



2016 FINAL REPORT

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY FOOD ACTION PLAN

For healthy people, a healthy economy, and a healthy environment



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As County Supervisors and co-chairs of the advisory board that oversaw the two-year development of the Santa Barbara County Food Action Plan, we are pleased to present you with our final report and recommendations.

As detailed in these pages, our food system is essential to the public health, economic vitality, and environmental resilience of Santa Barbara County. However, many challenges need to be addressed, including the assurance that everyone has access to sufficient nutritious food that will keep local families healthy and food secure. Fortunately, there are opportunities available to enhance our food system and make it more sustainable and accessible.

The Santa Barbara County Food Action Plan is the result of a broad and diverse community effort to examine the opportunities and challenges of the region's food system—which includes the growing, harvesting, processing, packing, transporting, selling and eating of food, as well as the disposing of food waste. Stakeholders included nonprofits, growers, educators, healthcare providers and community activists who came together to explore how this food system impacts people, the economy and the environment. We considered how to reconcile as many interests as possible and make those impacts positive.

We invite you to examine the results of 1,200 hours of volunteer time and involvement by over 200 community members. The Food Action Plan is not intended to take up valuable shelf space in your office. It is a clear invitation to a range of practical actions, where community partners can come together to make breakthrough changes in how food can shape our community's future well-being.

We believe this plan provides an exciting opportunity for the County of Santa Barbara to help move forward some of these initiatives. We heartily recommend this plan to you as a vital guide for the community as we come together to shape the region's food system and make it more resilient for generations to come.

Sincerely,



SALUD CARBAJAL
Co-Chair



STEVE LAVAGNINO
Co-Chair

Executive Summary



Food, the most basic of human needs, is easily taken for granted in a society of abundance. We too easily forget that history is littered with examples of societies who were not able to adapt how they feed themselves to changing conditions—whether that be persistent drought or economic upheaval. A better future is not guaranteed, and increasingly we are unable to use the past as a reliable guide for what is to come.

The goal of the Santa Barbara County Food Action Plan is to ‘future proof’ how food travels from farm to table. Future proofing is the process of insulating ourselves, as much as possible, from the vagaries of an uncertain future—in essence, to be more resilient. In the food and farming sector, these uncertainties are huge.

When planning for our future, we must ask:

- Will the past continue to be a good indicator for how much rainfall we see each year?
- Will global markets remain stable and growing, or will our attitudes and policies about trade change?

- Will the trend towards increased income disparity overwhelm our safety net of programs and services?
- Will attitudes about immigration and diversity make finding workers for the food sector possible?

In creating this action plan, we believe we can increase prosperity and health across the community and insulate ourselves from future uncertainties by making strategic investments in the food system. This would have a positive, cyclical effect that looks something like this:

- Providing more access to good food and better information creates healthier people who make positive choices for themselves and their families.
- This in turn creates well-nourished workers who are better able to support a vibrant food system, bringing more resources to the community.
- And this in turn allows people to become better stewards of the natural resources that support our health.

To start this positive change moving, the plan asks us to commit to four big actions:

1

INVEST IN OUR FOOD ECONOMY

Invest in Our Food Economy calls us to support a new, diverse generation of food and farming entrepreneurs with training, education, preferential purchasing policies, and investments in food distribution infrastructure. These upstream investments are designed to pay increasing dividends over time as these entrepreneurs build local businesses and create jobs.

This plan, which is based on two years of community engagement with both grassroots and organizational/business leaders, is focused on opportunities. It is filled with success stories and models and programs that are ready to go to scale today. It avoids debating what or who is wrong out of a belief that change is rarely made this way.

2

INVEST IN OUR HEALTH & WELLNESS

Invest in Our Health & Wellness calls us to address the continuing diet-related challenges in our community by creating networks of neighbor-to-neighbor support, and by engaging employers, teachers, and physicians as partners to promote healthy living. The strategies focus on the information gaps that make it hard to make good health choices.

