary to withstand the pandemic.

#### Needs for Improved Resiliency

- Develop capacity at the County level to incorporate the experience of agricultural stakeholders into a formal planning process in support of resiliency to future disruptions like COVID-19.
- Consider the unique needs of the farm-worker population when creating future food system policy including codifying the status of farmworkers as “essential

workers”

- Support and expand efforts to provide technical assistance to producers, particularly non-English speaking farmers and farm workers, in implementing regulations and accessing relief programs.
- Facilitate formal ongoing cross-sectoral collaboration between food system stakeholders to minimize future market disruptions on the local level and thereby support improved food security.
- Assess the potential for county support of supplemental and innovative marketing and distribution channels, such as food

hubs, to minimize the ripple effect of disruptions within the global supply chain.

- Evaluate opportunities to improve secure agricultural land access within Santa Clara County.

In 2018, the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors adopted the Santa Clara Valley Agricultural Plan, which lays out a strategy for preserving agricultural land and investing in the county’s agricultural economy. The recommendations identified below are intended to complement the Santa Clara Valley Agricultural Plan.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Increase access to land and technical assistance for food production**

- 3.1** Address the needs of new entry and socially disadvantaged farmers for access to land and technical assistance (prioritize conservation funding)
- 3.2** Make suitable public land available for farming (land inventory and process for access); and support access on state lands for livestock grazing

### **Support farm viability and climate-smart stewardship practices**

- 3.3** Support farm businesses in the permitting process, regulatory compliance, and access to resources (Agricultural liaison position)
- 3.4** Support networks to connect Santa Clara County-based farmers, ranchers, and food businesses/restaurants to each other and institutional and individual customers
- 3.5** Maintain agriculture water rates and water access for farms and ranches
- 3.6** Make permanent the County’s Agricultural Resilience Incentive grant pilot program

For a complete list of next steps, partners, and metrics for each strategy, see Appendix 1, “Goals, Recommendations, and Strategies.”

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## Goal 4. Build a strong regional food economy where communities and individuals prosper

### BACKGROUND

Food and agriculture play a significant role in Santa Clara County's economy, providing tens of thousands of jobs and generating billions in revenue. Food businesses are an important avenue for community development, local economic vitality, entrepreneurship, and are central to increasing access to healthy and culturally appropriate foods in underserved areas.<sup>54</sup> The majority of food establishments in the county are small businesses employing fewer than 15 employees.<sup>55</sup> Urban residents are also key customers for the growing local food market.<sup>56</sup> Investments in appropriately-scaled infrastructure make local products more readily available to institutional and commercial buyers, while innovative purchasing strategies increase important market opportunities for regional farmers and food manufacturers. Expanding



regional food markets also generates more economic activity by keeping money circulating locally.<sup>57</sup>

The County can support and strengthen the regional food economy and encourage equitable economic development by reducing barriers for food entrepreneurs, supporting cooperatives, and investing in the regional food economy's financial and physical infrastructure.

### CURRENT CONDITIONS

Restaurants, retail, food service, food production, processing, manufacturing and distribution are important contributors to Santa Clara County's economy. Before the pandemic, within the agricultural production, agricultural support, and food processing and distribution sectors in Santa Clara County, there were 4,773 businesses, employing 27,664 people and generating \$8.16 billion in revenue.<sup>58</sup> In San Jose, which is home to about half of the county's restaurants and food service industry, there were 2,095 food establishments, employing a total of 25,186 people, and generating \$731.6 million in annual revenue (or nearly one-quarter of revenue for all food-related industries in the city) in 2016. Most San Jose restaurants and bars are small businesses with relatively few employees: nearly



three-quarters have between one and 14 employees. The majority of these establishments gross less than \$200,000 per year.<sup>59</sup> These small establishments are important for entrepreneurship and providing access

to food, especially in low-income neighborhoods. Many of these food system sectors have been heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, food system workers are some of the most economically vulnerable populations and have faced serious financial and health risks during the pandemic.<sup>60</sup>

**Restaurants.** Shelter-in-Place orders, indoor dining closures, as well as changes in people’s consumption patterns have especially impacted the restaurant and food service industry. Currently, the County has 539 permits for restaurants, 6.2 percent of which are temporarily closed and 5.4 percent of which have permanently closed since March 16, 2020.<sup>61</sup> In the South Bay, declines in employment have been greatest in the leisure and hospitality industry, which includes restaurants, with Santa Clara and San Benito Counties losing a combined 45,700 jobs in this sector from February 2020 to February 2021.<sup>62</sup> Some large corporations in the county

have continued to pay subcontracted food service workers during the pandemic, recognizing the critical income and access to health insurance this provides to workers, the majority of whom are Black or Latino.<sup>63</sup>

The Great Plates Delivered program was developed in response to the pandemic, linking food for older adults with support for restaurants. Participants receive two meals a day, five days a week, delivered to them at no cost.<sup>64</sup> Currently, nine restaurants in Santa Clara County are providing meals for the Great Plates Delivered program, and all are owned either by women, people of color, or are a small local business.<sup>65</sup> One participating restaurant mentioned that Great Plates Delivered was the reason their restaurant was still in business, and that were it not for the program, they would not have survived. Programs like Great Plates Delivered are a win-win, supporting local businesses and providing food to those in need.

Cooperatives are worker- or member-owned for-profit businesses where workers and consumers participate in decision-making and share in profits.<sup>66</sup> Recent research has shown that worker-owned cooperatives have been more resilient during the pandemic than other businesses: retaining staff and maintaining hours and salaries, while protecting worker health.<sup>67</sup> Cooperatives are also a powerful tool for food equity because they often serve low-income, non-white workers, like many of those employed in the food sector. In

### COVID BRIGHT SPOT: A Slice of New York

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the pizza shop A Slice of New York, Santa Clara County's first brick-and-mortar worker-owner cooperative, has demonstrated the resilience of the cooperative business model. Unlike countless restaurants across the nation, no employees have been laid off at A Slice of New York during the pandemic. Worker-owners have also taken pro-active steps to prioritize safety for employees and customers, implementing safety protocols like eliminating dine-in eating and mask wearing weeks before any mandates. And early in the pandemic, the team voted to temporarily implement a surcharge for employees since contactless payments eliminated the opportunity for customers to tip. Credit card tipping typically amounts to 20-25% of the salary for the team. This restaurant, with storefronts in Sunnyvale and Santa Clara, became a worker-owned cooperative in 2017. Co-founders Kirk Vartan and Marguerite Lee were motivated to sell the business to their employees because they wanted to create sustainable jobs for workers and a more democratic workplace. Employees have the option to become equal co-owners of the business, who share equitably in the business's profits as well as decision-making about budget, strategy, and governance. (Day-to-day operating decisions are still made by the general manager.)<sup>68</sup>



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January 2021, the City of Santa Clara established a Worker Cooperative Initiative to provide technical assistance and resources for businesses to transition to employee ownership.<sup>69</sup> The establishment of more cooperatives in Santa Clara County could be a successful model both for community development and resilience during disasters, like the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Grocery stores.** Due to social distancing rules, grocery stores had to limit entry into stores to meet capacity requirements. Interviews with store managers indicated that the pandemic forced them to reduce staff hours since limited customers called for less staff per hour. Some stores noted that both staff and customers were fearful of contracting COVID. Though stores indicated that following masking and social distancing regulations were not hard to practice, they did mention they wished a pandemic protocol had been in place beforehand, so they only needed to implement it, rather than having to create one from scratch. Regarding food insecurity, multiple stores noted that CalFresh recipients' participation in the Double Up Food Bucks matching program increased, and also observed that customers were more conscious of maximizing their money so they could afford to buy more food.

**Farmers' markets.** Farmers' markets, a key outlet for many small and mid-scale farms in Santa Clara County, also experienced a significant decrease in sales, at least initially, due to the

closure of nearly 40 percent of weekly markets. Those with the capacity to re-open, have faced practical and regulatory constraints associated with new safety measures as well reduced customer visits due to shelter-in-place orders. Early in the pandemic, some farmers' markets pivoted to drive-thru markets and pre-packaged boxes in order to retain sales. Some farmers' markets managers reported that keeping up with frequently changing rules during the pandemic was a challenge. More than a year later, of the 37 farmers' markets operating in the County, at least 9 remain closed because of COVID.<sup>70</sup> Closures impact both market and vendor income. Since COVID began, some farmers' markets have seen an increase in CalFresh and Market Match redemptions, an increase in spending per CalFresh shopper, and a new influx of CalFresh shoppers. In an interview, a farmers' market operator shared that the push to make farmers' markets "essential" had been key to keep markets operating.



### ***Cottage Food Operations.***

Cottage food operations allow individuals to prepare, package and sell certain low risk foods (e.g. cookies, cakes, breads) out of private in-home kitchens. With a \$50,000 cap on annual sales, these operations are small by nature. Currently, the county has 146 cottage food operations that sell directly to customers and 20 who sell to stores, coffee shops, or another intermediary that sells products to the end consumer. Of these, roughly 6 have requested temporary closure because of COVID, while others indicate negative impacts such as fewer customers or struggles with their



own health that have affected their ability to operate their businesses.

***Mobile Food Operations.*** There are a total of 694 permitted mobile food facilities in the County; these operations

range from ice cream, hot dog, tamale, and fruit carts to food trucks. Roughly six, or less than 1 percent, of these mobile food operators have requested that their permits be temporarily inactivated due to COVID. Many mobile vendors are immigrants or people of color. Research has shown that mobile dining has benefits for eaters, who can get healthy food at lower prices, and

### **COVID BRIGHT SPOT: Working Partnerships**

As the pandemic began, Working Partnerships assisted in building capacity at food banks. Utilizing Labor Partnerships, Working Partnerships recruited service workers who had been laid off and out-of-work teachers as volunteers at The Health Trust's Meals on Wheels program. To address the increased demand for safety net resources during the pandemic, Working Partnerships, in coordination with the Office of Labor Standards Enforcement, also established Santa Clara County COVID-19 Assistance Navigation (SCC CAN), a hotline for information on pivotal resources such as food, rental assistance, etc. This hotline, originally staffed by Working Partnerships employees, was eventually staffed by county residents who had been laid off from service industry jobs. Working Partnerships also trained and deployed community health workers to work with local business owners through their Community Health & Business Engagement Team, providing guidance and resources on implementing COVID-19 protocols to keep their employees and the community safe.

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offers an economic lifeline to vendors, especially those who have faced job and income loss during the pandemic.<sup>70</sup> Removing barriers to street vending could be one way to keep some of Santa Clara County's most vulnerable residents fed and out of poverty.<sup>71</sup> Stakeholders noted that complexity of the permitting process can be a deterrent for small businesses and aspiring food entrepreneurs and favors larger businesses with more resources. Additional outreach and education, in multiple languages, to mobile vendors could help these small businesses through the permitting process. By increasing technical assistance and removing barriers, more small and new food entrepreneurs can become a part of this food system solution.

