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VENTURA COUNTY'S

FINAL DRAFT: APRIL 20, 2023



# RESILIENT AGRICULTURAL LANDS INITIATIVE

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A STRATEGIC PLAN TO BUILD  
COMMUNITY RESILIENCE





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COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

This **Resilient Ag Lands Initiative Plan** (RALI) was developed through the engagement of the agricultural community, ranchers, local government, non-profit organizations, conservation partners, businesses and agencies. Together, RALI was developed to offer recommendations to envision a resilient future for agriculture in Ventura County. Thanks to all for stepping up and helping to move this effort forward. Please refer to Appendix E for the lists of Project Partners and Stakeholders who gave their time and inputs to this critical project.

**Special thanks are also due to the original Team that initiated this effort:**

John Krist (*Farm Bureau of Ventura County*), E.J. Remson (*The Nature Conservancy*), Ed Williams (*County of Ventura Ag Commissioner’s Office*), Kim Prillhart (*County of Ventura Resource Management Agency*), and Annemiek Schindler (*University of California Cooperative Extension*). This effort was made possible with funding from the state of California’s Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program (SALC).

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# ACRONYMS LIST.

- DoC** - California Department of Conservation
- BIPOC** - Black, Indigenous, and People of Color
- CDFA** - California Department of Food and Agriculture
- CEDA** - California Enterprise Development Authority
- GHGs** - Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- GSA** - Groundwater Sustainability Agency
- LAFCo** - Local Agency Formation Commission
- MBLRP** - Multibenefit Land Repurposing Program
- PACE** - Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement
- RCD** - Resource Conservation District
- RUCs** - Rural Urban Connections
- SALC** - Sustainable Agriculture Land Conservation
- SGC** - Strategic Growth Council
- TDR** - Transfer of Development Rights
- UCCE** - University of California Cooperative Extension
- UC ANR** - University of California Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources
- USDA** - United States Department of Agriculture

# CORNERSTONES & RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE.

<b>CORNERSTONE 1: SECURE A RESILIENT FUTURE FOR AGRICULTURE</b>	
<b>Lead 1</b>	<b>Develop a land repurposing plan and program to improve Ventura County’s water supply.</b>
1A	Build on the Fox Canyon Water Market model.
1B	Consider a Recharge Net Metering Program to improve the quantity and quality of water resources.
1C	Incentivize cultivation practices and crops to maximize water use efficiency and enhance resiliency.
1D	Connect growers to local, state and federal programs that subsidize transition to sustainable operations.
1E	Support the Ventura County Resource Conservation District (VCRCD) in carrying out technical assistance for the implementation of conservation management practices that enhance water supply, improve soil health, sequester carbon, and reduce atmospheric greenhouse gasses (GHGs).
<b>CORNERSTONE 2: SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF A ROBUST AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY</b>	
<b>Lead 2</b>	<b>Enhance trust and collaboration among the agricultural community, key stakeholders and County leadership and staff by convening a quarterly Ag Roundtable.</b>
2A	Increase institutional impact on improving the economic viability of agricultural-related businesses by creating an “Agricultural Program Manager” within the County government focused on improving the economic vitality of agricultural related businesses.
2B	Establish a position or program to assist growers in gaining access to capital, grant funding, and other incentive programs.
2C	Determine the infrastructure required regionally to increase the amount of locally grown food reaching local markets and to capitalize on the burgeoning local market as an economic outlet and opportunity to diversify.
2D	Promote the purchase of local agricultural products to strengthen the local economy, enhance community resilience and foster community connections.
2E	Establish a program targeted to support succession planning, new farmers, employee-owned businesses and existing farmworkers and employees in accessing land and securing equitable land tenure, with a focus on turnover of local land ownership and facilitating land ownerships to family or BIPOC and small farm businesses.
2F	Build on Ventura County’s farmworker housing ordinance and the work of House Farm Workers! to catalyze building farmworker housing.
2G	Develop multipartner programs that provide training and opportunities for the agricultural jobs of the future.

