

Win-Win: In Pursuit of Collaborative Policy Development for Santa Barbara County Agriculture

December 2013



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research that went into creating this report, as well as the findings and recommendations contained herein, was conducted and prepared solely by the LoaCom team. Our team is made up as follows:

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We'd like to thank staff members from the Environmental Defense Center (EDC) for creating a thoughtful and deliberate process by which the LoaCom research team was able to engage a diverse cross section of the Santa Barbara County community. EDC provided direction and guidance while also allowing great flexibility in the way our research was carried out and in the way this report was ultimately written. We also thank the Santa Barbara Foundation for providing grant funding for EDC's efforts to explore the potential for collaborative opportunities involving agricultural and conservation interests.

All who participated in the process of developing this report are committed to the betterment of agriculture in Santa Barbara County and beyond. It is our sincere hope that this document can be of benefit to EDC, other environmental and conservation groups, agricultural interests, farmers, ranchers, policy makers, and others as a new paradigm evolves for how we view the land, our food, and each other.

Finally, we offer thanks to those who grow the food and fiber that feed and clothe us and to those who work to protect and enhance the air, land and water which support us. We recognize your collective good work and sacrifice.

LoaCom is a Santa Barbara based consulting firm providing business and organizational development, marketing and public relations, event planning, and production services to better world companies.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Objective

LoaCom's objective vis a vis this project was to conduct a qualitative research study gauging the prevailing attitudes of farmers, ranchers, conservationists, and others in Santa Barbara County as they relate to agriculture. Our purpose was to identify trends that might lend themselves to collaborative policy development in support of agricultural viability and conservation. While opportunities for policy outcomes were a primary goal, any trend that pointed to collaborative opportunities was noted.

Process

Working in conjunction with EDC staff, LoaCom set out over the course of four months (May-August 2013) to conduct oral interviews with target stakeholders. These stakeholders fell into five broad categories: Agricultural Organizations and Individuals, Environmental/Conservation Organizations and Individuals, Governmental Entities, Land Conservancies, and Food Access Organizations/Individuals.

"Let's stop reacting, where do we want to be in 15 years?"
- Agricultural Respondent

Findings

- Water (supply, rates, quality), labor issues, cost of land, lack of alternative on-farm revenue streams, inconsistent interpretation of policy, and pest/pesticide issues were deemed significant challenges to agriculture by many stakeholders.
- Regulations and regulatory burden was identified as a challenge by many stakeholders. The Regional Water Quality Control Board's (RWQCB) Ag Waiver Program was specifically cited by both agriculturalists and environmental/conservation stakeholders as a regulatory effort that has resulted in extreme frustration and communication break-down.
- Efforts to increase local market opportunities and the connection between farmers and consumers was deemed important by environmental stakeholders and some agriculturalists.
- The Santa Barbara County Agricultural Commissioner (CAC), Cachuma Resource Conservation District (CRCD) and UC Cooperative Extension (UCCE) were cited by many stakeholders as governmental entities which best understand the needs of agriculture.
- Relations with government agencies were deemed better at the local or regional level than at the state or federal level.
- Opportunities for collaboration were viewed by many stakeholders as critical for addressing issues facing agriculture as well as building trust.

Recommendations Based on Cross Cutting Themes

A variety of opportunities for collaboration were identified through this research project. Key recommendations that are aligned with the objectives of the report – high impact collaboration at the local level - are listed below, with a complete set of recommendations listed in section V.

1. **POLICY AND REGULATIONS.** Pursue policy efforts around the following themes:
 - a. Identification and protection of “prime Ag. land” at risk of development.
 - b. Additional income generation opportunities on agricultural land.
 - c. Identification of policy incentives and other mechanisms to facilitate the development of farmworker housing as part of a broader effort to address concerns over labor shortages/security.
2. **COMMUNICATION AND TRUST BUILDING.** Increase trust building opportunities and communication pipelines among diverse stakeholder groups:
 - a. Establish proactive outreach programs or communication mechanisms whereby the conservation and farming communities can build positive working relationships.
 - b. Continue and/or replicate efforts such as the Ag Futures Alliance (AFA) and EDC’s Open Space Preservation and Education Network (OPEN), which were noted as positive examples of collaboration between diverse environmental and agricultural stakeholder groups.
 - c. Establish an invasive pest communication and response plan with diverse stakeholders including conservation and environmental groups to quickly and effectively respond to pest outbreaks.



3. **ADDITIONAL TRENDS:** Monitor and respond to current trends within the broader agriculture/food communities.
 - a. Ecosystems services efforts and projects exist and provide opportunity for funding and collaboration.
 - b. Find opportunities to engage with farmers markets, market managers and the broader farmers market community to increase the connection between producers and consumers.
 - c. Monitor conversations around ‘food hubs’ in regards to potential infrastructure needs, zoning and related issues.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES	4
II. APPROACH AND PROCESS	5
III. BACKGROUND	8
IV. FINDINGS	11
A. Agricultural Stakeholders	12
B. Environmental/Conservation Stakeholders	14
C. Governmental Entity Stakeholders	15
D. Land Conservancy Stakeholders	16
E. Food Access Stakeholders	16
F. Cross Cutting Themes	16
V. RECOMMENDATIONS	19
A. Policy and Regulations	19
B. Communication and Trust Building	20
C. Additional Trends	23
VI. CONCLUSION	24
VII. RESOURCES	25
APPENDICES	26
1. Interviews - Agricultural Organizations and Individuals	26
2. Interviews - Environmental/Conservation Organizations and Individuals	27
3. Interviews - Government/Land Conservancy/Food Access Organizations	28

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

In February 2013, LoaCom was approached by the Environmental Defense Center (EDC), a nonprofit law firm based in Santa Barbara, Ca., with a proposal for a research project focused on the local agricultural industry and opportunities for collaboration between agricultural and conservation interests. EDC had previously received funding from the Santa Barbara Foundation to engage agricultural stakeholders in collaborative discussions over a wide range of concerns including how to build bridges and common ground among this important sector of the community.

After receiving funding, EDC experienced a staffing change and was no longer able to carry out the goals of the project as originally proposed. As such, EDC hired LoaCom under a revised project description, aimed at interviewing a number of stakeholders to assess the potential development or formation of local policies or other activities beneficial to agriculture throughout the Santa Barbara County region.