***Food processing and manufacturing.*** Santa Clara County has approximately 586 food processors and manufacturers who “transform raw farm products into a wide range of value-added foods, from those that require little additional processing, such as juice or preserves, to more complex, multi-ingredient foods,” like spaghetti sauce.<sup>72</sup> Among the processing and manufacturing businesses that we interviewed, COVID impact was quite varied depending on their products and type of market. Business increased for a meal preparation and delivery firm while a food manufacturer that supplies restaurants felt the ripple effect from restaurant closures. Two businesses with direct-to-consumer sales found that their online business increased substantially at least in the early months of

the COVID-19 pandemic. The majority of these interviewees reported that what would most support their business was additional grants/relief programs as well as a more streamlined way to access them. A few interviewees noted they were ineligible for COVID relief sources and felt that grant/relief programs should have more flexible criteria. The creation of a food business liaison position within County government could assist business owners in navigating permitting and other regulatory matters and help them access grants and other relief programs.

## **PROCUREMENT**

Increasing the demand in the county for regionally produced food through institutional procurement policies (such as the Good Food Purchasing Policy) is a promising strategy for building a more resilient, diverse food system in Santa Clara County. Every year public and private institutions, such as schools, hospitals and jails, serve tens of thousands of meals and spend millions of dollars purchasing food. When large institutions and government entities choose to direct part of their food budget to regionally grown products, they leverage their substantial purchasing power to support small and mid-size farms in the region while increasing access to fresh, healthy, and regionally-sourced food for their customers.<sup>73</sup> With values-driven procurement policies, public institutions can help to build a food system that reflects community members' values and prioritizes the health and well-being of people, the environment, and the



regional economy.

Institutional procurement policy is a powerful tool for shaping food system outcomes.<sup>74</sup> Pre-pandemic, a variety of entities in Santa Clara County, such as Kaiser Permanente,<sup>75</sup> Stanford University,<sup>76</sup> Santa Clara University,<sup>77</sup> and Bon Appétit Management Company<sup>78</sup> which provides cafe services at major technology companies, have worked to implement local procurement practices to feed their customers.<sup>79</sup> Pandemic response programs--like the San Jose COVID Food Relief Program, Tera Farm's Farm-to-My Neighborhood Farm Box and Veggielution's Eastside Connect Farm Box--have shown the potential of and generated support for procurement that prioritizes small-scale farmers and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) farmers in the region.

Nationwide, the Good Food Purchasing Policy

(GFPP) is the leading strategy for metropolitan areas to use food procurement to advance their broader food system goals, which help to achieve economic, environmental, and social outcomes. Urban governments around the country, including Los Angeles, Boston, Washington DC, Chicago, and Cincinnati, have adopted GFPP policies and active campaigns for their adoption are underway in New York, Buffalo, Minneapolis—St. Paul, and Denver.<sup>80</sup> In the Bay Area, the San Francisco Sheriff's Office and the Department of Public Health, which combined spend nearly \$7.5 million on food each year, have had their food purchasing practices assessed and are now starting to align their practices with GFPP standards.<sup>81</sup> In January 2021, Alameda County adopted a Good Food Purchasing Policy Resolution. In addition to GFPP's five core values, the resolution highlights community values, such as transparency, accountability, and equity with an emphasis on purchasing from small farms and food vendors, many of which are local businesses owned by women and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.<sup>82</sup>

The Good Food Purchasing Policy (GFPP) provides a framework for assessing how well food purchases align with five core values: local economies, nutrition, valued workforce, environmental sustainability, and animal welfare. By increasing market demand for good food through large institutional budgets, the Good Food Purchasing Policy seeks to shift more food production, processing and distribution

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### **COVID BRIGHT SPOT: San Jose COVID Food Relief Program**

To support individuals at high risk of contracting COVID-19 and those experiencing economic hardship in the face of the pandemic, the San Jose COVID Food Relief Program (SJCFRP) began operating in October of 2020. For the last quarter of 2020, the SJCFRP provided 291,407 pounds of fresh produce, 11,300 pounds of whole grains, 169,000 pounds of dairy, and 20,810 pounds of protein weekly (much of it produced by farmers of color) to 4,900 people hit hardest by the pandemic. For those not receiving CalFresh, other state or federal food assistance, SJCFRP stood in the gap. By December 30th of its sole quarter of operation, SJCFRP had provided 39,250 boxes of groceries to vulnerable Santa Clara County residents.

to align with these core values. Institutions who adopt the Good Food Purchasing Policy follow a simple process: assess current purchases' alignment with the five values, set goals and make shifts in purchasing, track progress towards goals, and celebrate improvements. The Center for Good Food Purchasing provides technical assistance throughout the entire process. For the assessment, they work alongside the institution to gather the purchasing records and then use their vast database to verify products' alignment with the five values. Once that is complete and the institution is setting goals, the Center provides planning tools, supplier and product lists and example requests for proposal (RFP) language to support improvements. The technical assistance and resources provided are designed to provide flexibility to meet institutional needs and prioritize continued improvement over time.

The County of Santa Clara spends approximately \$10-12 million on food purchases each year. Currently, the County is researching institutions that have GFPP in place in order to learn more about their policies, benchmarking, value add and successes. Once this research is complete, the Office of Sustainability, Santa Clara Valley Medical Center - Hospital and Clinic System, Department of Corrections, and Probation Department will convene to discuss what has been learned. There is broad support for adopting values-driven food purchasing policies at local institutions, including the County's jails and hospitals, as a key lever for making food system change. It has been a recommendation of various food system reports for nearly 10 years and was a theme in stakeholder interviews.<sup>83</sup> During focus groups, several organizations noted that one of the lessons of the pandemic is that local procurement can be a successful practice

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for providing food relief while supporting the viability of small-scale farms.

### **FOOD HUBS**

Along with financial investment in local purchasing, Santa Clara County needs distribution infrastructure that can facilitate connections between regional farmers, institutions, businesses, and consumers. A food hub is a centrally located facility for the aggregation, storage, processing, distribution, and/or marketing of regionally produced food products, often from small farms.<sup>84</sup> In many cases, small and mid-sized growers struggle to access retail, institutional, and other food service markets because of a lack of appropriately scaled distribution and processing infrastructure.<sup>85</sup> Food hubs can help small farms overcome barriers to accessing larger volume markets. Appropriately-scaled infrastructure is a particularly relevant issue in Santa Clara County where 92 percent of the county's 890 farms are classified as small farms by the USDA (i.e., less than \$250,000 in sales), and 78 percent operate on less than 50 acres.<sup>86</sup> Diverse regional food chains, including food hubs, have significant social and economic benefits. They have been shown to contribute to job growth, increase market access and sales for local and regional producers, create new jobs, and improve food access in underserved areas.<sup>87</sup>

As the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated, heavy reliance on a few, highly consolidated supply chains left our food supply

vulnerable to shocks. Conversely, diversified regional and local food economies contribute to the resiliency and efficiency of the nationwide food chain. Over the past year, examples from around the country have suggested that areas with regional food hubs were able to respond more nimbly to the pandemic and recover faster in part because of strong relationships between producers, suppliers, and others.<sup>88</sup> The development of emergency food hubs in Santa Clara County and around the Bay Area has been an innovative piece of the pandemic response and have shown great promise for connecting small- to mid-sized farms with diverse communities throughout the County in a way that enhanced farm viability and addressed food security, while also providing financial support to communities hardest hit by the pandemic.



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In Santa Clara County, public-facing farms with strong community ties have been able to react quickly during the COVID pandemic, to meet the need for fresh, nutritious, and safe produce, for food insecure urban residents. One example is the San Jose COVID Food Relief Program, which is a partnership between Off the Grid, Veggielution, Fresh Approach, and the San Jose Conservation Corps. Together, Fresh Approach and Veggielution are sourcing organic fruits, vegetables, grains, beans, and meats from regional, BIPOC-owned farms to fill weekly farm boxes that are provided for free to eligible San Jose residents. East San Jose residents also were employed in this effort demonstrating an effective form of tapping into local talent while meeting both community economic and social needs. Both Veggielution and Fresh Approach are involved in other, similar farm box programs. Between the months of May and November 2020, Fresh Approach, with the



help of Veggielution and other partners around the Bay Area, delivered 80,000 boxes of locally grown fruits and vegetables to food-insecure families and invested more than \$2,000,000 into more than 50 small farms.<sup>89</sup>

Commercial kitchens are another piece of physical infrastructure that add to a thriving regional food economy. Commercial kitchens are “permitted food preparation spaces that meet health and safety code requirements and are staffed by people who have food handler’s certificates.”<sup>90</sup> These kitchens are often used by small businesses owners and those who aspire to be small business owners to test and develop products, and to process and package products for sale. They allow small scale food businesses to develop their products legally and affordably while becoming part of the region’s food ecosystem. La Cocina is a San Francisco-based business incubator that helps local food entrepreneurs, primarily immigrant women, develop their businesses by providing affordable commercial kitchen space and business assistance. More than 50 graduates of the program have gone on to become successful business owners.<sup>91</sup> In 2020, the Santa Clara County Consumer and Environmental Protection Agency implemented a Board of Supervisors approved pilot program that offered mini-grants to charitable feeding organizations for the purpose of renting permitted commercial kitchen spaces. This successful pilot program concluded in March of 2020 having aided several charitable

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feeding organizations in obtaining permitted kitchen space, which enabled them to prepare food for those in need in a safe setting.

The middle of the food system, including infrastructure like food hubs and commercial kitchens, often receives the least attention, but is critical for improving conditions for local producers and local consumers. As research and recent experience show, investments in regional food economy infrastructure supports small to medium-sized farms, facilitates business entrepreneurship, and can connect consumers

in historically underserved areas to fresh, healthy food. Stakeholders across the food system recognized that physical infrastructure is important for connecting small to mid-size farms and food businesses to retail and institutional customers as well as the charitable feeding system. In addition, local governments can support the regional food economy by providing virtual and social connections within the supply chain (e.g., between growers and restaurants, retailers, and wholesalers), online directors of farm and food businesses, and supporting shared-use commercial kitchens.<sup>92</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Leverage purchasing power to support the regional food system through values-driven procurement**

- 4.1** Adopt the Good Food Purchasing Policy
- 4.2** Support partner institutions with values-driven procurement

### **Support the development of, and equitable access, to food aggregation, distribution, and processing/manufacturing infrastructure**

- 4.3** Advance the development of a community food hub
- 4.4** Facilitate access to commercial kitchens for community programs and new food entrepreneurs

### **Reduce barriers and promote opportunities for independent food businesses, restaurants and food workers**

- 4.5** Reduce barriers for aspiring or new, small, local food entrepreneurs
- 4.6** Foster creation of food and agricultural cooperatives

For a complete list of next steps, partners, and metrics for each strategy, see Appendix 1, “Goals, Recommendations, and Strategies.”