**CORNERSTONE 3:**  
**ENSURE A VIABLE AGRICULTURAL LAND BASE**

<b>Lead 3</b>	<b>Explore the creation of a County-wide non-regulatory “Resiliency District” (pursuant to California Public Resources Code sections 5500 et seq) focused on protecting and investing in the County’s agricultural lands. The District’s mission would be to work closely with local farmers and ranchers to help them invest in and preserve the County’s working lands.</b>
3A	Update and strengthen the Right-to-Farm Ordinance to raise public awareness in all sectors of the local community (consumers, farmers, and policy/decision makers) about the importance of co-stewarding the agricultural industry for long-term resilience.
3B	Stand up a voluntary purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement (PACE) program that prioritizes conservation of agricultural land as an investment in the land base.
3C	Secure the future of Ventura County agriculture by expanding capacity to develop agricultural conservation easements and acquisition projects, with the intent of supporting long-term production agriculture in the County.
3D	Develop a transfer of development rights (TDR) program that encourages infill development in urban areas.
3E	Explore cooperative planning agreements to enable a regional, unified approach to long-term protection and investment in working lands.
3F	Implement measures and/or reforms to regulations and development standards so farmers may diversify and better utilize their land.

**CORNERSTONE 4:**  
**CATALYZE COMMUNITY CO-STEWARDSHIP OF AGRICULTURE**

<b>Lead 4</b>	<b>Establish a Rural-Urban Connections (RUCS) Program at UCCE to help bridge the urban - rural divide.</b>
4A	Develop partnerships to increase ag-related climate resilience.
4B	Develop an artist-led and art-driven cultural initiative that conveys to the public the importance of agriculture to the local economy and identity.
4C	Support development of school childrens’ foundational knowledge about agriculture by enhancing agricultural literacy and education programs at K-12 educational institutions and on farms.
4D	Facilitate young people’s exploration and pursuit of diverse careers in agriculture with an emphasis on career opportunities within Ventura County.
4E	Develop a “Grown in Ventura County” (or similar) regional brand to support recognition and awareness of the importance of working lands to the health and resiliency of the region.



[01]

## [01]

## VISION.

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

The ***Ventura County Resilient Agricultural Lands Initiative (RALI)*** is the result of a community-led effort to support local agriculture for the future. This means securing its economic viability and preserving the lands upon which it depends. This Initiative provides a Strategic Plan to enhance and identify interventions to minimize the impacts of climate change and risks to agriculture’s long-term viability. The foundational strategies of this effort are to strengthen the agricultural economy through conservation, land-use planning tools and policies, financial incentives, and enhanced partnerships among farmers, ranchers and members of the general public.

The effort is led by a diverse group of community stakeholders, including farmers and ranchers, farmworker advocates, representatives of local government agencies, land trusts, and representatives of community-based organizations. Funds for the development of the RALI were made available through the California Strategic Growth Council’s *Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program (SALC)* in collaboration with the Department of Conservation. SALC is part of *California Climate Investments*, a statewide initiative that puts billions of Cap-and-Trade dollars to work reducing greenhouse gas emissions, strengthening the economy, and improving public health and the environment – particularly in disadvantaged communities.

**The overall goal of the *Resilient Ag Lands Initiative* is to empower members of the community to collectively take actions, adopt policies and develop plans to secure a vibrant and resilient agricultural economy.**



THERE IS NO POWER FOR CHANGE  
GREATER THAN A COMMUNITY  
DISCOVERING WHAT IT CARES ABOUT.

- Margaret Wheatley

# THE FUTURE.

## 1.2 A VISION FOR A SHARED FUTURE

Agriculture has shaped Ventura County’s economy, culture, history and landscape for nearly 150 years. For generations, farmers and ranchers have encountered and overcome countless challenges to their survival and prosperity. These challenges include fickle markets, capricious weather, a growing thicket of government regulations, crop-wrecking pests and pathogens, rising prices for critical inputs, and competition from other business sectors for scarce labor.

Thanks to their efforts — and a mild coastal climate that enables year-round production — Ventura County continues to be an agricultural powerhouse, generating \$2 billion a year in crop value and nearly \$2 billion in indirect and induced economic activity. Ventura County has one of the 10 largest agricultural economies among all counties in the United States; despite decades of urban expansion, more than half of the non-federal land in the county remains devoted to rangeland or irrigated cropland.