Specific objectives of the research project included:

- **Identify a broad range of stakeholders** with direct involvement in agriculture (farmers, ranchers, producers, etc.) as well those whose work impacts or is impacted by agriculture and agricultural operations (conservation, environmental, land conservancy and food access organizations and individuals). Governmental entities that support Ag. (e.g., Cachuma Resource Conservation District) were also approached as part of this survey.
- **Interview stakeholders** with a set of questions aimed at learning more about the status of local agriculture, including barriers to agricultural viability and opportunities for collaboration. While questions were developed with agricultural respondents in mind, the same set of questions were asked to all stakeholders.
- **Pay special attention to policy concerns** and the effect these might have on agricultural operators, agricultural viability, and the formulation of local level policies addressing these concerns.
- **Produce a report** based on stakeholder interviews that focuses on areas of potential collaboration between diverse stakeholders, including opportunities for policy development.
- **Share findings** with stakeholders through follow-up conversations or in-person meetings and social gatherings.

EDC asked the LoaCom team to synthesize interview results and, based on this synthesis, provide a set of recommendations focusing specifically on areas of common ground as opposed to areas of conflict. As such, all of the recommendations listed (Section V.) are areas where LoaCom believes there to be collaborative opportunities.

II. APPROACH AND PROCESS

INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Working in conjunction with EDC staff, LoaCom developed a list of stakeholder targets to interview over a 4-month period. The list of stakeholders was broken into five broad categories: Agricultural Organizations and Individuals; Environmental/Conservation Organizations and Individuals; Governmental Entities; Land Conservancies; and Food Access Organizations and Individuals.

Agricultural organizations interviewed included the Santa Barbara County Farm Bureau, Grower-Shippers of Santa Barbara County, the Strawberry Commission, Cattlemen's Association and Avocado Commission. Individuals directly involved with farming and ranching were also interviewed (see full list of Agricultural Organizations and Individuals in Appendix 1). California Rural Legal Assistance was interviewed and classified as an agricultural organization due to its heavy work in the region around farmworker/labor transportation, safety, and farmworker housing.

Environmental/Conservation Organizations interviewed included the Environmental Defense Center, Santa Ynez Valley Alliance, Buellton is Our Town, Santa Barbara Channelkeeper, Santa Barbara County Action Network, Gaviota Coast Conservancy and Surfrider Foundation. See full list of Environmental/Conservation Organizations and Individuals in Appendix 2.

One Governmental Entity, the Cachuma Resource Conservation District, was interviewed.

Land Conservancy Organizations interviewed included the Land Trust of Santa Barbara County and the Trust for Public Land.

One individual with a focus on Food "Access" was interviewed on behalf of the Foodbank of Santa Barbara County. See Appendix 3 for a full list of Government/Land Conservancy/Food Access Organizations.

Individual stakeholder responses have been kept confidential. To that end, the findings in this report represent a synthesis of interview responses.

To begin the research process, LoaCom sent an email to all stakeholders explaining the project and asking to schedule in-person interviews. Of the 48 stakeholders identified as interview targets, LoaCom successfully completed interviews with 31, representing 65% of the initial target pool. Three people – one agricultural stakeholder and two conservation/environmental stakeholders – declined to be interviewed. Two people replied but were never interviewed due to scheduling conflicts. LoaCom did not receive responses from 13 (27%) of interview targets.

Of the 31 interviewees, 13 were interviewed in person, 17 were interviewed by phone and 1 responded via email. Interviews lasted approximately one hour.



Our final list of interviewees included 18 members (58% of total) representing Agriculture. Nine interviewees (29% of total) represented the Conservation/Environmental category. Land Conservancy groups were represented by two stakeholders, or 7% of our total, while Government Entities and Food Access groups were each represented by one person (3% each, respectively).

INTERVIEW PROCESS & METHODOLOGY

LoaCom's survey was qualitative in nature. We asked a series of questions aimed at getting stakeholders to tell their stories.

Because the survey questions were geared towards agriculturists, some questions were not relevant to our conservation/environmental subjects. In some instances, conservation/environmental subjects would simply list "N/A" as their answer, while in others, these stakeholders were asked to consider the views of agriculturists in their answer. Various questions had multiple parts. Participants did not always answer all questions completely

SURVEY QUESTIONS

The survey was comprised of the following questions:

- In your opinion, what are the three biggest challenges facing agriculture as a whole in Santa Barbara County? Please prioritize from highest priority to lowest (can be regulatory or non-regulatory in nature).
- In your opinion, what are the three biggest challenges facing your specific commodity/interest area in Santa Barbara County (can be the same as above). Please prioritize from highest priority to lowest (can be regulatory or non-regulatory in nature).
- What resources do you or your organization turn to for information on ongoing agricultural policy, research, etc? Please list by name.
- Which regulatory body/agency do you deal with the most frequently at each of the following levels (list no more than two for each level of government):

City:

County:

State:

Federal:

- Please prioritize three specific regulatory barriers facing your agricultural operation at each of the following levels from highest priority to lowest:

City:

County:

State:

Federal:

- Are there agencies that you've worked with directly in a collaborative capacity that have yielded beneficial results to your commodity or the agricultural industry? If yes, which agencies and what was the outcome of your efforts?
- Have there been any multi-stakeholder collaborations that you've participated in directly that have yielded beneficial results to your commodity or the agricultural industry? If yes, what was the type of collaboration and what was the outcome?
- In your opinion, what trade groups or organizations best represent the Agricultural industry?
- In your opinion, what government agency/entity best understands the Agricultural industry?
- What do you think are the greatest misconceptions that the environmental or conservation community has about agriculture in Santa Barbara County?
- Do you feel there is an existing regulation, policy or issue where a collaborative approach with the environmental and conservation community might yield beneficial results? If yes, which regulation or issue?
- On the whole, how would you best describe your working relationship to local (city/county) regulatory agencies and departments?

1 – poor 2 – below average 3 – average 4 – above average 5 – excellent

- On the whole, how would you best describe your working relationship to state regulatory agencies and departments?

1 – poor 2 – below average 3 – average 4 – above average 5 – excellent

- On the whole, how would you best describe your working relationship to federal regulatory agencies and departments?