We recognize that there are a number of issues that polarize our community – from farmworker housing and wages to pesticide use—and that some agriculture representatives, food justice advocates and environmentalists may not be completely satisfied with how these topics were addressed in the plan. However, it is our hope that by raising these important issues, the plan will serve as a platform for continued engagement on areas critical to the health of the food system and our county’s resilience. This plan explicitly intends to stand outside of the traditional polarization of our community between north and south County, agriculture and environment, and red or blue politics, and is intended to be the beginning of the dialog.

3

INVEST IN OUR COMMUNITY

Invest in Our Community calls for a countywide commitment to reduce food insecurity and the socially corrosive impacts of poverty through more effective delivery of safety net services, increases in community self-sufficiency in food production, and increased availability of housing for food system workers. The strategies tackle hunger and poverty at three points: immediate need, long-term security, and lifting the most at-risk of us up into stable workforce housing.

This is an ‘all in’ plan that calls for every one of us, every part of the food and farm sector, to get engaged and get aligned. You do not have to agree with everything to get started. Together we can invest in a better future for the community, by focusing on the health, nutrition, job and business creation, and stewardship opportunities that our food and farming sector presents.

4

INVEST IN OUR FOODSHED

Invest in Our Foodshed calls us to become stewards of our natural heritage by reducing greenhouse gas emissions generated from the food system, protecting scarce farm and ranch land, reducing food waste, and encouraging best practices for managing precious natural resources. The strategies are focused on opportunity areas where small investments can have big impacts.

Together we can future proof our food system. All we need now is the will to act.

What Makes the Santa Barbara County Food System Unique?



The mild, warm-summer Mediterranean climate, prevailing coastal Pacific winds, and mountainous interior abutting Santa Ynez and Cuyama Valleys make for exceptional year round

growing conditions. Encompassing 700,000 acres of row crops, orchards, vineyards, and rangeland, the agricultural sector is Santa Barbara County's primary economic driver—providing a production value of close to \$1.5 billion in 2014 through diverse goods from strawberries to broccoli, beef to wine grapes.

Moreover, agricultural production is only the beginning of Santa Barbara County's rich food system. Innovative companies create food hubs, distributing fresh products to community schools and neighborhood restaurants. Nearly 20,000 residents work in food and beverage stores or service locations alone. Local philanthropic organizations are supporting schools in establishing nutrition classes and school gardens, helping even the youngest eaters learn about their health and where their food comes from.

However, underpinning this abundance are systemic challenges within our food system. More than half of all residents countywide are overweight or obese. Farm work is the largest and fastest growing

What is a Food System?



The food system encompasses how food moves from farms to tables. It includes farmers and the farmland on which food is grown, manufacturers and processors, distributors—from truckers to grocery stores to food banks—and all residents as consumers. It also incorporates the inputs needed and outputs generated at each step, including food waste. There are no defined geographical boundaries of our food system, but for the purposes of this plan, we localize the system to be Santa Barbara County.

occupation in the county, but the average farmworker makes less than \$19,000 a year and faces significant challenges in terms of affordable housing, healthcare, and food security for their own families. Our two major agricultural centers, Santa Maria and Lompoc, particularly suffer from some of the highest rates of poverty. These factors—along with lack of access to healthy food and lack of nutrition education—can lead to the consumption of inexpensive, heavily-processed foods containing high amounts of sugar, salt and fat.

Even the natural resources bolstering the county's food system are threatened—through drought, land development, and in some cases overuse of pesticides and synthetic fertilizers. And while some

of our residents can't predict whether they will make it through the month on their food budget, our region sends tons of useable food and food scraps to the landfill each year, generating the potent greenhouse gas, methane.

Clearly, the food system of Santa Barbara County holds both great success and significant opportunities for improvement. The rising interest and efforts to improve the food system shows the possibility for change, while the increasing threats to it show where the change is most necessary. The Santa Barbara County Food Action Plan addresses the food system's largest risks and guides us towards greater resilience, sustainability, and vitality for producers and consumers.



PHOTO CREDIT:
DANIEL GIRARD

What is a Food Action Plan?