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## **Goal 5. Improve food security and public health through access to nutritious, culturally relevant, and affordable food**

### **BACKGROUND**

Many Santa Clara County residents struggle to obtain consistent access to adequate quantities of affordable, healthful, culturally relevant foods. Estimates of food insecurity rates in Santa Clara County vary widely across reports—between 6 percent and 29 percent for 2017, depending on the metrics used.<sup>93</sup> Nonetheless, it is evident that food insecurity is a widespread and persistent issue that plagues many Santa Clara County residents as regional cost of living and income inequality steadily rise.

### **FEDERAL NUTRITION PROGRAMS AND THE CHARITABLE FOOD SYSTEM**

While poverty is a significant indicator of food insecurity, households with incomes well above the poverty line often also experience food insecurity. This is of particular significance in locales like Santa Clara County, where residents tend to earn incomes which disqualify them from means tested government assistance, yet fail to cover the true cost of living. For instance, a family of four must have an income of less than \$34,000 to qualify for free school meals; however, the Family Needs Calculator finds that a family of four in Santa Clara County needs an annual income of \$106,000 just to make ends meet.<sup>94</sup> Inability to access programs like SNAP, WIC and school

meals—the most extensive food assistance available—limits households to seeking help from charitable or emergency food sources. Food banks, pantries, and meal distribution sites provide essential services to their communities; still, the charitable food sector is only a fraction of the size of the federal nutrition safety net. Private charitable food assistance can only effectively serve as a complement to federal and state nutrition programs.

### **SCHOOL MEALS**

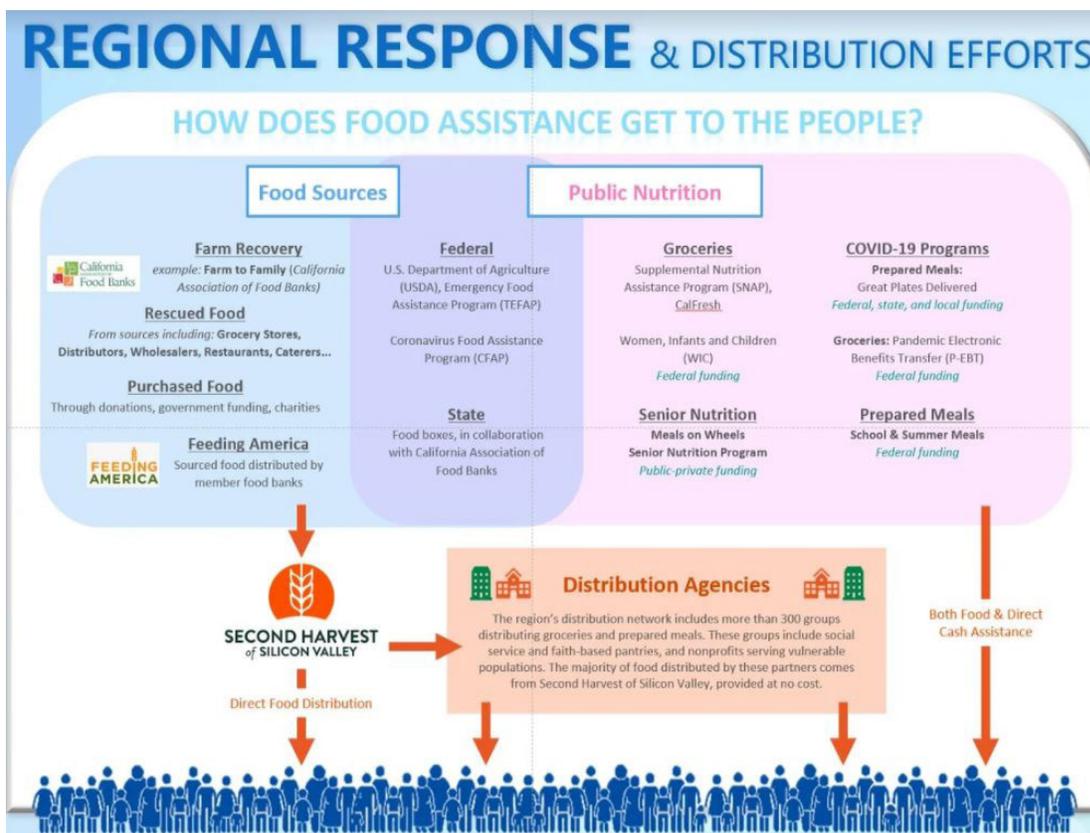
School meals, including breakfast, lunch, and afterschool snack/supper meals, are a vital part of the safety net for children. School meal participation is associated with improved food security and reduced obesity rates. However, barriers to participating in school meals, including stigma, prevent the benefits of school meals from reaching all children. Universal school meals allow all children, regardless of income, to access at least two nutritious meals a day. Studies show that schools participating in the Community Eligibility Provision, which allows high need schools to provide universal meals, have improved attendance rates, promotion rates, and school meal participation.<sup>95</sup> Universal meals advance equity by removing stigma, reducing administrative burden for schools, and promoting

nutrition.

## ACCESS TO NUTRITIOUS FOOD FOR OLDER ADULTS

As in any geographic area, the struggle to obtain food in Santa Clara County impacts some individuals more than others. Older adults, especially those who are homebound or homeless, have been identified as a group of particular concern given their unique needs

and risk factors. Health-related costs often force low-income older adults into spending trade-offs, leading to or worsening food insecurity.<sup>96</sup> Ambulatory difficulty limits the ability of many low-income seniors to travel to sources of aid, including Senior Nutrition Program congregate meal sites or brown bag sites.<sup>97</sup> As such, there is a significant need to develop strategies to better meet the needs of this group of residents.



**Figure 3.** This graphic depicts how food insecure individuals and families access food resources, from both government sources, under public nutrition, and charitable organizations (under food sources). Graphic is courtesy of Joint Venture Silicon Valley and is modified from: Research Brief: Food Insecurity & Distribution Program in Silicon Valley Amid the Pandemic, September 2020.

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## COVID-19 IMPACT

The emergence of the COVID-19 health crisis dramatically impacted the state of food insecurity in Santa Clara County, greatly exacerbating existing barriers to access. As a result of the economic fallout from COVID-19, food insecurity and demand for food assistance increased dramatically.

Researchers at San Jose State University conducted a survey to assess food access in the fall of 2020. Their results showed a 65 percent increase in food insecurity (from 20 percent to 33 percent).<sup>98</sup> Local residents also shared what would be most helpful to address their food needs, during COVID-19, and several strategies were noted: 39 percent indicated extra money to pay for food or other bills; 25 percent mentioned a need for more information on food assistance programs; and 22 percent said that different hours for meal programs would increase accessibility.<sup>99</sup>

The initial months of the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, were characterized by a major flux in demand for not only federal and state aid, but charitable food and meal distributions as well.

- By the end of 2020, enrollment in CalFresh had increased by 21 percent as the number of County residents receiving CalFresh benefits rose from 82,967 in March 2020 to 100,289 by November 2020.<sup>100</sup>
- During the same period, enrollment in Special Supplemental Nutrition Program

for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) increased by 22 percent, growing from 11,887 in January to 14,504 enrolled County residents in December 2020.<sup>101</sup>

- Second Harvest of Silicon Valley, the largest emergency food provider in the county, experienced a 54 percent increase in pounds of food distributed and meals served from pre-pandemic to March-June 2020.<sup>102</sup>

Interviews with charitable food providers revealed that many organizations experienced pressure to meet increased need while simultaneously dealing with uncertainty regarding a coordinated response and insufficient funding. Many of these programs rely on volunteers, and concerns about COVID-19 among volunteers and staff only exacerbated these challenges, as hunger relief organizations experienced a significant loss in capacity. Despite these challenges, charitable food providers completely overhauled their operations to meet surging community demand. Organizations shared the changes and innovations that enabled them to meet the needs of the communities they serve, including:

- Rapidly scaling up operations, providing food on more days per week in more locations;
- Providing no-touch, drive-through grocery distributions;
- Shifting congregate meals programs to food delivery programs;

## COVID BRIGHT SPOT: Second Harvest of Silicon Valley

When the pandemic started, Second Harvest of Silicon Valley had to quickly change their operations to ensure safe distribution of food by creating protocols for drive-thru locations. To increase the safety and efficiency of distributions, they pre-boxed food with the help of the National Guard, the San Jose Conservation Corps, and hundreds of volunteers. From just three drive-thru food distributions pre-pandemic, Second Harvest of Silicon Valley and their 300 partners pivoted to operating 130 drive-thrus, some serving upwards of 1,000 people in a two-hour window. Also, given the risks of the pandemic to older adults and people with pre-existing illnesses, a new home delivery program was started. Within just a few months, Second Harvest of Silicon Valley and their partners were providing home deliveries to over 5,000 households every two weeks.



Photo courtesy of Silicon Valley Community Foundation (2020) and Second Harvest of Silicon Valley.

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### **COVID BRIGHT SPOT: Hope's Corner**

Hope's Corner made major changes in its operation in response to changes in needs brought on by COVID-19. In addition to switching to "to go" meals and maintaining the long-standing Saturday morning meal, Hope's Corner added a Wednesday meal. Food is provided by Second Harvest Food Bank, A La Carte, and from purchases by Hope's Corner. Hope's Corner now serves a minimum of 2800 meals per month compared to 767 meals in the month of January 2020. Just one month into the pandemic they expanded their meal service to Wednesdays and Saturdays and increased their meal distribution sites to include deliveries to five RV parking locations and distribution to the Day Worker Center. They developed a unique collaboration with local faith organizations, where a rotating schedule was established for the Wednesday meals, with a different faith group providing a subsidy for the meal and the volunteer power to sustain the additional distribution day. In February of 2021 alone, Hope's Corner served 2,872 meals to those in need.

- Engaging new volunteer groups, including faith based communities, to help them expand distributions;
- Finding new ways to stay connected to the clients they serve via phone or video check-ins; and
- Collaborating with other nonprofits to complement services and to source needed PPE.

These providers also cited the resilience of their staff and volunteers, as well as a groundswell of community support, as key to their success. Several providers reflected that though the year had been challenging, they were proud to have pulled together to meet the needs of residents.

Providers who served older adults were especially impacted by the pandemic. Congregate meal service was not possible, given county restrictions and concerns about virus transmission. And while many sites pivoted to pick-up models, transportation was a major barrier for this demographic group. Providers indicated that many of the older adults they served were understandably concerned about contracting COVID-19, and as a result were socially isolated. Clients had varying levels of comfort with and access to technology, which made it difficult to communicate changes in service or to engage clients virtually to maintain social connection.

### **COVID BRIGHT SPOT: Morgan Hill Unified School District (MHUSD)**

When news of the pandemic hit, Morgan Hill Unified School District's food service director Michael Jochner immediately began planning alternate ways to make sure that all students in his district would be fed if schools were forced to close. When that possibility became a reality, MHUSD found ways to preserve staff jobs, streamline food production, access PPE, and even coordinate meal delivery for those without transportation, all while keeping the health of the planet in mind in food and supply procurement decisions. Now one year into the pandemic, MHUSD is serving a similar number of students as they would during a typical year and has provided more than 1 million meals.