1 – poor 2 – below average 3 – average 4 – above average 5 – excellent

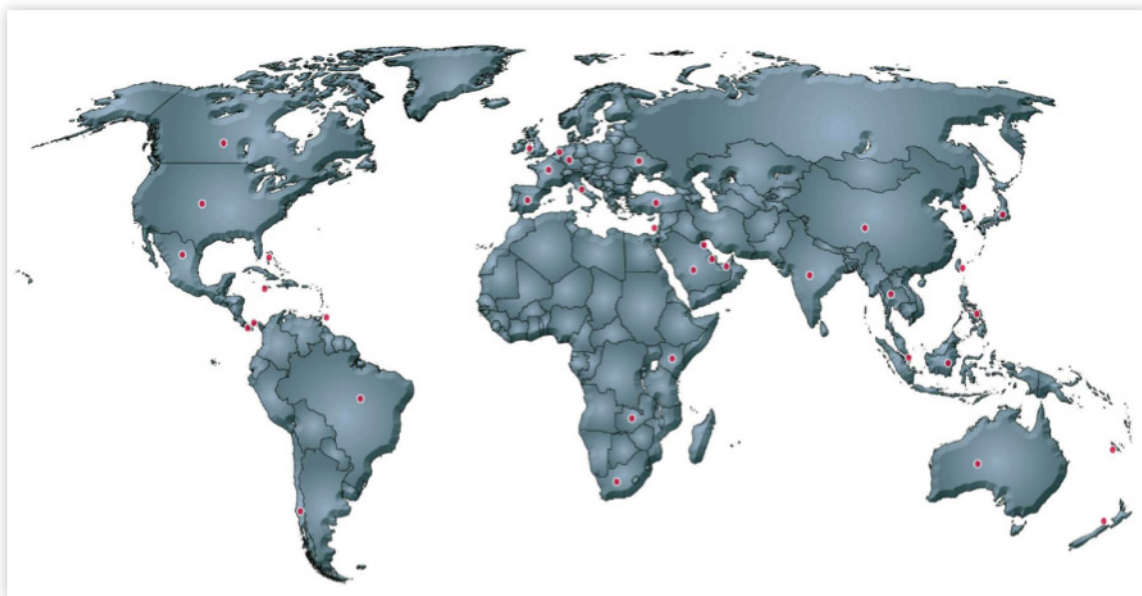
- Is there anything you want to add?

III. BACKGROUND

Santa Barbara County ranks 13th in California counties for total agricultural production¹, making it among the nation's most productive. With nearly \$1.3 billion in gross revenue in 2012, and \$2.5 billion when factoring in an economic multiplier effect², the local agricultural industry stands alone in providing both the economic underpinning of a healthy community as well as the land resources that bring a much desired quality of life for central coast residents.

A mild year-round climate, oceanic influences, unique geography and diverse soil types are among the many contributing factors that allow agriculture to thrive.

There are approximately 1,756,000 total acres of land in Santa Barbara County, including the Los Padres National Forest, Vandenberg Air Force Base, and the Channel Islands³. Of these, nearly 710,000 were harvested acres in 2012⁴. Top crops include strawberries, broccoli, wine grapes, head lettuce, avocados, cauliflower, celery, cattle, cut lillies, cut gerberas (top 10 in economic value) and many more⁵.



The Global Reach of Santa Barbara County Agricultural Products- (SBCAC Crop Report, 2013)- Exported Commodities: Artichoke, Avocados, Bare Root Plants, Beans, Beets, Blackberries, Blueberries, Bok Choy, Broccoli, Brussel Sprout, Butternut Squash, Cabbage, Carrot, Cauliflower, Celery, Cilantro, Cucumber, Cut Flowers, Cut Greens, Lettuce, Napa Cabbage, Onion, Parsley, Peppers, Potted Plants, Radicchio, Romaine, Rooted Plant Cuttings, Snap Peas, Spinach, Strawberries, Tomato, Zucchini.

¹ Santa Barbara County Agriculture and Weights & Measures Newsletter, Summer 2013;
<https://www.countyofsb.org/uploadedFiles/agcomm/outreach/Summer%20Edition%202013.pdf>

² Santa Barbara County Agricultural Commissioner's Office, 2012 Crop Report.

³ Santa Barbara County Comprehensive Plan, Agricultural Element, 2009 (republished);
<http://longrange.sbcountyplanning.org/programs/genplanreformat/PDFdocs/Agricultural.pdf>

⁴ Santa Barbara County Agricultural Commissioner's Office, 2012 Crop Report.

⁵ Santa Barbara County Agricultural Commissioner's Office, 2012 Crop Report.

Despite this agricultural productivity, a host of issues have threatened and continue to threaten the viability of regional agriculture, including rising real estate values, labor shortages, water supply and prices, increased regulatory requirements, and dynamic markets. These issues have had an impact not only on farming and active farmland, but also on natural resources, sensitive or endangered species, and broader community relations, in some cases pitting urban communities against rural ones. The conflicts that have emerged between these communities have involved many of the organizations and individuals interviewed as a part of this research project.

While there has been friction, there have been multiple cases where collaboration has taken root among diverse groups and individuals who want to solve problems, yielding results beneficial to the agricultural sector and the broader community. It is the collaborative efforts and past successes that this report aims to inspire more of in the future.

Past collaborative successes have included, for example, efforts in Lompoc, CA, where conservation and farm groups joined forces to oppose annexation of prime farmland into city boundaries. These preservation efforts on the outskirts of the city (commonly referred to as Bailey Avenue) have been underway since 2011 and continue today.

In another collaborative initiative, the Ag Futures Alliance spearheaded an effort in 2010 to develop a countywide Buffer Policy to protect farmland from encroaching developments and to shield urban neighbors from the dust, noise, lights, pesticides, and other perceived nuisances associated with normal farming activities. This effort saw farmers, conservationists, community members and others come together over the course of three years to get this ordinance approved by the County Board of Supervisors in 2013.

Additionally, efforts to protect the Gaviota Coast while allowing certain types of agricultural activities are in progress under the Gaviota Coast Plan. Ranching, farming, government, and conservation interests have all participated in the Plan.

These collaborative efforts highlight the positive outcomes and relationships that can manifest when committed citizens put aside differences to work towards a broader, mutually agreed upon goal. This approach, however, has been the exception and not the norm. A long history in Santa Barbara County of fighting, lawsuits, and distrust have prevented ongoing collaboration, and groups from all sides have found it easy to slip back into their own 'camps.'

Amidst the tension and occasional collaborative success, a few emerging trends are worth noting as they set the framework for broader themes related to the current agricultural climate.



First, the Directors of the Santa Barbara County Agricultural Commissioner's Office, Santa Barbara County Farm Bureau, Cachuma Resource Conservation District, and Santa Barbara Grower Shippers Association are all women. The Secretary of the California Department of Food and Agriculture is Karen Ross. The rise of women in leadership positions, and their role within the local agricultural industry, seemed noteworthy to authors.

It is worth mentioning the incredible rise of organic agriculture and the related consumer demand for locally produced food. The success of existing farmers' markets, the demand for additional markets, and the rise of the "buy local" and "foodie" movements cannot be understated, with the latter becoming seemingly more popular than the "organic" or "sustainability" movements.

In addition, as older generations of farmers pass on, their children and a host of young farmers seeking land to cultivate often stand at the ready. A growing trend in young farmers and agrarians points to a resurgence in farming and a desire to tend to the land.

Considering these trends, the conservation community finds itself incredibly well positioned to pursue and implement cross cutting strategies in support of local agriculture. Likewise, agriculturalists have a prime opportunity to reach out to traditional adversaries who have the capacity and interest to support their efforts at maintaining economically viable and conservation minded agricultural practices.