The coming decades however, bring new risks. Chief among them is the threat to the agricultural water supply. This is being driven both by climate change, with its attendant droughts and warming temperatures, and by a statewide regulatory system intended to rein in extraction of groundwater — the lifeblood of Ventura County’s agricultural economy.

Failure to adapt to, or mitigate these threats effectively, has serious repercussions for the entire community, including:

- + *Declining agricultural employment,*
- + *Loss of the ecosystem services provided by working lands,*
- + *Reduction of the local food supply,*
- + *Increased pressure to develop fallowed agricultural land, with attendant increases in greenhouse gas emissions, and*
- + *Loss of the quality-of-life benefits provided by proximity of working lands to residential communities.*

In the face of the emerging new risks, adaptive strategies that proved successful in the past are unlikely to ensure the continuing vitality of agriculture over the coming decades. This Strategic Plan describes recommended strategies that, among other objectives, expand economic opportunities for farm and ranch operators; incentivize and compensate retirement of lands impacted by reduced water supply and extreme weather events; and creates a new perspective and mechanism for shared stewardship among agricultural landowners and operators and their urban and suburban neighbors.

While the long-term sustainability of agricultural lands must include augmentation of water supply, the RALI plan focuses on strategies that run in parallel with these efforts to provide flexibility and resiliency for the region.



### **What do we mean by “working lands”**

*Working lands are the rangelands, farms and forestlands used to support livelihoods. Their value, however, extends beyond a dollar amount. Working lands are also recognized as homes to wildlife, areas that protect open space, and landscapes that provide local people with a sense of place.*

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**+ We envision a thriving agricultural economy, one that takes full advantage of the region’s temperate coastal location, as well as the industry’s history of innovation, collaboration and adaptation. We also encourage public investment and increased community awareness of the important benefits these lands provide to all Ventura County residents.**

### 1.3 WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE:

*Implementation of this Initiative will be considered successful if a series of milestones are achieved over the near, medium and long term.*

**01.**

Ventura County remains one of the top agricultural production regions in California.

**02.**

Collaboration to solve the critical issues facing the agricultural sector.

**03.**

A long-term, collaborative plan to protect and sustainably manage water resources is developed and implemented.

**04.**

Working lands are valued as providing critical ecological and economic and benefits which are recognized as a key component of the region's ability to adapt to an uncertain future.

**05.**

Vibrant working lands are seen as a key component in reducing the threat of wildfires.

**06.**

A co-stewardship principle emerges, manifested by increased public investment, awareness and support for agriculture.

**07.**

Workforce investments result in labor-supply stability, rising labor standards, and enhanced career opportunities to attract future generations of agricultural workers.

**08.**

Lands impacted by water-supply reductions and climate-change impacts are repurposed in ways that provide appropriate compensation for landowners, as well as public benefits such as flood protection, groundwater recharge, and ecosystem integrity.

**09.**

Farm and ranch ownership patterns remain dominated by local businesses, families and those interested in production agriculture with roots in the community.

**10.**

Increased diversity of farm ownership and a pipeline of farmworkers to small farm owners and operators.

# CORNERSTONES.

## 1.4 THE FOUR CORNERSTONES - BUILDING A FOUNDATION FOR LONG-TERM COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Developed through a 12-month process this *Strategic Plan* identifies four “*Cornerstones*” that provide a framework of strategies, tools and actions to secure a resilient agricultural future for the County. Each *Cornerstone* is supported by a *Lead Strategy*, supporting strategies and related actions:

### + CORNERSTONE 01

#### **Secure a Resilient Future for Agriculture**

There are many benefits that working landscapes provide to the region. These strategies are focused on the protection and enhancement of water resources, climate smart farming and ranching practices, and strategic land repurposing.

### + CORNERSTONE 03

#### **Ensure a Viable Agricultural Land Base**

These strategies propose a blend of incentives, policies, and land use tools, as well as an organizational framework, to support investment in and the security of the agricultural land base while streamlining permitting and encouraging climate-smart agricultural practices.