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Charitable food providers saw massive increases in demand for the services, in some cases participation doubled or more. Providers speculated that increased need was driven not only by pandemic-related job loss and economic impacts, but by improved outreach by the county and other partners so that residents who had needed help pre-pandemic were now able to more easily access information and services. For this reason, many providers predicted that increased demand for services would continue for months to come. Funding was a universally expressed need, and several larger providers noted that they had only been able to rapidly scale up services because of their organization's financial health and indicated that smaller organizations—often those with deepest and closest ties to communities—did not have the resources to survive the early part of the pandemic, much less scale up operations.

### **DISRUPTION TO SCHOOL MEALS**

Santa Clara County schools serve as an essential source of food, providing many school-age children with two or more meals before, during, and after the school day. The emergence of COVID-19 forced schools to close site operations with nearly no notice, requiring food service directors and staff to immediately pivot their operations to provide meals in new and rapidly changing conditions. Maintaining participation in meal programs in these new conditions required food service directors and their staff to be flexible and determined. This transition to an all pick-up

model resulted in substantial budget shortfalls due to an imbalance between costs and income from reimbursements. Still, staff remained highly motivated and flexible—a critical component of maintaining operations—and went to great lengths to continue to serve children and families by:

- Changing pick up times to better accommodate families;
- Developing delivery programs, in partnership with nonprofits or other school district departments;
- Providing food in bulk, as opposed to unitized, quantities; and
- Forming partnerships with other organizations to meet families' needs through additional meals or grocery pick-ups.

### **KEY TAKEAWAYS**

The food system, food insecurity, and methods of food assistance are incredibly complex during normal conditions. The impacts of COVID-19 further complicated this landscape, strongly demonstrating the need to leverage both public and private food assistance programs to their fullest potential in order to improve access for Santa Clara County residents. Interviews with local leaders in food aid highlighted a number of opportunities to improve local food access including:

- Expanded support of healthy food incentive programs to improve the impact of federal assistance for those who are eligible;

- Establishing partnerships with community organizations to improve SNAP’s reach by connecting with eligible non-participants;
- More effectively serving residents who rely on charitable food by identifying and addressing barriers to accessing charitable food resources—be that geographic gaps in service, limited public transportation or paratransit, language barriers, overlapping service times, etc;
- Because schools serve as anchors of community food access, continued and increased investment in school meal programs is necessary to support budget shortfalls and efforts to improve participation.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Leverage federal and state nutrition programs to improve food security by maximizing participation and impact.**

- 5.1** Support or expand County partnerships to bolster SNAP enrollment
- 5.2** Invest in schools as anchors of community feeding

### **Improve access to charitable food resources**

- 5.3** Assess current food access locations for gaps in services and implement localized solutions
- 5.4** Improve coordination among food distribution sites and develop common tracking system and reporting format
- 5.5** Assess infrastructure and facility needs to ensure food access service providers have sufficient capacity to store and distribute food for food insecure residents

### **Ensure older adults are able to access culturally-relevant food**

- 5.6** Develop an outreach and service strategy to better meet older adults’ needs
- 5.7** Assure Meals on Wheels can maintain current services and increase capacity as needed

For a complete list of next steps, partners, and metrics for each strategy, see Appendix 1, “Goals, Recommendations, and Strategies.”

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## Goal 6. Expand food recovery and composting

### BACKGROUND

In the United States, 30-40 percent of the food supply ends up as food waste, which has environmental, economic, and social costs. Discarded food, for instance, is the largest category of material disposed of in landfills, where it decomposes and releases methane, a potent greenhouse gas.<sup>103</sup> Fortunately, there are many benefits to solving the problem of food waste, particularly at the county and city level. Rescuing edible food from becoming waste and donating it to those in need can help to address food insecurity in the community. Composting diverts organic waste from landfills to produce a valuable soil amendment for farmers and gardeners.<sup>104</sup> Because of these multiple co-benefits, food waste reduction, recovery, and recycling are an important part of a sustainable food system. Rather than throwing away excess food, cities and counties across California are working to manage it by reducing the amount of food waste at the source, and diverting it to feed people, feed animals, and for compost.<sup>105</sup>

### CURRENT CONDITIONS

The issue of food waste in Santa Clara County sits at the intersection of climate change mitigation, food insecurity, and healthy soils. In Santa Clara County in 2013, an estimated 125 million additional meals were needed to meet the needs

of families, beyond what could be obtained through food purchases and food assistance programs. Yet, that same year 17,000 tons of edible food went to the landfill.<sup>106</sup> Although an estimated 14,915 tons of food scraps are composted annually at county residences in Santa Clara County and another 96,000 tons are diverted through curbside programs each year, a significant amount of edible and compostable food still ends up in the landfill.<sup>107</sup> According to the EPA food waste hierarchy and the Institute for Local Self-Reliance's guidelines, the highest priority is to reduce food waste at the source, followed by recovering edible food to feed people and animals, and then composting (or recycling) food waste—first at residences, then at community-scale composting sites, and finally at larger-scale facilities.<sup>108</sup>

### EDIBLE FOOD RECOVERY

The major disruption in eating outside the home precipitated by Shelter-in-Place orders had ripple effects that extended to food rescue in Santa Clara County. When the order took effect and many businesses closed their offices at once, it created a surge of food to be picked up by food rescue organizations. Because of the large quantities of food donated simultaneously, there was not enough cold storage to hold it all. After that initial surge in donations, however, the

number of meals donated by large employers dropped off. Before COVID-19, one recovery nonprofit would typically pick up about 2,500 meals a day for donation but that number fell to less than 1,000 meals a day. Another food rescue organization pivoted from recovering food from hotels and stadiums to creating and distributing meals. Second Harvest of Silicon Valley, which also works with wholesalers and local grocery

stores to rescue food, collected nearly 1.5 million pounds of rescued food per month in the first six months of the pandemic.<sup>109</sup>

As part of its effort to combat climate change, California adopted SB 1383, the Short-Lived Climate Pollutants Act, in 2016. The law mandates a 75 percent reduction in the level of disposal of organic waste (compared to 2014) by 2025 and

### COVID BRIGHT SPOT: Loaves & Fishes

With provisions from Second Harvest Food Bank and other food suppliers, Loaves and Fishes prepares over 6000 hot meals per day and delivers them to shelters, encampments, halfway homes, community centers, and senior centers. Loaves and Fishes is also involved in prepared food recovery from multiple organizations, which include Facebook, Stanford University, San Jose International Airport, and several regional hospitals. Through its A la Carte Program, prepared food that has been recovered from these organizations and carefully evaluated for food safety is immediately delivered to those in need throughout the county. Despite drastically decreased in-person activity, Loaves and Fishes has been able to recover approximately 1,000 meals per day from county organizations throughout the pandemic. Through food rescue, Loaves and Fishes is providing 1.2 million meals per year to food insecure people in Santa Clara County.



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the diversion of 20 percent of edible food from the waste stream. Implementation of a new edible food rescue program as required by SB 1383 regulations will take effect in January 2022. Meeting the state goal of diverting 20 percent of excess food for human consumption will be a collaborative effort between the county, jurisdictions, food producers and organizations that are in the business of recovering excess food. The more collaboration that occurs across the county in this effort, the more effective the recovery programs will be. Food system stakeholders recommend that the collaboration be institutionalized, so that some of the burden of coordinating, planning, managing, and creating and implementing capacity increase plans can happen on the county level.<sup>110</sup>

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- SB 1383 requires the County to assess the required capacity needed and for jurisdictions to plan for capacity increases. It would be difficult for smaller individual cities to manage their impact on the food recovery infrastructure independently, as the capacity infrastructure is managed across City and County boundaries. Similarly, it will be costly and inefficient for food recovery organizations to work with 15 separate jurisdictions to implement edible food recovery programs.
- To accommodate increased donations of edible food as required by SB 1383, food recovery organizations in the County will

need financial support and to increase their infrastructure capacity.

- SB 1383 forces a shift in how food at groceries, restaurants, and distributors is viewed. Before SB 1383, these food generators were the final stop in the supply chain before consumers. Now that they are required to donate or sell all food before it spoils, they need to plan differently so that donations can be made a few days before food goes bad. Educational programming and outreach can help these food businesses meet the requirements.

### COMPOSTING

By diverting food waste from landfills, composting helps avoid greenhouse gas emissions while producing a valuable soil amendment, which can be used for sustainable local food production, as well as the improvement of residential and commercial landscapes. While Santa Clara County is a leader in curbside organic waste collection, small-scale or community composting is currently happening at very few locations and lacks coordination. Within cities, much of our food waste is trucked away, while many urban gardeners and farmers purchase compost made outside the county as an input to improve the health and fertility of their soil. Free compost giveaways do exist, but they are not widely accessible throughout the county. One challenge to closing the carbon loop—that is, recycling food waste and returning the resulting compost to the same geographic area



in which it was generated—is having small-scale systems to collect organic waste, compost it, and distribute compost for use in urban areas at minimal cost. Small-scale, community-based

composting can help. Locations where this type of composting happens and are open to the general public are called community composting hubs. These sites are designed to educate and engage residents directly in the process of organic waste recycling, compost production, and soil health management. By recycling valuable carbon resources that would otherwise produce greenhouse gases in landfills, community composting closes the carbon loop, while building community, providing a valuable low-cost input for urban agriculture, and reducing food insecurity.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Public education is a key strategy for improving the quality and usefulness of curbside organic disposal, increasing the adoption of home composting, and

encouraging the application of compost to improve soils, water holding capacity, and home food production.

- While several sites in Santa Clara County are developing the infrastructure for community-scale composting, these programs have yet to be fully implemented and would benefit from networked coordination which would increase community engagement and improve site management.
- Prioritizing the development of community compost hubs in historically underserved neighborhoods can support climate resilience strategies in communities most negatively impacted by climate change. Community compost sites can help to overcome barriers to composting experienced by those without space at their residence to compost, often people living in multi-unit housing developments.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Support public education, engagement, and infrastructure for sustainable food waste recycling**

- 6.1** Provide leadership for public education and engagement on food waste prevention, reducing contamination in curbside organics bins, and composting
- 6.2** Prioritize and build capacity for residential and community-scale composting

### **Support the implementation of SB 1383, the Short-Lived Climate Pollutants Act, to increase food rescue and reduce the disposal of organic food waste**

- 6.3** Analyze and support opportunities for countywide coordination for certain SB 1383 program areas
- 6.4** Increase the efficiency of SB 1383 and AB1836 in reducing food waste
- 6.5** Explore opportunities to integrate SB 1383 into other components of the local food system

For a complete list of next steps, partners, and metrics for each strategy, see Appendix 1, “Goals, Recommendations, and Strategies.”