Together, by relying on existing multi-sector relationships, an abundance of local expertise, an ever-evolving agricultural landscape, and past collaborative successes, great opportunities exist for effective policy development that protects agriculture, protects natural resources, and facilitates the building of stronger relationships between agriculture, environmentalists and government.

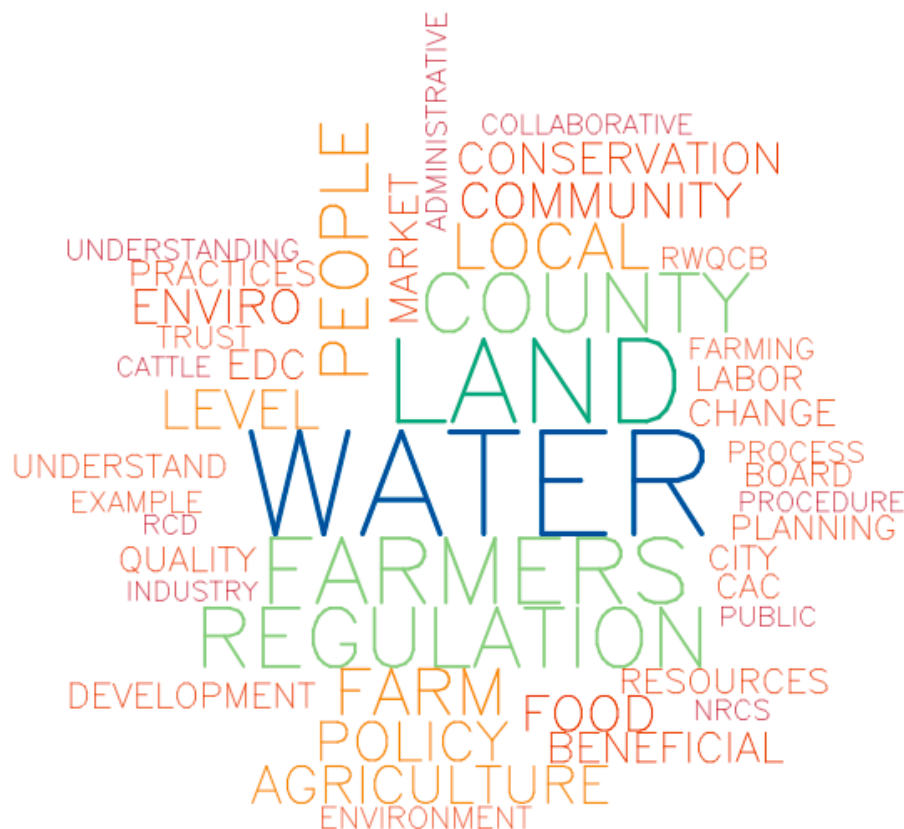
While there may be a legitimate question as to whether farmers and ranchers need or want help in protecting their farms and their farming history, the results from our research indicate that the agricultural community could use, and indeed wants, support from the broader community. The challenge lays in all sides listening to opposing viewpoints with an open mind, putting aside historical perceptions, and taking into account the Santa Barbara County community in its entirety.

IV. FINDINGS

In this section, we summarize key responses/views held by interviewees. First, we identify common responses by each stakeholder group. It is important to note that findings indicated under each stakeholder category did **not** necessarily have broad support among all interviewees. Secondly, we identify findings where there was conceptual support from all stakeholder groups around certain topics, listed below as 'Cross Cutting' themes. In a few cases, we note cross cutting themes within individual stakeholder responses.

Stakeholder groups have been categorized below. In some cases, very few respondents made up a stakeholder category. Number of respondents per category are listed in parenthesis.

- A. Agricultural Stakeholders (18)
- B. Environmental/Conservation Stakeholders (9)
- C. Governmental Entity Stakeholders (1)
- D. Land Conservancy Stakeholders (2)
- E. Food Access Stakeholders (1)
- F. Cross Cutting Themes



A Word Cloud functions by aggregating a group of documents into a single stream of text and then counting the frequency of individual words. 'Word Cloud library in R' was the algorithm used to create the image above, and depicts the most commonly used terms by the subjects of LoaCom's research. Image produced by Sarah Clark, UCSB National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis.

A. Agricultural Stakeholders

Our most significant contributors to this report were members of the Ag. industry, with 18 individuals who either farm or who represent farmers providing input. This, coupled with the fact that questions were tailored to the agricultural community, resulted in much more detailed information coming from this sector of respondents.

The following issues were commonly referenced by agricultural interviewees.

“If you don’t have labor here, you don’t have Agriculture here.
What do you have?”

- Agricultural Respondent

1. Water

Water issues were the most frequently cited challenge faced by agricultural respondents. These centered around a few key themes.

Regional Water Quality Control Board

The most frequently cited water issue was related to the Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) and its Ag Waiver⁶ process.

Mandated by the Porter Cologne Act⁷, Region 3 RWQCB (which oversees areas of California’s central coast including Santa Barbara County) has worked for years to address the issue of water quality negatively impacted by agricultural operations. Stakeholder groups of diverse interests have attempted for nearly 20 years to develop a process that would monitor and improve water quality over time through the Ag Waiver Process. The process aims to waive state discharge requirements from certain operations if it is deemed in the public interest, but with conditions.

Concerns with the RWQCB process, as cited by Ag. stakeholders, include:

- A lack of understanding by RWQCB staff of agricultural needs.
- Proposed RWQCB staff remedies are not seen as solving the problems they set out to address.
- A burdensome amount of paperwork needed to comply with Ag. Waiver requirements.
- Unnecessary and unrealistic expectations for agricultural runoff to meet drinking water standards.

Water Supply

Water supply in the region was deemed a significant challenge to the continued viability of agriculture. While some cited climate change as having a current and future impact on water resources, others cited current drought conditions and the cycle of drought in the region as an ongoing challenge. Issues such as water pollution, saltwater intrusion, and others also impacted overall availability/supply.

⁶ State Water Resources Control Board;
http://www.swrcb.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/agriculture/docs/about_agwaivers.pdf

⁷ The Porter-Cologne Act, passed in 1969 by the state legislature, entrusts the California State Water Board and Regional Water Quality Control Board with broad duties and powers to “preserve and enhance” all beneficial uses of the state’s immensely complex waterscape. The Porter-Cologne Act is recognized as one of the nation’s strongest pieces of anti-pollution legislation and was so influential that Congressional authors used sections of the Act as the basis for the Federal Clean Water Act

Costs of water and infrastructure associated with water transport/irrigation (wells) were also seen as a significant challenge to ongoing agricultural operations, with fears that water rates would continue to increase while supplies continue to dwindle.