A food action plan is a community-driven strategic plan that assesses how we grow, distribute, consume, and dispose of food. While each community tailors the plan to their specific needs, most share two common elements: they capture the aspirations of the community around food and farming, and they identify concrete things that can be done to improve the policies, programs, and individual actions that shape how food moves from farm to plate.

Santa Barbara County Food Action Plan's 16 Goals

INVEST IN OUR FOOD ECONOMY



PRIORITY GOAL

1

Support the next generation of farmers and food system entrepreneurs by creating or expanding agriculture and vocational education at the high school and community college level.

GOAL

2

Encourage entry into the local food economy by building access to a collaboration of educational resources and tools that can be utilized by new and emerging food system entrepreneurs.

GOAL

3

Develop a preferential purchasing policy model for agencies and institutions.

GOAL

4

Strengthen distribution systems for local produce through existing networks, food hubs, and alternative markets.

GOAL

5

Form a food incubator / impact investing hub to facilitate investment in food systems development in Santa Barbara County.

INVEST IN OUR HEALTH AND WELLNESS



PRIORITY GOAL

6

Support the development of neighborhood networks of volunteers to provide peer-to-peer education and empowerment to food insecure community members to improve their health.

GOAL

7

Facilitate the adoption and implementation of workplace wellness policies that include support for healthy eating behaviors and access to healthy foods.

GOAL

8

Integrate food literacy into all school campus cultures—including in-school and out-of-school programs—throughout Santa Barbara County.

GOAL

9

Establish “Food as Medicine” programs that promote health through better nutrition.

INVEST IN OUR COMMUNITY



PRIORITY
GOAL
10

Establish Community Food Access Centers that serve as place-based, food-centric neighborhood revitalization efforts, and which unite multiple functions (including education) in one or nearby locations.

GOAL
11

Increase affordability and accessibility to healthy, safe, environmentally-sound, locally grown food for all residents of Santa Barbara County.

GOAL
12

Support fair compensation for all members of the food workforce and increase the availability and accessibility to affordable housing to help sustain their vital role in the regional food system.

INVEST IN OUR FOODSHED



PRIORITY
GOAL
13

Reduce the food system's contribution to greenhouse gas emissions, while strengthening its resilience and ability to adapt to long-term drought and future climate change scenarios.

GOAL
14

Protect existing and potential farm and ranch land, as well as the ecosystem services they provide.

GOAL
15

Reduce food waste across all sectors of the Santa Barbara County food system—from producer to consumer—through policy, education, and collaboration.

GOAL
16

Promote and incentivize the use of Best Management Practices on farms, ranches, and food system businesses in Santa Barbara County.

The biggest challenge is to ensure that this report doesn't sit on a table somewhere. Getting people motivated is key. Solutions are multifaceted, and include education, communication, and getting people inspired.

– DR. DAVID TILLMAN, *Professor, Ecology, Biodiversity, Ecosystem Functioning, UCSB Bren School of Environmental Science & Management*

How to Get Involved

1

Utilize the plan to further your work and leverage additional support.

The Food Action Plan is supported by multiple jurisdictions, government agencies and community-based organizations throughout Santa Barbara County. Aligning your current and future work with the plan will strengthen the impact of your projects and programs, and leverage a network of community leaders dedicated to achieving the designated goals and strategies.

2

Investigate sample resources and policies that align with the mission and values of your organization.

The Food Action Plan highlights resources and policies in support of designated strategies that are linked to local, state and national organizations. We encourage you to contact organizational leaders and engage with existing partnerships and collaboratives.

3

Invest in the implementation of goals and strategies.

Food Action Plan partner organizations will continue to collaborate with the support of local foundations and individual donors. If you would like to donate in support of this work, please go to www.sbcfoodaction.org or the LEAF (Landscapes, Ecosystems, Agriculture, and Food Systems) Initiative at www.sbfoundation.org.

Visit sbcfoodaction.org for more information about the Food Action Plan or to download the full report.

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PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

The Santa Barbara County Food Action Plan is funded through the Santa Barbara Foundation's LEAF Initiative and the Orfalea Foundation.



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