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## Goal 7. Build a constituency for a strong regional food system by increasing food and agricultural education

### BACKGROUND

Residents who are knowledgeable about the food system and active about food and agricultural issues are critical for the long-term success of efforts to develop a more resilient and equitable Santa Clara County food system. Education about food and agriculture can equip children and adults with the knowledge and skills to transform their food system and make positive changes in their communities.<sup>111</sup> Raising awareness of farms in the county and the ecological and cultural services they provide, for example, is important in building a constituency that is invested in the future of local farming.<sup>112</sup> Nutrition education supports healthful eating and empowers individuals to adopt lifelong healthy habits by improving nutrition knowledge and skills, dietary behaviors, and promoting systems and environments that support healthy food choices and behaviors. Experiential education, through field trips to farms or the utilization of school gardens, is another important way for students of all ages to learn about the food system. Many of the county's urban farms and gardens serve as educational sites where the public can learn about food production and other aspects of the food system. Structured education programs provide hands-on training in how to grow food; choose, prepare, and eat



healthful food; care for the local environment; and compost.<sup>113</sup>

### CURRENT CONDITIONS

In Santa Clara County, there are many organizations providing nutrition and agricultural education. One of the largest nutrition education programs is the CalFresh Healthy Living program, implemented by three local agencies: the County of Santa Clara Public Health Department, Catholic Charities, and UC Cooperative Extension. CalFresh Healthy Living programming supports healthy, active and nourished lifestyles by teaching Californians



about good nutrition and how to stretch their food dollars to purchase healthy food, while also building partnerships in communities to increase healthy choices. The need for this education has increased during the COVID pandemic. In a survey of Bay Area residents, respondents noted that to meet their immediate food needs they were more likely to employ strategies such as buying non-perishable or cheaper foods.<sup>112</sup> Youth education in food production takes place at schools and through organizations that offer garden- and farm-based learning, such as San Jose State's CommUniverCity, Taylor St. Farm in San Jose, and Hidden Villa in Los Altos Hills

### **COVID BRIGHT SPOT: CalFresh Campbell**

During these unprecedented times, CalFresh Healthy Living (CFHL), UCCE of Santa Clara County engaged students at Monroe Middle School in Campbell through a virtual Cooking Club. UCCE's CalFresh Healthy Living Program built on their strong partnership with the school and the success they had running a cooking club afterschool prior to the pandemic. The CalFresh Healthy Living Program has been able to continue supporting the school during distance learning in various ways, including convening a virtual afterschool cooking club. CalFresh Healthy Living educators have led lessons regarding cultural foods and eating local and seasonal foods. Students have learned a variety of cooking skills and techniques and have become their families very own top chefs! One student commented, "My mom's favorite day is cooking club days because I make dinner." UCCE recently partnered with Second Harvest Food Bank to provide students staple foods, to ensure all students have access to common ingredients used in the cooking club. As one educator said, "Though we cannot see the students in person, it is wonderful to virtually see the students' enthusiasm as they try new fruits and vegetables and make common recipes healthier and tastier than ever!"

among many others. Increasingly, local colleges and universities have added their own farms and gardens to serve as outdoor classrooms.<sup>114</sup> The pandemic has necessitated that educators adapt their programming for an online environment, at the same time that interest in gardening, food preparation and other topics is surging. Finally, there is also a growing interest in education about food justice, food sovereignty, and the root causes of inequities in the food system. For example, the La Mesa Verde Program offers food justice training as part of its larger garden education curriculum and in March 2020 a South

Bay Food Justice workshop brought together participants working in urban agriculture, food access, procurement, and higher education for learning and to identify areas for potential collaboration. Stakeholders identified both increased education about racial inequity in the food system and nutrition education at every school as important strategies for increasing equity and community engagement in the Santa Clara County food system.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Coordinate educational opportunities and expand awareness of nutrition, agriculture, and equity in the food system**

- 7.1** Increase food and agricultural literacy by coordinating and expanding nutrition and agriculture education
- 7.2** Develop and launch a public education campaign about local farmers and climate-stewardship practices
- 7.3** Support food justice and food sovereignty through education about the root causes of inequities in the food system

For a complete list of next steps, partners, and metrics for each strategy, see Appendix 1, “Goals, Recommendations, and Strategies.”

## SCC FOOD SYSTEM WORKPLAN

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# GOALS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND STRATEGIES WITH PARTNERS AND METRICS

## GOAL 1. ENHANCE FOOD SYSTEM COORDINATION AND LEADERSHIP

### **Recommendation: Increase the capacity of County government to support and lead food system change**

**Strategy 1.1:** Create a full-time Food System Manager position within County government to coordinate cross-departmental food systems work and lead implementation of the Food System Workplan through establishment of, and collaboration with, a Food System Leadership Collaborative and Resident Food Equity Advisory Council.

#### *Next Steps:*

- Pursue approval and funding for Food System Manager position, with responsibilities that include coordination of internal county Kitchen Cabinet group and external Food System Leadership Collaborative and Resident Food Equity Advisory Council.
- Once hired, Food System Manager would further identify departments with applicable programs to participate in Kitchen Cabinet.
- Conduct assessment of gaps in County services that could be addressed by Kitchen Cabinet.
- Support the Food System Leadership Collaborative to identify and address priorities in the Food System Workplan.

*Partners:* County Office of Sustainability and County Departments involved in food system work

#### *Metrics:*

- Job description developed
- Number of departments identified along with their role in the food system
- Assessment conducted that reports on gaps in County services related to food system work
- Food System Leadership Collaborative and Resident Food Equity Advisory Council structures established

**Strategy 1.2:** Institutionalize internal collaboration through the creation of a “Kitchen Cabinet” within County government to coordinate food-related work.

#### *Next Steps:*

- Assess potential collaboration opportunities between County programs (e.g. food waste

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collaboration or food access), that would serve the most vulnerable populations (those with greatest health disparities, older adults, homeless).

- Evaluate barriers to streamline County and City governmental processes to ensure local organizations can move more quickly with implementation of food system projects.
- Leverage existing County resources for implementation of Food System Workplan priorities and identify new potential funding sources as needed.

**Partners:** County departments involved in food system work

**Metrics:**

- Number of annual accomplishments of the Cabinet that maximized collaboration opportunities
- Number of barriers identified and workplans established to address those barriers
- Number of Workplan strategies that have started to be implemented with identified County resources

**Recommendation: Strengthen the capacity for food system coordination among public, nonprofit, and private food system stakeholders**

**Strategy 1.3:** Guide the establishment of an external Food System Leadership Collaborative that will partner with the County and the Kitchen Cabinet, and provide coordination among cities and existing food system collaboratives and efforts.

**Next Steps:**

- Further identify key city departments, existing collaboratives, and projects that are addressing food system issues in Santa Clara County that could be represented on the Collaborative.
- Lead with equity in the recruitment of members on the Food System Leadership Collaborative through ensuring the racial and socio-economic diversity of our county is reflected in the Collaborative.
- Develop shared understanding of Collaborative members' roles in the food system and strategize opportunities to work together.
- Prioritize recommendations from the Food System Workplan for the Collaborative to take the lead on.
- Develop common reporting system and dashboard to capture efforts and accomplishments of work within the food system.

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**Partners:** County Food System Manager/Office of Sustainability; Kitchen Cabinet County Agencies; Cities; existing Collaborative groups and key players within the food system including, Santa Clara County Food System Alliance; County Nutrition Action Partnership; Second Harvest of Silicon Valley; Community Alliance with Family Farmers; Fresh Approach; Veggielution & Si Se Puede Collective; SAGE; San Ysidro F.I.R.S.T.; Dairy Council of California

**Metrics:**

- Number of city departments, collaboratives and projects identified and compiled into a directory
- Number of members recruited to serve on the Leadership Collaborative who reflect the diversity of the county
- Increased knowledge among Collaborative members of roles and opportunities to work together (pre/post assessment)
- Number of recommendations prioritized and implementation plans developed based on the Food System Workplan

**Strategy 1.4:** Develop a food system resilience plan and infrastructure to more effectively prepare for and respond to future crises that disrupt food security for residents, and ensure a secure food supply for the future.

**Next Steps:**

- Formulate a disaster plan with specific procedures that designates working relationships between the County, cities and food system players that can be activated for several types of emergencies (e.g., pandemic, earthquake, flood, wildfire).
- Develop pre-established agreements between the County and cities as well as MOUs between the County and food access organizations (nonprofits) that designate or allow for funding to ensure quick scale-up of food resources to ensure readiness before next disaster.
- Specifically evaluate emergency food provision response to identify barriers to streamline.
- Consult with leaders from the disability community and experts with knowledge of a range of disabilities and chronic health conditions to ensure that steps to address the needs of the whole community for food during emergencies, including equally accessible communication for all audiences, are incorporated in the planning efforts.
- Design a reporting system, with the minimum amount of data required, that larger scale food access organizations could contribute to that would allow the County and Cities to be knowledgeable of community need during a disaster.

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- Develop a business support plan that will designate the County’s role in, and available funding for, supporting local farms, food businesses and restaurants during disasters.
  - Convene essential workers, including farmers and farmworker groups, to assess needs related to personal protective equipment (PPE) and other resources in preparation for future disasters.
  - Establish Resilience Hubs in priority communities and neighborhoods that are community-serving facilities augmented to support residents, coordinate communication, distribute resources, and reduce carbon pollution.

**Partners:** County Food System Manager/Office of Sustainability; Kitchen Cabinet County Agencies; County Department of Agriculture and Environmental Management; Food Leadership Collaborative; Second Harvest of Silicon Valley; Silicon Valley Council of Nonprofits; CADRE; Santa Clara County Food System Alliance; Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County; DAAS; Farmworker Caravan; Loaves & Fishes Family Kitchen; St. Joseph’s Family Center; Team San Jose; West Valley Community Services; Martha’s Kitchen; Recovery Café; Guadalupe-Coyote Resource Conservation District; SAGE; Santa Clara University - Food and Climate Justice Committee; UCCE food manufacturers and processors; restaurants; farmers

**Metrics:**

- Disaster plan completed
- Agreements and MOUs executed
- Reporting system designed
- Business support plan developed
- Convening held with essential workers, PPE needs outlined, sources for procurement to meet needs identified, storage area obtained, and inventory warehoused.
- Resilience Hub plan developed

**Strategy 1.5:** Collaborate across industry sectors (e.g., housing and homeless support services, social services, health care, transportation) to further the reach of food systems work and reduce food insecurity.

**Next Steps:**

- Convene cross-sector partners to identify options for prioritizing land, including urban spaces, for food production, access, and food businesses or restaurants co-located with residential housing (mixed use properties).
- Explore expansion of “food as medicine” pilots/concepts (e.g. food pharmacy, medically tailored

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meals) into additional health care settings based on shared best practices.

- Screen for food insecurity in clinical or public health settings (e.g. at medical clinics or within Public Health Nurses Home Visitor programs) and provide referrals to CalFresh Food benefits or emergency food resources.
- Partner with comprehensive social service approaches (e.g. Bridge To Recovery Program) to implement solutions to address the root causes of food insecurity.