### + CORNERSTONE 02

#### **Support the Growth of a Robust Agricultural Economy**

These strategies lay out specific tools and actions for investment in the regional food system, as well as funding and financing strategies from local community organizations, and County, State and Federal governments.

### + CORNERSTONE 04

#### **Catalyze Community Co-Stewardship of Agriculture**

These strategies foster community co-stewardship of a vibrant agriculture sector as a foundation for community health, well-being and identity, resilience, and a diverse, equitable economy.



VENTURA COUNTY'S WORKING LANDS  
ARE CRITICAL TO ITS ECONOMY, IDENTITY,  
QUALITY OF LIFE, AND RESILIENCE.



[02]

[02]

## THE PLAN FRAMEWORK.

The vision of a resilient agricultural economy can become a reality through commitments to policy decisions, investments, and long-term, collaborative strategic planning.

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**+** *The overarching goal is to generate a community-driven vision for a resilient and economically thriving agricultural economy, and build momentum toward implementation of that vision.*

VENTURA COUNTY CONTINUES TO BE AN AGRICULTURAL POWERHOUSE, GENERATING \$2 BILLION A YEAR IN CROP VALUE AND NEARLY \$2 BILLION IN INDIRECT & INDUCED ECONOMIC ACTIVITY



## 2.1 PLAN PURPOSE

These strategies, tools and actions to align the myriad plans, programs, policies and infrastructure investments affecting agricultural lands across the County. State, regional, and local projects for water supply augmentation, climate change adaptation, and resiliency are critical elements to ensuring that production agriculture not only survives, but thrives in the decades to come. These strategies are meant to support and enhance these important initiatives. This work, funded by the *Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program (SALC)*, recognizes that investing in working lands while balancing climate-smart growth is an important part of California’s climate adaptation strategy.

*The purpose is to address three main objectives:*



**Provide comprehensive, detailed mapping of agricultural lands** for Ventura County to assess the local risks and conditions and evaluate options for economic incentives and future climate adaptation planning.



**Analyze the existing local regulatory framework** to craft potential policies and programs to support a collaborative approach to investing in farmlands while enhancing their resiliency; and



**Bring together the agricultural and broader community** to co-create an initiative that reflects a shared vision for a healthy, resilient and economically vibrant community that understands the important role that the agricultural economy and lands play in a resilient future.

## 2.2 THE FOUR CORNERSTONES

These four *Cornerstones* of equal importance are intended to guide decisions and priorities:



**SECURE A RESILIENT FUTURE FOR AGRICULTURE**



**SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF A ROBUST AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY**



**ENSURE A VIABLE AGRICULTURAL LAND BASE**



**CATALYZE COMMUNITY CO-STEWARDSHIP OF AGRICULTURE**

Each **Cornerstone** is supported by recommended **Objectives**, a **Lead Strategy**, and follow-on strategies and actions. **Lead Strategies** represent the recommended first step to incrementally build a resilient future for working lands in Ventura County.

The framework is based on the idea that innovation is most likely to occur in areas where the Cornerstones, agricultural businesses, nonprofits, government agencies, educational institutions, and others work together in concert. The underlying concepts and goals of this framework are:

- + **Common agenda** – To articulate a shared community-driven vision and actions that strengthen the regional agricultural economy.
- + **Collaboration and community accountability** – To build on a range of opportunities for increased communication and collaboration across a diversity of community members and organizations, while identifying key leadership roles and an effective organizational framework.
- + **Mutually reinforcing activities** – To support and build on existing agricultural and food system projects, programs and organizations and advance new ideas in a coordinated and directed fashion.

### 2.3 ORGANIZATIONAL FRAMEWORK AND EARLY IMPLEMENTATION

This Plan recommends a suite of over 25 interrelated strategies and program ideas to address the most pressing challenges facing agriculture.