2. Labor

Lack of comprehensive immigration policy was cited as a major challenge to agriculture. Specifically, a lack of a stable, consistent, and legal workforce was cited as being a major impediment to the long term viability of agriculture. Agricultural respondents with very diverse operations, from ranching to orchard management, organic to conventional, all cited labor as a major concern for the county's agricultural productivity. Farmworker housing was mentioned as both a need and potential opportunity.

Acknowledging the makeup of the County's current agricultural workforce, one respondent stated that the City of Santa Maria is a "safe harbor city, without which agriculture as we know it in Santa Barbara County would not exist."

3. Policy Interpretation/Implementation

The inconsistent interpretation of policies at all levels of government was a major concern. Water policy (cited above), Santa Barbara County's Grading Ordinance and regulations in California's Coastal Zone (overseen by the California Coastal Commission, among others), state and federal interpretation of the Endangered Species Act, and responses to invasive pest issues were all mentioned by many respondents.



4. Pests/Pesticides

Invasive pests were mentioned as a current and growing threat to agriculture. While pests themselves were viewed as a challenge due to their destructive nature, so too was the public's ongoing concern about common pest prevention/control mechanisms used to control invasive species, especially in urban settings. Lack of a consistent, community based approach to addressing these issues was a concern.

5. Perceptions of Environmental/Conservation Organizations and Agencies

An important part of our research was to determine the views and opinions that the agricultural community held about the conservation/environmental communities and governmental entities that provide support to agricultural operators. Below are some observations provided by Ag. stakeholders.

Cachuma Resource Conservation District (CRCD), UC Cooperative Extension (UCCE), and the Natural Resources and Conservation Services (NRCS)

The CRCD, UCCE, and to a lesser degree, the Natural Resources and Conservation Service, were all cited as "conservation" groups that best understood the needs of agriculture. It should be noted that there was uncertainty by respondents about whether these groups were government, quasi-government, or nonprofit organizations (they are governmental entities). Successful collaborations cited by respondents often involved these agencies.

Environmental Defense Center

EDC and its role in the community was frequently mentioned by respondents. Many respondents recognized the role that EDC played in brokering collaborative approaches (Ag Futures Alliance, Open Space Preservation and Education Network) between those of “opposing views” in order to build trust within the farming community. While the EDC was frequently mentioned, there was not a consistent view as to its efficacy or understanding of agricultural needs.

General Perceptions

When asked, “What do you think are the greatest misconceptions that the environmental or conservation community has about agriculture in Santa Barbara County?” the overwhelming response by all stakeholder groups was that there is a misconception that farmers do not care about the land, the need to protect it, or the environment.

“I don’t know of any other profession where you can call in and ask just about anything and have answers and resources immediately at your disposal (referring to UCCE).”

- Agricultural Respondent

Education/Understanding

A lack of understanding was seen as a key challenge facing agriculture. Agriculturalists, conservation and environmental groups all agreed that mechanisms for increased communication were important.

B. Environmental/Conservation Stakeholders

Generally speaking, due to the nature of interview questions, responses from environmental organizations were broader in nature than those by agricultural stakeholders and did not go into the same level of depth as our agricultural responders. While this is true, there were common themes that arose among the environmental community.

1. Enhanced Revenue Opportunities on Ag. Land

The need to allow for increased revenue generating opportunities on Ag. land was identified by environmental respondents as an observed need (this response was not unique to environmental respondents). Opportunities for additional revenue included increased Ag. tourism, allowances for increased Ag. infrastructure, permitting for farm stands and more. There was an acknowledgement that zoning issues might be a barrier to implementation of some of these and would need to be addressed.

2. Improved Relationship Between Producers and Consumers

Members of the environmental community (and some farmers/ranchers) described the need to enhance the connection between farmers and consumers. Farmers markets were pointed to as a great vehicle for this. Farm stays and farm ‘work days’ were mentioned. Thoughts about how to localize production and consumption to a greater degree were frequently expressed, including how increased infrastructure might allow for this.

3. Water

As with agricultural respondents, water issues came up frequently among environmental respondents. While regulations around water were the main concern for farmers and ranchers, issues related to water supply, cost and quality were most frequently identified by environmental organizations.

Some environmental respondents specifically mentioned water regulations as being impactful to agricultural viability, as well as the role that government agencies played in regulating water. Environmental organizations expressed frustration with the RWQCB process and the position of Ag. in that process.

4. Perceptions of Agricultural Organizations

While the question asked to stakeholders was about the biggest misconceptions that environmental and conservation organizations might have about agriculturalists, our conservation and environmental respondents turned this question around by providing misconceptions they felt agriculturalists held about them.

A key misconception that arose was that conservation groups simply do not understand agriculture. Some of the environmental and conservation organizations interviewed strongly believed they understood agriculture and the needs of agriculture, even though they might not agree with the views held by many within the agricultural industry due to ideological differences. They felt that Ag doesn't give environmental, conservation and other groups/agencies credit for how much they actually do know about Ag. These same respondents felt that despite differences in perception and ideology, there were many opportunities for collaboration.

C. Governmental Entity Stakeholders

There was only one respondent that we can qualify as an 'agency,' the Cachuma Resources Conservation District. Despite efforts, we were unable to communicate with the County Agricultural Commissioner. Both of these entities were cited by interviewees as a great resource for the agricultural community.

1. Funding and Incentives for Restoration Projects

Opportunities for farmers and ranchers to be innovative and take risks exist via a variety of funding streams. While this is true, new restrictions on how funding can be used has created a disincentive for farmers to apply for funds. Permit coordination and/or streamlining of the regulatory process, a shift

in policy attitudes towards resource stewardship, and additional incentives and funding options for landowners could provide a variety of agricultural and ecosystems benefits.

"The biggest misconception is that large scale Ag. operations put environmental concerns well below all other concerns. I have made that same mistake of typecasting...but you always find farmers of any scale that really do care."

-Environmental Respondent

D. Land Conservancy Stakeholders

We interviewed two Land Conservancy organizations, the Trust for Public Land and the Santa Barbara County Land Trust. Common themes among this stakeholder group included the following.

1. Streamlining of Regulatory Process

Land Conservancy organizations commented on the need to allow for flexibility and/or streamlining of the permitting process when considering restoration and conservation projects on agricultural properties. A 'one size fits all' approach was deemed ineffective and the concept of 'adaptive management' was considered important. Streamlined permitting and 'updating the regulatory framework' came up among other stakeholder groups as well.

2. High Cost of land

The high cost of land/land values were cited by Land Conservancy representatives as a challenge to keeping Ag. land productive in the long term.

E. Food Access Stakeholders

There was only one respondent interviewed under this stakeholder category, representing the Foodbank of Santa Barbara County.