**Partners:** County Food System Manager/Office of Sustainability; County Office of Supportive Housing; Santa Clara County Health & Hospital System; Public Health Department; County Social Services Agency; County Probation Department – Neighborhood Safety & Services Unit; Cities; Veggielution & Si Se Puede Collective; SPUR; SAGE; food businesses; organizations involved in food production and food as medicine pilots; food access organizations including, Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County; Martha’s Kitchen; Loaves & Fishes

**Metrics:**

- Number of convenings held, options identified, and projects developed related to incorporating food business, food retail, and/or food production in or near housing
- Assessment completed of feasibility of expanding food as medicine concepts/pilots into health care settings
- Number of food insecurity screenings conducted
- Number of systems changes implemented to reduce food insecurity

**Recommendation: Promote regional food system development in other sectors and at other levels of government**

**Strategy 1.6:** Advocate for policies at the regional, state, and national level that advance food system goals and reduce food insecurity with a focus on those that create equity for Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) communities, food system workers, farmers and ranchers.

**Strategy 1.7:** Embed food system planning and implementation in existing county policies and plans (e.g. “food in all policies”) or adopt new policies and provide capacity building for cities to institute similar policies.

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**Next Steps:**

- Expand County advocacy platforms to include food system issues and utilize expertise of County departments for data or information that would support advocacy efforts.
- Review existing County policies and plans to determine gaps and where potential exists to add to or create new healthy food systems policies and practices.
- Convene city stakeholders to share model policies around food and offer training and assistance for adoption of healthy food or food system related policies

**Partners:** County Food System Manager/Office of Sustainability; Public Health Department; Community Alliance with Family Farmers; Fresh Approach; La Mesa Verde (Sacred Heart Community Service); Veggielution & Si Se Puede Collective; Loaves & Fishes; Martha’s Kitchen; SAGE

**Metrics:**

- Number of food policies advocated for, including assistance from other county departments outside the CEO’s office
- Gap analysis completed and list of policies and practices generated that could be added or adopted
- Number of cities provided training and technical assistance to adopt healthy food policies

**GOAL 2. INCREASE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN THE FOOD SYSTEM TOWARD GREATER FOOD SOVEREIGNTY**

**Recommendation: Foster connections between community food leaders and local government officials**

**Strategy 2.1:** Create a Resident Food Equity Advisory Council to define problems and solutions for food system issues to work in tandem with the Kitchen Cabinet and the Food Systems Leadership Collaborative.

**Next Steps:**

- Explore successful advisory council models (e.g. Santa Clara County PEACE partnership and Resident Food Equity Advisors in Baltimore, MD) and select model to implement.
- Fund/partner with a community-based organization to lead the county-wide Resident Food Equity Advisory Council.

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- Recruit members to participate in the council who understand the needs of food insecure populations and reflect the racial and socio-economic diversity within the county.
  - Prioritize Food System Workplan strategies to address through agreement from the Council, Kitchen Cabinet, and Food Systems Leadership Collaborative.
  - Explore Workplan strategies the Council would lead to create improvements in the food system

**Partners:** County Food System Manager/Office of Sustainability; Cities; County Kitchen Cabinet Agencies; existing food system collaborative groups; Second Harvest of Silicon Valley; La Mesa Verde Program (Sacred Heart Community Service); Martha’s Kitchen; Loaves & Fishes; Fresh Approach; Veggielution & Si Se Puede Collective; Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County; San Ysidro F.I.R.S.T.; UCCE

**Metrics:**

- Model for Resident Food Equity Advisory Council proposed and adopted
- Number of members recruited to serve on the Resident Food Equity Advisory Council who reflect the diversity of the county
- Number of recommendations prioritized and implementation plans developed based on the Food System Workplan

**Recommendation: Strengthen the capacity for neighborhood-level food sovereignty work**

**Strategy 2.2:** Invest in community-based organizations to facilitate community involvement in the food system by supporting food system leadership development for communities to organize and advocate for themselves and by supporting the development of collaborative, community-led and designed projects (e.g., community gardens, compost hubs, community food system ambassadors).

**Next Steps:**

- Explore establishment of County grant program or contracts to support food system leadership programs where community partners train resident leaders to identify food system gaps, formulate solutions, and implement projects.
- Select neighborhoods to focus on for community-led projects utilizing racial health equity framework.
- Identify community based-organization(s) with expertise in leading community-based projects to lead the work in those neighborhoods
- Partner on community-led collaborative events that would address identified gaps

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- Convene periodic information exchanges between organizations to share best-practices in resident engagement in the food system that would advance the food sovereignty movement

**Partners:** County Food System Manager/Office of Sustainability; CommUniverCity; Veggieluton & Si Se Puede Collective; Sacred Heart Community Service; Valley Verde; South County FIRST Collaborative; South Bay Food Justice Collaborative; Santa Clara University – Food and Climate Justice Program; Fresh Approach; Second Harvest of Silicon Valley; La Mesa Verde (Sacred Heart Community Service); Recovery Café; Martha’s Kitchen; Loaves & Fishes; Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County; Guadalupe-Coyote Resource Conservation District; UCCE

**Metrics:**

- Feasibility study conducted for grant program establishment
- Number of neighborhoods selected
- Community based-organizations identified
- Number of food system gaps identified in each neighborhood, solutions named, and projects implemented
- Number of collaborative events held
- Number of exchanges convened

**GOAL 3. MAINTAIN FARMLAND, INCREASE AGRICULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES, AND ENHANCE FARM VIABILITY**

**Recommendation: Increase access to land, capital, and technical assistance for food production**

**Strategy 3.1:** Address the needs of new entry and socially disadvantaged farmers for secure, affordable access to land, and technical and financial assistance.

**Next Steps:**

- Prioritize conservation funding for use in the buy-protect-sell model, through which immigrant and BIPOC farmers have access to purchasing or leasing farmland that is subject to a conservation easement and thereby kept affordable for working farmers in perpetuity.
- Expand technical assistance for socially disadvantaged farmers by ensuring continued County support for bilingual farm support staff, especially Spanish and Chinese language speakers.

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**Partners:** County Department of Planning and Development; County Department of Agriculture and Environmental Management; University of California Cooperative Extension; Guadalupe-Coyote Resource Conservation District; Pacific Coast Farmers’ Market Association; SAGE; Green Foothills; Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority; Land Trust of Santa Clara Valley

**Metrics:**

- Amount of conservation funding prioritized for the buy-protect-sell model
- Number of permanently protected parcels leased or sold to immigrant and BIPOC farmers
- Number of bilingual staff available to support farmers

**Strategy 3.2:** Make suitable public land available for new entry and urban farmers and gardeners, including creation of a farm incubator; and support access on state lands in the county, where livestock grazing can reduce wildfire and support conservation.

**Next Steps:**

- Identify County land that is suitable for agriculture and make available for affordable long-term leasing or purchase, subject to a restrictive perpetual conservation easement, especially valley-floor farmland adjacent to County assets like Harvey Bear Park and the San Martin Airport.
- Reduce barriers for farmer and rancher tenants on publicly-owned lands to invest in their agricultural operations and in the adoption of climate-smart management practices.
- Use an equity lens to prioritize areas where need for urban agriculture is the greatest and partner with community groups to develop a plan for access to garden plots.
- Develop streamlined process for leasing public land or developing joint-use agreements for public properties for farms, community gardens, community and institutional compost hubs, livestock grazing and other activities supporting food production.
- Assess best approaches for, and develop programs to, increase access to resources and assistance for urban agriculture.
- Build upon County feasibility study, conceptual plan, and business plan for establishing a farm incubator at Harvey Bear Park (from Valley Ag Plan).
- Support state legislation on wildfire prevention through managed grazing on state lands, AB 434 (Rivas).

**Partners:** County Department of Planning and Development; County Parks and Recreation Department; County Roads and Airports; UCCE; Guadalupe-Coyote Resource Conservation District; urban agriculture

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organizations, including Valley Verde; La Mesa Verde program (Sacred Heart Community Service); Veggielution; Taylor St. Farm; Soil & Water Garden; Santa Clara County Cattlemen’s Association; California Department of State Parks and Recreation; California Department of Fish and Wildlife; Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority; Land Trust of Santa Clara Valley

**Metrics:**

- Public land inventory completed
- Prioritization of areas where urban agriculture need is greatest completed
- Plan for accessing land through long-term leases or joint-use agreements completed
- Report on programs to support urban agriculture completed
- State acres managed with livestock grazing to meet conservation objectives
- Number of new lease opportunities for beginning, limited resource, socially disadvantaged or veteran ranchers.

**Recommendation: Support farm viability and climate-smart stewardship practices**

**Strategy 3.3:** Support farm businesses through the permitting process, in regulatory compliance, and accessing other small business resources

**Next Steps:**

- Allocate funding for the County Agricultural Liaison position recommended by the Board of Supervisors on January 15, 2019.
- Evaluate and implement opportunities for permit streamlining, especially for on-farm food businesses and other value-added (e.g., jams and sauces) revenue generators.
- Identify existing business resources for small businesses and compare with needs of new entry and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.

**Partners:** County Department of Agriculture and Environmental Management; County Department of Planning and Development; UCCE; Guadalupe-Coyote Resource Conservation District; Pacific Coast Farmers’ Market Association

**Metrics:**

- Agricultural Liaison position approved, posted, and hired

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- Number of improvements implemented to streamline the permitting process
  - Business resources identified
  - Business assistance needs assessed

**Strategy 3.4:** Support networks to connect Santa Clara County-based farmers, ranchers, and food businesses/restaurants to each other and institutional and individual customers.

**Next Steps:**

- Create an online directory to identify local farm and food businesses
- Convene local farmers, food businesses/restaurants to identify opportunities to collaborate
- Facilitate networking opportunities between local farmers, food businesses/restaurants and institutional and individual customers.

**Partners:** County Department of Agriculture and Environmental Management; UCCE; Santa Clara County Farm Bureau; food businesses and restaurants; One Acre Farm; Veggielution; Guadalupe-Coyote Resource Conservation District; Santa Clara County Food System Alliance; Santa Clara University (SCU)

**Metrics:**

- Directory of Santa Clara County food and farm businesses created
- Number of convenings held of local farmers and food businesses/restaurants
- Development of Santa Clara County Grown marketing program

**Strategy 3.5:** Maintain agriculture water rates and water access for farms and ranches

**Next Steps:**

- As recommended in the Santa Clara Valley Agricultural Plan, explore opportunities to collaborate on refining or expanding the Santa Clara Valley Water District's Open Space Credit Program which recognizes farmers' contributions to the county's water resources through groundwater recharge and open space and provides incentives to agricultural landowners who employ water-saving conservation management practices
- Explore conducting an economic cost-benefit analysis or pursuing a pilot implementation program for expanding the Open Space Credit Program to provide additional incentives to agricultural landowners who employ management practices that promote water conservation and groundwater recharge.