To implement these strategies a collaborative approach is needed. The partners who undertake this work include farmers, ranchers, agricultural organizations, farmworker and community advocacy groups, agencies, government bodies, and conservation organizations. We recommend that the Project Partners group (see Section 4.3) continues to provide the initial oversight and promote further exploration of the strategies. Recommended Co-Hosts are trusted organizations with a demonstrated history of collaboration and a deep commitment to production agriculture’s resilience. They are:

- + ***The Farm Bureau of Ventura County***
- + ***UC Cooperative Extension (UCCE)***
- + ***Agricultural Commissioner’s Office of the County of Ventura***
- + ***Resource Management Agency (RMA) of the County of Ventura***

As appropriate, the **Agricultural Roundtable** in **Lead Strategy 2** may be a venue to set priorities for the project partners team, gather feedback, and ensure strong support for initiatives brought forward by the project partners team and co-hosts.



VENTURA COUNTY HAS ONE OF THE 10 LARGEST AGRICULTURAL ECONOMIES AMONG ALL COUNTIES IN THE UNITED STATES

## 2.4 FUNDING THE FUTURE - A REGIONAL COLLABORATION

Many of the over 25 recommended strategies and programs require additional funding, and many require long-term sources. Opportunities exist to attract new funding from diverse sources by using this **Initiative Plan**, along with other key County and regional guiding documents as a foundational element in making the case for State, Federal, local and/or

philanthropic investments. Each strategy is followed by the most relevant potential funding sources. Appendix A provides a detailed inventory of *Working Lands Conservation Incentives and Tools* that may be referenced to understand the types of tools and incentives available as programs, models, or grant funding to implement the actions in this Plan.



THE INITIATIVE PLAN'S SUCCESS RELIES ON  
AGRICULTURAL BUSINESSES, NONPROFITS,  
GOVERNMENT AGENCIES, EDUCATIONAL  
INSTITUTIONS, AND OTHERS WORKING TOGETHER.



## 2.5 SECURING VENTURA COUNTY'S AGRICULTURAL FUTURE - THE CORNERSTONES AND MAIN OBJECTIVES

Each *Cornerstone* has a set of objectives, and recommended strategies and near-term actions as outlined in Chapter 3. The strategies are organized under the following objectives:





### SECURE A RESILIENT FUTURE FOR AGRICULTURE

- A. Facilitate strategic land repurposing to protect and enhance water resources while meeting regional needs.
- B. Promote agricultural practices and crops that maximize water efficiency and enhance resiliency.
- C. Quantify and assess the nature-based community benefits that the County's working lands provide and explore plans to invest in land owners' management practices and businesses.



### SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF A ROBUST AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY

- D. Provide an organizational framework that brings together diverse stakeholders to build trust, capacity and ultimately share the responsibilities of taking action at a regional scale to build a healthy, resilient agricultural economy.
- E. Support the growth of a diverse, vibrant, and innovative agricultural economy.
- F. Provide support for farmers in regulatory compliance and access to capital.
- G. Support the development of new farms and creation of new farmers to provide diversity and long term resiliency in the local agricultural economy.
- H. Grow and retain a skilled workforce to lead the County's agricultural industry into the future by promoting the development of quality farmworker housing and agriculture jobs training.



### ENSURE A VIABLE AGRICULTURAL LAND BASE

- I. Promote community investment and involvement in the long-term protection of working lands.
- J. Invest in a voluntary conservation easement program.
- K. Explore opportunities to "think regionally" and establish cooperative partnerships with local agencies to build coordinated and collaborative approaches to investing in and protecting farmland.
- L. Encourage the establishment of infrastructure and supportive uses that facilitate the growth of the regional agricultural economy.



### CATALYZE COMMUNITY CO-STEWARDSHIP OF AGRICULTURE

- M. Coordinate and enhance public education and awareness efforts to help the general public feel connected to and invested in Ventura County agriculture.
- N. Develop school childrens' foundational knowledge about agriculture and related agricultural career pathways.
- O. Develop and launch a "Grown in Ventura County" (or similar) brand to connect consumers to the agriculture landscape surrounding them.



# SETTING THE TABLE.



WE NEED EVERY  
SOLUTION AND  
EVERY SOLVER.  
AS THE SAYING  
GOES, TO CHANGE  
EVERYTHING, WE  
NEED EVERYONE.  
WHAT THIS MOMENT  
CALLS FOR IS A  
MOSAIC OF VOICES--  
THE FULL SPECTRUM  
OF IDEAS AND  
INSIGHTS FOR  
HOW WE CAN TURN  
THINGS AROUND.