1. Multiple Use Allowances for agricultural land.

The current lack of mixed uses allowed on farm lands was seen as prohibitive. Allowing the likes of 'farm to table' restaurants on farms, processing units, and opportunities for increased agricultural tourism were seen as necessary in helping maintain the viability of some local farming operations. It was acknowledged that current zoning laws may prohibit such activities.

F. Cross Cutting Responses

Among all interviewees, a few areas emerged consistently with potential for collaboration. While not all respondents commented on every area below, there was enough overlap to believe that collaborative efforts undertaken to address some of these might yield beneficial results.

1. Land and Agricultural Income

Many respondents cited the high cost of land as a challenge to agriculture. Pressures to develop agricultural land on the coast and annexation proposals near city limits throughout the county were seen as additional risk factors impacting agriculture. Limitations on the ability to earn additional revenue on agricultural land added another restrictive burden on landowners. How to incentivize keeping land in agriculture through tools such as the Williamson Act were also mentioned.



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2. Government Relations

Relationships with government varied from person to person and depended on personal relationships as well as the level of government being considered (local, state, federal). However, trends emerged as to which levels of government were easiest to work with, provided the most opportunity for partnerships, raised the most barriers, etc.

Santa Barbara County Agricultural Commissioner's Office

The CAC was cited as the governmental agency most understanding of the needs of agriculture. A large majority of respondents testified to a positive working relationship with the current Agricultural Commissioner or viewed the Ag Commissioner as a good resource for the agricultural industry.

Local Level Government

On average, relations with local (city/county) agencies were viewed as a 3.8 on a scale of 1-5 (1 being poor, 5 being excellent), with many respondents having positive working relationships at the local level even though they did not always agree with local regulators.

State Level Government

On average, relations with state agencies were viewed as a 3 on a scale of 1-5 (1 being poor, 5 being excellent). Respondents had differing opinions of state agencies based on their type of agricultural operation, resources on their land, and other influencing factors.

Federal Level Government

On average, relations with federal agencies were viewed as a 3 on a scale of 1-5 (1 being poor, 5 being excellent). Again, respondents had differing opinions of federal agencies based on their type of agricultural operation, resources on their land, and more.

3. Collaborative Efforts

Multiple examples of successful collaborations were cited by most respondents.

Santa Barbara County Ag Futures Alliance (AFA)

Many respondents pointed to the AFA as an example of a collaborative approach that served the specific purpose of bringing diverse stakeholders together. Interestingly, AFA was cited as a model of collaboration by many respondents who have never directly participated with AFA. Many acknowledged that the success of AFA hinged largely on relationships between EDC staff and members of the agricultural community. Other views were that AFA may no longer be serving its original purpose and seems from the outside like another Ag 'Trade Group.'

Open Space Preservation and Education Network (OPEN)

EDC's OPEN Project was pointed to as an effort by EDC that was positive, seeking to build bridges with members of the agricultural community. Many acknowledged that the success of OPEN hinged largely on relationships between EDC staff and members of the agricultural community.

Buffer Policy

Many respondents pointed to a recently passed ordinance, Santa Barbara County's Buffer Policy, as a prime example of what can happen when diverse groups and individuals work together towards a common goal.

Spearheaded by the AFA, the policy was vetted by numerous organizations and county agencies before being approved by the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors in March 2013.

Cachuma Resource Conservation District (CRCD) and the Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS)

CRCD and NRCS were cited by many respondents as entities that effectively worked via collaborative models with individual farmers and/or on individual projects that yielded beneficial results to agriculture. These came in the form of pilot projects, grant money for restoration initiatives, seed trials, and more.

Gaviota Coast Planning and Advisory Committee

Multiple respondents cited the Gaviota Planning Advisory Committee as an example of a multi-stakeholder collaboration that has the potential to yield positive results, although most deemed it too early to tell.



V. RECOMMENDATIONS

It was agreed at the onset of this research project that recommendations would focus not on areas of friction, but rather on areas of common interest among all stakeholders. We also agreed to focus on local opportunities because they provide the greatest chance of success. As such, recommendations listed here are based on those areas with high potential for collaboration where stakeholder responses pointed to opportunity. The findings by stakeholder group listed in section IV were listed as reference.

We acknowledge that it will be difficult if not impossible for any one entity to address every recommendation listed below. These suggestions should be seen as an opportunity for positive community engagement on behalf of many within the agricultural and conservation/environmental communities.

Recommendations are divided into three categories, including:

- A. Policy and Regulations
- B. Communication and Trust Building
- C. Additional Trends

A. POLICY AND REGULATIONS

Overarching concerns about regulations were cited as one of the top threats to viable agriculture. Opportunities for collaboration around policy development should focus on locally developed and/or implemented regulations, including the following:



1. Implement efforts to identify and protect “prime Ag. land⁸” from development.

Conservation groups and other allies should prioritize the identification of “prime agricultural land” that is currently under development risk with the help of agricultural stakeholders. Policy efforts should focus on how best to protect these prime parcels. As was seen with Bailey Avenue in Lompoc, efforts to protect prime farmland from development is generally viewed as a “win-win.” EDC and other conservation/environmental stakeholders should establish a response mechanism that enables close working relationships with the agricultural community when prime Ag. land is placed at risk by city or county annexation proposals or other outside pressures (development proposals by farmers themselves would not be prioritized for collaboration). Parcels could be prioritized based on a series of “risk factors” established by stakeholders.

2. Consider efforts to allow additional sources of revenue generation on agricultural land.

For many farmers interviewed, the cost of land is high and the return on investment is low. Some of this is due to natural market fluctuations while some is due to regulation. As such, the allowance for additional income opportunities on Ag. land should be strongly considered.

⁸

Uniform Rules for Agricultural Preserves and Farmland Security Zones, Santa Barbara County 2007

Allowing some reasonable amount of increased income can come in a variety of ways including allowing increased opportunities for Ag. tourism, developing agricultural infrastructure such as processing facilities/refrigeration units/etc., allowing certain recreational activities on farm lands that are not currently permitted, increased flexibility for farm/road produce stands and more.

While some of these considerations would require zoning changes and/or shifts in prevailing attitudes or philosophies, they could have the intended consequence of producing increased revenue on farms, increasing the ability by farmers to manage (and protect) productive farm lands, and allowing more effective responses to critical issues deemed necessary by the community.

Respondents from agricultural and conservation interests alike acknowledged on-farm income as a challenge, and opportunity, for maintaining viable agriculture in this region.