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**Partners:** County Department of Planning and Development ; Santa Clara Valley Water District; Santa Clara County Farm Bureau; Green Foothills; Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority; Land Trust of Santa Clara Valley

**Metrics:**

- Report on opportunities for collaboration
- Board Resolution urging stable rates that maintain agricultural viability
- Water rates maintained at, or reduced from, current levels for agricultural users

**Strategy 3.6:** Make permanent the County’s Agricultural Resilience Incentive (ARI) grant pilot program for farmers and ranchers to adopt climate-smart practices

**Next Steps:**

- Create an ongoing dedication of funding to continue the ARI grant pilot program, which incentivizes carbon farming and regenerative agriculture, created by the Board of Supervisors on January 15, 2019.
- Explore supplemental funding sources through private partnerships and local-level implementation of California Senate Bill 1383.

**Partners:** County Department of Planning and Development; UCCE; County Department of Agriculture and Environmental Management; Santa Clara County Farm Bureau; Santa Clara County Cattlemen’s Association; Green Foothills; Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority; Land Trust of Santa Clara Valley

**Metrics:**

- Sustained and predictable annual funding for ARI grants
- Increasing number of ARI grant applications from farmers and ranchers
- New sources of match-funding
- Carbon sequestered by practices adopted through ARI grants

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## **GOAL 4. BUILD A STRONG REGIONAL FOOD ECONOMY WHERE COMMUNITIES AND INDIVIDUALS PROSPER**

### **Recommendation: Leverage purchasing power to support the regional food system through values-driven procurement**

**Strategy 4.1:** Adopt the Good Food Purchasing Policy (GFPP), which would align County food purchases with five values: environmental sustainability, valued workforce, nutrition, local economies, and animal welfare.

**Strategy 4.2:** Expand the impact of the Good Food Purchasing Policy in the county by supporting partner institutions with values-driven procurement

#### ***Next Steps:***

- Adopt Sustainable Procurement Policy and develop specification and administrative guidelines for various purchasing categories, including food purchases.
- Convene County departments that work on food procurement to learn more about the Good Food Purchasing Policy.
- Adopt the GFPP.
- Conduct baseline assessment of County food purchases.
- Identify strategies to align purchasing with key County priorities, including support for county and regional farmers and purveyors who sell locally produced food products.
- Identify other institutions pursuing or interested in GFPP and assess and address their needs for support.

**Partners:** County Office of Sustainability; County Department Procurement; Santa Clara County Health and Hospital System; County Corrections and Probation; SPUR; Center for Good Food Purchasing; CAFF; Veggielution & Si Se Puede Collective; Santa Clara University - Food and Climate Justice (SCU)

#### ***Metrics:***

- Process outlined including: governance for success developed; stakeholder roles and responsibilities established; deliverables and timelines defined
- Ordinance in support of GFPP developed and voted on
- Baseline assessment complete

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- Strategies to align purchases with County food system priorities identified

**Recommendation: Support the development of, and equitable access to, food aggregation, distribution, and processing/manufacturing infrastructure**

**Strategy 4.3:** Advance the development of a community food hub, which aggregates and distributes regionally produced food, by conducting a food hub feasibility analysis.

*Next Steps:*

- Conduct a feasibility study, which can include analysis of local supply, a market analysis, review of existing infrastructure and infrastructure needs, and possible sites.
- Convene stakeholders to discuss feasibility study and identify potential partners, funding, marketing, branding, and incentives for moving forward.

*Partners:* County Department of Agriculture and Environmental Management; School Districts; county farmers; restaurants, institutions; CAFF; Kitchen Table Advisors; Spade & Plow; Tera Farms; Veggielution; Martha's Kitchen; Guadalupe-Coyote Resource Conservation District; Pacific Coast Farmers' Market Association; Santa Clara County Food System Alliance; SAGE

*Metrics:*

- Feasibility study complete

**Strategy 4.4:** Facilitate access to commercial kitchens for community programs, charitable feeding operations, and new food entrepreneurs.

*Next Steps:*

- Identify public sites with commercial kitchens and determine availability of space at different times
- Convene County, City, and community partners to ascertain needs, barriers, and identify mechanisms for providing access that are mutually beneficial.
- Develop or streamline process for access to public commercial kitchen space
- Re-establish a mini-grant program that supports access to permitted commercial kitchens for charitable feeding operations.
- Continue to monitor Microenterprise Home Kitchen Operation activities taking place in California Counties

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**Partners:** County Department of Environmental Health; Community Centers; Cities; Rental Kitchens; Veggielution; Moveable

**Metrics:**

- Number of public spaces with commercial kitchens and times available identified
- Needs, barriers, and mechanisms for providing access identified in partnership with City and community partners.
- Process for accessing public commercial kitchen space developed or streamlined

**Recommendation: Reduce barriers and promote opportunities for independent food businesses, restaurants and food workers**

**Strategy 4.5:** Reduce barriers for aspiring or new, small, local food entrepreneurs.

**Next Steps:**

- Utilize the current communications officer position as a Food Business Liaison within the County to assist food business owners with County regulatory and permitting processes, including navigation during disasters and complying with the requirements of SB 1383.
- In consultation with aspiring food entrepreneurs, food cart, and food truck operators, identify needs and opportunities for streamlining permitting processes for local food businesses.
- Conduct assessment to identify needs of women and immigrant owned food businesses and identify resources to address them.
- Educate businesses and growers on the food donation process and available tax deductions to reduce food waste.
- Develop resources for food generators on how to collaborate with food recovery organizations and what cost-recovery models may be available.

**Partners:** County Department of Environmental Health, County Department of Agriculture and Environmental Management, County Executive Office – Small Business, Veggielution & Si Se Puede Collective; Moveable; Guadalupe-Coyote Resource Conservation District; food generators; Joint Venture Silicon Valley; Santa Clara County Office of Education, Santa Clara University

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*Metrics:*

- Assessment of new, small, local food entrepreneurs conducted
- Number of resources developed for food generators
- Number of educational materials/resources distributed to food generators

**Strategy 4.6:** Foster creation of food production, food processing, food service, and farm and ranch cooperatives

*Next Steps:*

- Assess available models for a County pilot program to provide education, outreach, and technical assistance to cooperative startups and for conversion of existing businesses to cooperatives.
- Coordinate with local and regional partners to explore development of small business resources for cooperatives including grants, partnerships with financial institutions, and accessing funding opportunities.
- Convene stakeholders to develop a support system strategy to become a co-op, beginning with providing education about cooperative development and financing.
- Support cooperatives through County contracts and procurement of goods and services.

*Partners:* County Office of Housing a; ALBA; California Center for Cooperative Development; California Credit Union; City of Santa Clara; CoBank; Community Development Finance Institutions; Democracy at Works Institute; La Mesa Verde; Mainstreet Phoenix; National Cooperative Bank; Project Equity; Small Business Development Centers; Sustainable Economies Law Center; UCCE; Veggielution & Si Se Puede Collective, Guadalupe-Coyote Resource Conservation District; Santa Clara University - Food and Climate Justice and other institutes

**GOAL 5. IMPROVE FOOD SECURITY AND PUBLIC HEALTH THROUGH ACCESS TO NUTRITIOUS, CULTURALLY RELEVANT, AND AFFORDABLE FOOD**

**Recommendation: Leverage federal and state nutrition programs to improve food security by maximizing participation and impact.**

**Strategy 5.1:** Support or expand County partnerships with cities, private and nonprofit organizations to bolster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) enrollment

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**Next Steps:**

- Continue to support and expand healthy food incentives programs (e.g. Double Up Food Bucks and Market Match) to leverage SNAP benefits.
- Conduct an assessment or use existing data to understand barriers to accessing CalFresh Food, including understanding why eligible non-participants are not enrolling
- Establish partnerships with community organizations to improve SNAP participation in targeted communities
- Ensure investment in SSA's enrollment capabilities to maximize leveraging of federal funding and meet needs of low-income and BIPOC residents

**Partners:** Social Services Agency- Department of Benefits and Employment Services; Public Health Department- CalFresh Healthy Living Program; Second Harvest of Silicon Valley (Community Outreach Network); SPUR; Pacific Coast Farmers' Market Association; Urban Village Farmers' Market Association; Gavilan College; Morgan Hill Unified School District; Pacific Coast Farmers' Market Association; Fresh Approach; The Health Trust; local higher education institutions (community colleges, universities) Recovery Café; Veggielution; Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County; 211

**Metrics:**

- Number of locations implementing incentive programs
- Report completed with assessed barriers and proposed solutions
- Number of new partnerships established with community-based organizations for SNAP enrollment
- Number of SSA staff dedicated to SNAP enrollment

**Strategy 5.2:** Invest in schools as anchors of community feeding

**Next Steps:**

- Support high-need schools in obtaining Community Eligibility Provision and Provision 2 status and support budget shortfalls to pilot universal feeding programs and increase school meal participation
  - Cost: \$2-4 million/year for 3 to 4 years (per Second Harvest of Silicon Valley)
- Extend current one-year COVID relief fund to cover the full four-year commitment of these programs.
- Support efforts to improve summer meal participation by identifying new sites (e.g. partnerships)

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with libraries, community centers, housing organizations) and supporting efforts to expand sponsor opportunities

- Support school districts' efforts to improve school meal appeal by encouraging local purchasing of fresh fruits and vegetables and implementation of Smarter Lunchroom Movement techniques

**Partners:** Public Health Department - CalFresh Healthy Living Program; Santa Clara County Office of Education; UCCE - CalFresh Healthy Living Program; Second Harvest of Silicon Valley; CAFF; YMCA; School Districts; Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County; Dairy Council of California

**Metrics:**

- Number of schools with universal free meals
- Number of new summer meal sites
- Program participation rates (SNAP, NSLP, SBP, CACFP, summer meals, etc)
- Number of schools implementing Smarter Lunchroom techniques

**Recommendation: Improve access to charitable food resources**

**Strategy 5.3:** Assess current food access locations for gaps in services and implement localized solutions

**Next Steps:**

- Conduct outreach to seasonal farmworkers and undocumented residents to assess barriers leading to underutilization of services
- Conduct an assessment to understand barriers to accessing charitable food resources, including understanding transportation and paratransit, time of day, language barriers, and the functional needs of people with disabilities.
- Permanently maintain a Food Access map so food insecure individuals can easily find and access food

**Partners:** Social Services Agency; nonprofit feeding organizations; Second Harvest of Silicon Valley; Gavilan College; Joint Venture Silicon Valley; Morgan Hill Unified School District; Santa Clara County Public Health Department; Second Harvest of Silicon Valley; The Health Trust; Loaves & Fishes; Martha's Kitchen

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**Metrics:**

- Report completed with assessed barriers and proposed solutions
- Existence of food access map

**Strategy 5.4:** Improve coordination among food distribution sites and develop common tracking system and reporting format

**Next Steps:**

- Continue to support the Social Services Agency (SSA) Food Access group's efforts to convene emergency food providers, improving coordination (e.g. so food distribution dates/times do not overlap) and developing a common tracking tool
- Continue to collaborate closely with Second Harvest of Silicon Valley to ensure that all communities have access to emergency food resources and food system partners have the resources they need

**Partners:** Social Services Agency; Santa Clara County Probation Neighborhood/Safety Services; Second Harvest of Silicon Valley; Gavilan College; Joint Venture Silicon Valley; Santa Clara County Public Health Department; Fresh Approach; The Health Trust; nonprofit feeding organizations including Loaves & Fishes; Recovery Café; Martha's Kitchen; Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County

**Metrics:**

- Number of SSA meetings convened
- Maintained food access map

**Strategy 5.5:** Assess infrastructure and facility needs within the county to ensure food access service providers have sufficient capacity to store and distribute food to meet the needs of food insecure residents

**Next Steps:**

- Conduct assessment of existing food distribution facilities
- Identify barriers for effective utilization of current locations and existing gaps where additional storage locations would be beneficial and propose solutions
- Explore opportunities to leverage existing or underutilized spaces

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**Partners:** Second Harvest of Silicon Valley; South County FIRST Collaborative; Fresh Approach; non-profit feeding organizations including Loaves & Fishes; Martha’s Kitchen; Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County

**Metrics:**

- Summary of research that includes existing food distribution facilities; barriers and gaps with proposed solutions; and potential spaces

**Recommendation: Ensure older adults are able to access culturally-relevant food**

**Strategy 5.6:** Develop an outreach and service strategy to better meet older adults’ needs, especially adults who are homebound or homeless

**Strategy 5.7:** Assure Meals on Wheels has sufficient funding and financial sustainability to maintain current services and increase capacity as needed

- Cost: Estimated to be \$3.4 million dollars per year in addition to current funding. Per Second Harvest of Silicon Valley, the need has dramatically increased during the pandemic and given demographic trends, is expected to continue to grow.