- Ayana Elizabeth Johnson,  
*All We Can Save*

## [03]

### CORNERSTONES, STRATEGIES & ACTIONS.

The *Resilient Ag Lands Initiative (RALI)* *Plan* builds on four **Cornerstones** of equal importance to guide decisions and strategic priorities.

The following Chapter outlines each **Cornerstone, Objectives**, a **Lead Strategy**, and follow-on **Strategies**, and **Actions**.

**Lead Strategies** represent the recommended first step to incrementally build a resilient future for working lands in Ventura County.

## + CORNERSTONE 01

### SECURE A RESILIENT FUTURE FOR AGRICULTURE

Strategies in Cornerstone 1 are focused on the protection and enhancement of water resources, climate-smart farming and ranching practices and strategic land repurposing.

#### OBJECTIVE A:

*FACILITATE STRATEGIC LAND REPURPOSING TO PROTECT AND ENHANCE WATER RESOURCES WHILE MEETING REGIONAL NEEDS.*

#### LEAD STRATEGY 1

**Develop a land repurposing plan and program to improve Ventura County's water supply.**

##### Actions:

- Continue to add to and utilize the modeling and prioritization findings from the *Ventura County Sustainable Agricultural Lands Gateway* to identify the agricultural lands that will be most impacted by climate and water stresses.
- Develop a program that provides market-based incentive payments to landowners to support them in gradually shifting income streams from crops that no longer thrive to payments for avoided water use, transitioning to lower water use agricultural production, temporary fallowing, recharging of the groundwater basin or habitat or floodplain restoration. The program should also consider how to share this economic support with farmworkers impacted by these transitions.

**Potential Funding Sources:** California Department of Conservation: Multibenefit Land Repurposing Program (MLRP); California Department of Conservation's Working Lands and Riparian Corridors Program; CDFA Healthy Soils Program; CDFA State Water Efficiency & Enhancement Program; CDFA Conservation Agriculture Planning Grants Program; Department of Conservation: Climate Smart Land Management - Capacity and Technical Assistance Program

#### STRATEGY 1A

**Build on the Fox Canyon Water Market model.**

##### Actions:

- Assess the demand and feasibility to expand the model to other Ventura County basins.

**Potential Funding Sources:** California Department of Conservation: Multibenefit Land Repurposing Program (MLRP)



### County of Madera Voluntary Land Repurposing Program (VLRP)

The Madera County Voluntary Land Repurposing (VLRP) program was born out of the Madera Groundwater Sustainability Agency's objectives for demand management actions, including a groundwater allocation, a potential groundwater market that would allow groundwater trading, and a land repurposing program. The VLRP incentivizes growers to repurpose irrigated lands to other, non-irrigated uses. Landowners that choose to participate in the program are compensated with a financial incentive payment, and the GSA realizes groundwater benefits because pumping is reduced. The owner agrees to forgo irrigation and give up their allocation of groundwater on a portion of their lands (repurposed lands) in exchange for compensation from

the Madera County GSA and applying certain specified management requirements on the repurposed lands. The owner and the Madera County GSA execute a standard agreement that specifies the duration, compensation, and other terms. The Madera County GSA is responsible for the administration and implementation of the VLRP and will conduct an annual, competitive solicitation for participation. The County of Madera and partners received an initial \$10 million grant from the California Department of Conservation in 2022 to develop the program and provide incentive payments. The VLRP will be funded by a GSA fee, assessed to enrolled acres (typically irrigated acreage) within the County GSA.

## STRATEGY 1B

### Consider a Recharge Net Metering Program to improve the quantity and quality of water resources.

#### Actions:

- Explore the use of a recharge net metering program to assist regional stakeholders in meeting demand and helping to maintain sustainable and secure water supplies.
- Ensure that stakeholders include small and economically disadvantaged farmers, former farmworkers who have transitioned to becoming farm owners, and BIPOC and immigrant farmers.