3. Develop plans for supplying farmworker housing

Though farmworker housing was not a topic that was mentioned by a majority of respondents, the issue of labor and immigration was. The lack of a stable, consistent workforce was seen as a major barrier to the long term success of the farming industry. A collaborative process to address the major need for safe and decent farmworker housing in Santa Barbara County through Comprehensive Planning or city General Plan processes could be very beneficial to agriculture, and might gain the widespread support of industry.

While addressing farmworker housing would not address broader issues related to immigration reform, it would be a positive first step in addressing a very real need for the region's agricultural community and its workforce.

4. Develop a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) policy

Although the development of a TDR policy within Santa Barbara County was expressed by only a handful of respondents, a TDR policy should be considered as this effort falls under broader themes of Ag. land protection and preservation.

Members of the AFA are actively engaged in TDR discussions with members of county staff, members of the agricultural and environmental communities, and others. Because TDR issues could affect farming operations throughout the county at any time, efforts around a multi-stakeholder initiative to develop such a policy is warranted as it would provide a framework by which responsible parties could respond to certain types of development proposals. Similar to the recently passed Buffer Policy that enjoyed widespread support from diverse sectors, the development of a TDR policy might serve as a great collaborative opportunity for members of the agricultural, environmental and other communities.

B. COMMUNICATION AND TRUST BUILDING

Trust building opportunities and increased communication avenues are needed in order to engage diverse stakeholders in efforts that are protective of local agriculture. The following is an initial list of recommendations based on respondent's input.

1. Establish proactive communication programs between farming organizations and conservation/environmental groups

The conservation community should proactively outreach to organizations and agencies that hold the trust of the farming community in order to assess where and how they might play a supporting role. Trusted farm organizations and governmental entities include CAC, CRCDC, UCCE, Natural Resources and Conservation Services (NRCS) and the Farm Bureau.

At a minimum, a 'communication tree' should be created to alert and engage diverse stakeholders in a time of need. This can take form via an internal email list, phone list, or other mechanism. The issue that recently arose regarding funding for UCCE at the county level is one example where, with a communication plan in place, a multi-stakeholder response may have been beneficial.

2. Implement and maintain communication efforts consistently over time

Open lines of communication should be established between conservation organizations and Ag. organizations on a full-time basis, both in times of stability and times of crisis, in order to build trust and increase potential for ongoing collaboration.

3. Maintain and/or implement collaborative stakeholder engagement processes

If not the Ag Futures Alliance (AFA) itself, a collaborative process similar to the one developed by the AFA should be implemented in order to facilitate dialogue among diverse participants about key issues affecting agriculture. This process should be balanced in its representation of stakeholder interests and should be supported/facilitated by a neutral entity.

In this same vein, continuation of the Open Space Preservation and Education Network (OPEN) at EDC should be strongly considered. A number of agricultural interviewees pointed to the critical role played by Christina McGinnis and the OPEN program. With direct ties to conservation, Christina served as a communication pipeline, ambassador, and "voice of reason" that the agricultural community could trust.



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4. Formalize partnerships with UCCE, CRCDC, and/or CAC

Partnerships with UCCE, CRCDC, and CAC should be formalized and should focus on efforts with the potential for broad support including incentive-based agricultural best practices, resource sharing, and Ag. land preservation. Partnerships could pave the way for the following: a) proactive support for agriculture in

times of need, b) funding for best management practices and pilot projects, c) development of educational programs for the public around agricultural issues on an ongoing basis (farm tours, forums, events), and d) development of deeper understanding of the serious issues facing local farmers and ranchers.

5. Support funding and staffing for agricultural allies

As one of agriculture's trusted entities, the conservation community should strongly consider supporting robust budgets for the CAC's office, UCCE, and CRCDC. As critical technical resource providers and bridges to the government and public, strong support for these entities on an annual basis during budget hearings would build goodwill and provide genuine benefit to the agricultural community.

Additional advocacy during annual County budget hearings for County staff with strong agricultural backgrounds (CAC, Planning & Development, or other) would be beneficial. Not only would this improve relationships and service between agriculture and government, it would highlight the conservation/environmental community's willingness to understand and support agriculture.

'Farmbudsman'⁹ positions have been established/considered in other California counties to assist landowners with the permitting process, with communications to the public, and as neutral third party to assist with communications and relationships between Ag., regulators and environmental/conservation interests. Such a position could prove useful in Santa Barbara County as well.

6. Develop an invasive pest response protocol

An appropriate communication and response protocol for invasive pest outbreaks should be developed immediately. The Glassy Winged Sharpshooter, Light Brown Apple Moth, Oriental Fruit Fly, Asian Citrus Psyllid, and an increasing number of other invasive pests have highlighted in very real terms the threat that these pests pose to agriculture in Santa Barbara County and the broader region. They have also highlighted a need for effective communication strategies, community outreach and appropriate response tools before taking action.

The traditional 'spray now' response of government agencies when dealing with pest infestations that threaten large swaths of the agricultural industry has given way to a more measured response that provides opportunities for community engagement. While this is true, community perception around pesticide use, government efforts to fix the problem, and an ever-changing political climate dictate that conservation stakeholders, members of the agricultural community, and local agencies develop a response protocol for serious pest infestations that has broad understanding and support.

The protocol should include pest prevention, pest identification, public communications, and pest abatement strategies that are agreed upon by key stakeholder groups including conservation and environmental interests. An agreed upon protocol should be shared with the public via public service announcements, educational forums, traditional media, government websites and other means.

⁹

See Farmbudsman in section VII. Resources.

C. ADDITIONAL TRENDS

Attention to trends from within the broader community around agricultural and food issues should be monitored. Opportunities for broad level collaborative efforts may exist around some of the following actions.

1. Pursue collaborative ecosystems services projects

Funding for very specific projects that focus on “ecosystems services” and sustainable farming practices has increased at the national, state, and regional level. Money for water retention, energy efficiency, soil health, carbon sequestration, habitat restoration, and many other types of projects is available, especially for collaborative efforts between conservation organizations and agricultural interests.

Opportunities for collaborative projects with willing landowners should be pursued, as many in the agricultural community have confirmed that they would be receptive to implementing incentives-based best management practices.

2. Seek opportunities to engage with farmers markets

The increasing demand for locally grown food has resulted in the growth of farmers markets at all levels. As local examples, a farmers market in Vandenberg Village was launched in 2011 and has seen great success. A new Saturday farmers market in Santa Maria launched earlier this year to great fanfare. The ever popular Santa Barbara Certified Farmers Markets brings in \$10 million in gross revenues every year by operating 8 markets per week. While acknowledging that outreach efforts here would be limited to a specific sector of the agricultural industry, conversations with farmers market managers should be initiated to assess collaborative and educational opportunities that might exist. Farmers markets were pointed to by many as a prime example of enhancing the relationship between consumers and producers.