**Next Steps:**

- Increase Senior Nutrition Program participation in areas with high concentrations of low-income older adults.
- Maximize capacity at underutilized congregate sites (post-COVID).
- Diversify ethnic meal options for older adults and increase program awareness among non-English speaking older adults.
- Evaluate and expand pilot programs to pair programming (e.g. distributing summer meals for children and senior meals at the same location).
- Explore opportunities to provide medically tailored meals.
- Explore opportunities to increase clients’ meal choices and streamline delivery operations, using technology similar to that used by for-profit meal delivery services.
- Leverage the resources and expertise of Sourcewise, the local area agency of aging, to support service delivery.
- Maximize federal and state funds for Meals on Wheels programs and provide financial

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sustainability for Meals on Wheels and other local meal distribution nonprofits to increase capacity to serve more people.

**Partners:** The Health Trust; Sourcewise; Social Services Agency; nonprofit feeding organizations including ; Martha’s Kitchen; ;The Health Trust; Sunnyvale Community Services; Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County; Second Harvest of Silicon Valley; Loaves & Fishes

**Metrics:**

- Number of older adults and other residents who are homebound served

**GOAL 6. EXPAND FOOD RECOVERY AND COMPOSTING**

**Recommendation: Support public education, engagement and infrastructure for sustainable food waste recycling at the residential, community, and commercial levels**

**Strategy 6.1:** Provide leadership for public education and engagement on food waste prevention (including food preservation), reducing contamination (e.g., glass, plastics, and metal) in curbside organics bins, residential and community composting, and sustainable gardening (including use of compost).

**Next Steps:**

- Support the development of educational resources, such as websites, that links the public to community-based and commercial composting efforts in the County.
- Develop outreach campaigns for unincorporated service areas, and collaborate with other agencies that support the reduction and diversion of food waste to highest and best uses regionally.

**Partners:** County Department of Agriculture and Environmental Management for Unincorporated areas; Technical Advisory Committee; Cities; Fresh Approach; La Mesa Verde (Sacred Heart Community Services Agency); University of California Cooperative Extension; Veggielution; Santa Clara County School Linked Services; Guadalupe-Coyote Resource Conservation District

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*Metrics:*

- Educational resources developed and made publicly available
- Outreach campaigns developed and implemented for unincorporated areas

**Strategy 6.2:** Prioritize and build capacity for residential home composting and community-scale composting based on the EPA food waste hierarchy and the guidelines developed by the Institute for Local Self-Reliance.

*Next Steps:*

- Provide technical assistance and infrastructure resources to community gardens and other appropriate spaces for community composting, including development of off-site food waste collection.
- Collaboratively develop and assist with the implementation of organic waste educational programming that centers on active participation from community members
- Integrate community volunteers with advanced training, such as Master Composters and Gardeners, into County organic waste recycling and sustainability planning.

*Partners:* Fresh Approach; University of California Cooperative Extension; Guadalupe-Coyote Resource Conservation District

*Metrics:*

- Number of technical assistance sessions provided
- Number of county supported community gardens and composting sites
- Number of trained master composter volunteers
- Number of community volunteers participating in decision-making.

**Recommendation: Support the implementation of SB 1383, the Short Lived Climate Pollutants Act, to increase food rescue and reduce the disposal of organic food waste**

**Strategy 6.3:** Analyze and support opportunities to allow countywide coordination for certain SB 1383 programs areas.

*Next Steps:*

- Identify food recovery implementation areas under SB 1383 that would be best managed through

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regional collaboration as opposed to individual jurisdictions

- Identify funding and staffing resources to support county level planning and agreed upon aspects of food recovery program management.

**Partners:** County Department of Agriculture and Environmental Management; County Office of Sustainability; County Department of Planning and Development; Second Harvest of Silicon Valley; Cities; Santa Clara County Food Recovery Steering Committee; Martha’s Kitchen; Guadalupe-Coyote Resource Conservation District; Santa Clara County Food System Alliance; Santa Clara University

**Metrics:**

- Number of areas for regional collaboration identified
- Options for centralized coordination proposed and adopted
- Resources to support county level planning identified

**Strategy 6.4:** Increase the efficiency of SB 1383 and AB1836 implementation to reduce food waste

**Next Steps:**

- Explore opportunities for sharing of resources, enhancing channels of communication and/or establishing mutual support networks between jurisdictions.
- Identify action plans for various mutual support networks to identify where work plans overlap, and ways to leverage multiple intersecting objectives, conversations, and workplans noting areas where regional coordination is more efficient.
- Explore centralized web-based education and food recovery organization promotion, including a centralized method for fulfilling SB1383 jurisdictional requirements regarding promotion and listing of food recovery organizations.

**Partners:** Technical Advisory Committee to the Recycling and Waste Reduction Commission; Santa Clara County Food System Alliance; County Office of Sustainability; Silicon Valley Food Recovery Council; Second Harvest of Silicon Valley; Joint Venture Silicon Valley

**Metrics:**

- Number of resources shared between jurisdictions
- Number of action steps identified to leverage work between jurisdictions
- Centralized education hub developed

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**Strategy 6.5:** Explore opportunities for SB 1383 to be integrated into other components of the local food system.

*Next Steps:*

- Identify where SB 1383 compliance aligns with carbon farming, food security and food rescue programs, livestock feeding, compost and mulch specification for agriculture, the County’s ARI grant program, and the development of mid-scale community composting sites.
- Identify opportunities and resources for organic materials procurement

*Partners:* Santa Clara County Food System Alliance; County Department of Agriculture and Environmental Management; County Office of Sustainability; County Planning Department; Joint Venture Silicon Valley; Santa Clara County Food System Alliance; Martha’s Kitchen; Guadalupe-Coyote Resource Conservation District; Santa Clara University-Food & Climate Justice.

*Metrics:*

- Matrix developed that identifies alignment between SB1383 and food system components
- Resource list for locally produced compost

**GOAL 7. BUILD A CONSTITUENCY FOR A STRONG REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEM BY INCREASING FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION**

**Recommendation: Coordinate educational opportunities and expand awareness of nutrition, agriculture, and equity in the food system**

**Strategy 7.1:** Increase food and agricultural literacy by coordinating and expanding nutrition and agricultural education

*Next Steps:*

- Work with County and community nutrition, garden, and agricultural education providers to assess where adult and child nutrition and agricultural education is being offered and gaps in programming, including language accessibility.
- With community partners and educational program participants, identify types of nutrition education desired (e.g. cooking classes).
- Evaluate capacity to expand current nutrition education programs being offered.

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- Identify and expand opportunities for experiential farm and garden education for demonstration and story-telling.
  - Explore a train-the-trainer model to increase capacity for education delivery.

**Partners:** CalFresh Healthy Living Program; UCCE, Public Health Department and Catholic Charities; WIC; Healthier Kids Foundation; Palo Alto Medical Foundation – 5210 Program; School districts; Santa Clara County Office of Education; CommUniverCity; California Native Garden Foundation; La Mesa Verde; Valley Verde; Taylor St. Farm; Soil & Water Garden; Living Classroom; Bronco Urban Gardens; Deer Hollow Farm; Hidden Villa; Farmworker Caravan; Second Harvest of Silicon Valley; Fresh Approach; Veggielution; Recovery Cafe San Jose; Guadalupe-Coyote Resource Conservation District; SAGE; Dairy Council of California

**Metrics:**

- Gaps in educational programming identified
- Assessment of desired education complete
- Opportunities for experiential farm and garden education compiled
- Partners and resources identified to expand in-school and experiential learning for children and adults

**Strategy 7.2:** Develop and launch a public education campaign about the economic, environmental, and social impacts of local farmers and climate-stewardship practices

**Next Steps:**

- Identify partners and existing resources.
- In partnership with other stakeholders, create educational materials and programs that give examples of farmers and ranchers' roles as resource stewards, of farms and ranches' role in climate change mitigation and adaptation, and other benefits of county-based agriculture.
- Develop communications tools to tell the story of Santa Clara County agriculture.

**Partners:** County Department of Agriculture and Environmental Management; County Department of Planning; Valley Water; NRCS; RCD; Santa Clara County Food System Alliance; UCCE; Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County; La Mesa Verde; Second Harvest of Silicon Valley; Valley Water; Veggielution, Guadalupe-Coyote Resource Conservation District; Pacific Coast Farmers' Market Association; SAGE; San Ysidro F.I.R.S.T.; Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority; Dairy Council of California; Santa Clara

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County Farm Bureau

**Metrics:**

- Number of communication tools developed
- Number of people reached with public education materials

**Strategy 7.3:** Support food justice and food sovereignty through coordinated efforts and collaboration to expand education about the root causes of inequities in the food system.

**Next Steps:**

- Partner with nonprofits, universities, and others to assess existing educational resources and identify gaps.
- Collaborate with community partners with expertise in food justice and racial equity to develop team of trainers.
- Provide learning opportunities on racial equity in the food system to organizations including County of Santa Clara departments, food access providers, and safety net organizations.

**Partners:** South Bay Food Justice Collaborative; County Racial Health Equity Initiative; Community Colleges and Universities; La Mesa Verde Program (Sacred Heart Community Service); Fresh Approach; Santa Clara County Public Health Department; Second Harvest of Silicon Valley; South Bay Food Justice Collaborative; Veggielution & Si Se Puede Collective; Guadalupe-Coyote Resource Conservation District; San Ysidro F.I.R.S.T.

**Metrics:**

- Number of curricula assessed
- Number of people trained on the intersection of racial equity and food insecurity
- Increased understanding of how to ensure racial equity in the food system