3. Monitor food hubs

Rising interest in “food hubs¹⁰” should be monitored. While not a single agricultural or conservation stakeholder cited a need for the creation of a food hub, the concept has been broached along the south central coast for some time. Most recently, food hub efforts in Ventura and San Luis Obispo counties have begun, and a small subset of individuals in Santa Barbara County are currently assessing the need for such a resource. Because food hubs would require new or existing infrastructure, potential zoning changes and more, the development of such a resource should be monitored for potential opportunity and collaboration.

4. Assess Ag. and food needs for Santa Barbara County

The development of a broad-based agricultural/food needs assessment¹¹ that researches the overall level of Ag./food resources within the county is merited. Included in such a study would be, for example, access to food resources by community members, overall food security¹², potential for increased local markets for locally grown products, the purchasing power of local institutions, incentives for institutions to purchase locally grown products, and level of buy-in from key stakeholders.

¹⁰ As defined by the US Dept. of Agriculture. “A centrally located facility with a business management structure facilitating the aggregation, storage, processing, distribution, and/or marketing of locally/regionally produced food products.” <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5088011&acct=wdmgeninfo>

¹¹ See Foods Needs Assessments in section VII. Resources

¹² As defined by the World Food Summit of 1996. “When all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life.” <http://www.who.int/trade/glossary/story028/en>

VI. CONCLUSION

There is an incredible opportunity for an experienced and reputable nonprofit organization to serve as a bridge builder, catalyst, and communications vehicle between the agricultural industry and the conservation/environmental communities and beyond. This is a role that EDC has successfully played in the past and could again play in the future.

Widespread interest in food, farming, and agriculture, evolving leadership among agricultural organizations, increasing challenges to agriculture via water, climate, and regulatory issues, and a new wave of young farmers with increased interest in best management and conservation practices are noticeable trends. With its track record of collaborative successes and its knowledge of local policy, EDC stands at the forefront of what could be a paradigm shift in agricultural/conservation relations. EDC can and should be joined by its environmental and conservation colleagues in this effort.



In order for this transition to occur, an intentional shift in thinking by all parties must occur. EDC, conservation allies, and members of the farming community must seek to avoid the knee-jerk reactions that have too often dictated the flow and tone of conversations.

A new approach to rulemaking, policy development and strategic partnerships must be considered. Because conditions “on the ground” are not the same now as they once were, an evolution in the approach used to identify, address and solve problems is critical.

Core pillars of communication must be established and utilized on an ongoing basis to aid in trust building and understanding. While actions will undoubtedly be taken by some stakeholders that are disagreeable to other stakeholders, a strong framework underpinning a new communications approach will enable collaboration more often than not.

As agriculture continues to evolve, so too will the environment in which it operates. Water is, and will continue to become, an issue of concern for farmers and urban residents alike. Invasive pests and the impact they have on agriculture are not going away and will only increase. Demand for housing will increase in an improving economy, placing continued strain on productive farm and ranch lands as well as the natural resources found on or near them. Conservation and environmental organizations have a critical voice in helping address these issues.

How all stakeholders—be they agriculture, conservation, environment, or the broader community—choose to engage is ultimately up to each of them. It is clear from our research, however, that new and stronger alliances and relationships will be necessary in order to secure our food, the lands that produces it, the workers that tend it, and the larger community that depends on these resources.

VII. RESOURCES

Farmbudsman

Solano County Farmbudsman- In Solano County, the Farmbudsman program's objective is to "facilitate and expedite the development of promising value-added agricultural projects in both counties. The farmbudsman hopes to accomplish this objective by assisting farmers, ranchers and agriculture-related businesses with various permitting processes, including assistance with agricultural permitting and standards as required by various regulatory agencies."

<http://www.solanocounty.com/farmbudsman/home.asp>

Food Systems Assessments

Food Systems Assessments look at the various inputs, outputs, and needs of a given region in order to determine the viability of and opportunities for agricultural and food based programs in that region. Examples of assessments include:

Oakland Food Systems Assessment-

<http://oaklandfoodsystem.pbworks.com/w/page/7498248/FrontPage>

Sonoma County Community Food Assessment-

http://aginnovations.org/images/uploads/SCFSA_Assessment_FINAL_72711.pdf

San Diego County Food System Assessment-

<http://asi.ucdavis.edu/resources/publications/sandiegoreport.pdf>

APPENDICES

Appendix 1.

Interviews - Agricultural Organizations and Individuals

Organization Contact

Andy Mills
Carolyn Oconnor
Claire Wineman
Jeanne Barrett
Ken Melban
Laura Gregory
Teri Bontrager

Organization Name

Cattlemen's Association
Strawberry Commission (state)
Grower Shippers of Santa Barbara County
California Rural Legal Assistance
Avocado Commission
Strawberry Commission (region)
Santa Barbara County Farm Bureau

Contact Title

Director
Communications Director
President
Regional Director
Director, Issues Management
Grower Communications Specialist
Executive Director

Individual Name

Fred Chamberlin
Gene Zannon
George Adams
Guner Tautrim
Jay Ruskey
Jim Poett
Jose Baer
Mark Tollefson
Paul Van Leer
Robert Abbott
Susan Petrovich

Crop/Commodity

Cattle
Pistachios
Mixed Vegetables/Strawberries
Cattle/Rangeland
Exotic Fruits/Coffee
Cattle/Rangeland
Walnuts
Mixed Fruits/Vegetables
Avocados
Citrus/Avocados
Attorney

Region

Santa Ynez
Cuyama
Santa Maria
Gaviota Coast
Goleta
Lompoc
Buellton
Goleta
Gaviota Coast
Carpinteria
Santa Barbara County

Appendix 2.

Interviews - Environmental/Conservation Organizations and Individuals

Organization Contact

Ben Pitterle
Bob Fields
Joan Hartmann
Joyce Howerton
Marc Chytilo
Mark Oliver
Nathan Alley
Phil McKenna
Sandy Lejeune

Organization Name

Santa Barbara ChannelKeeper

Buellton is Our Town
Santa Barbara County Action Network

Santa Ynez Valley Alliance
Environmental Defense Center
Gaviota Coast Conservancy
Surfrider Foundation

Contact Title

Program Manager
Community member
Founding Member
Former Executive Director
Community Member
President
Staff Attorney
Member, Board of Directors
Santa Barbara Chapter Chair

Appendix 3.

Interviews- Government/Land Conservancy/Food Access Organizations

Organization Contact	Organization Name	Contact Title
Anne Coates	Cachuma Resource Conservation District (CRDC)	Executive Director
Carla Frisk	Trust for Public Land	Consultant
Carla Rosin	Foodbank of Santa Barbara County	Board of Directors
Michael Feeney	Land Trust of Santa Barbara County	Executive Director