**Potential Funding Sources:** California Department of Conservation's Multibenefit Land Repurposing Program (MLRP)



## OBJECTIVE B

**PROMOTE AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES AND CROPS THAT MAXIMIZE WATER USE EFFICIENCY AND ENHANCE RESILIENCY.**

### STRATEGY IC

**Incentivize cultivation practices and crops to maximize water use efficiency and enhance resiliency.**

**Actions:**

- Use modeling to imagine potential changes and compare outcomes, including reductions in water demand, increases in ROI and/or crop success.
- Secure grant funding to develop programs to provide incentive payments to the farming community for adopting climate-smart ag practices.
- Support applied research trials that demonstrate best practices and yield cost-benefit information.
- Determine technical support needed from organizations such as UCCE and NRCS to scale practices.

**Potential Funding Sources:** CDFA Healthy Soils Program, NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), NRCS Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP); County General Fund

### STRATEGY ID

**Connect growers to local, state and federal programs that subsidize transition to sustainable operations.**

**Actions:**

- Develop a list of potential grants and other funding sources to help the farming community transition to more energy efficient equipment for production, processing and distribution.
- Develop and implement an assessment tool to determine farmer’s needs/desires for technical and/or financial assistance. Efforts should ensure that small and economically disadvantaged farmers, former farmworkers who have transitioned to becoming farm owners, and BIPOC and immigrant farmers are included in the development and implementation of the tool.
- Determine technical support needed from organizations such as UCCE and NRCS to scale practices.
- Ensure that technical assistance is culturally and linguistically competent in both outreach and programming to the many farm operators who face language and other barriers to accessing these resources.

**Potential Funding Sources:** USDA Rural Development Energy Programs; PG&E Self-Generation Incentive Program (SGIP)



#### **Healthy Soils, Resilient Agricultural Systems**

*Land management plays a vital role in increasing the resilience of agricultural systems to help insulate from natural and climate related disaster impacts. The California Department of Food and Agriculture’s (CDFA) Healthy Soils Program provides financial assistance for incentivizing and demonstrating the implementation of soil management practices that sequester carbon, reduce atmospheric greenhouse gases, and improve soil health. On-farm management practices that are included are: Cover cropping, no-till, reduced-till, mulching, compost application, and conservation plantings. For information about this grant program and other resources, visit <https://www.cdfa.ca.gov/of/healthy-soils>.*

## OBJECTIVE C:

**QUANTIFY AND ASSESS THE NATURE-BASED COMMUNITY BENEFITS THAT THE COUNTY'S WORKING LANDS PROVIDE AND EXPLORE PLANS TO INVEST IN LAND OWNERS' MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND BUSINESSES.**



### What do we mean by nature-based solutions?

Nature-based solutions are sustainable planning, design, environmental management and engineering practices that weave natural features or processes into the built environment to promote adaptation and resilience. These solutions use natural features and processes to:



**REDUCE  
FLOOD RISK**



**IMPROVE  
WATER QUALITY**



**PROTECT  
COASTAL PROPERTY**



**INCREASE RESILIENCE  
TO WILDFIRES**

Nature-based solutions offer significant monetary and non-monetary benefits. They often come at a lower cost than traditional infrastructure. These benefits include economic growth, green jobs, increased property values and better public health.

## STRATEGY 1E

**Support the Ventura County Resource Conservation District (VCRCD) in carrying out technical assistance for the implementation of conservation management practices that enhance water supply, improve soil health, sequester carbon, and reduce atmospheric greenhouse gasses (GHGs).**

### Action:

- Continue the collaboration of partners to pursue California Department of Food and Agriculture Healthy Soils Pilot Block Grants Program (and similar grant programs) and as an organizing structure and platform for promoting widespread adoption of conservation management practices throughout Ventura County.
- Technical assistance regarding conservation management practices should be culturally and linguistically competent in both outreach and programming to the many farm operators in the community who face language and other barriers to accessing these resources.
- Ensure that small and economically disadvantaged farmers, former farmworkers who have transitioned to becoming farm owners, and BIPOC and immigrant farmers are integrated into the ongoing collaboration and program.

**Potential Funding Sources:** California Department of Food and Agriculture Healthy Soils Block Pilot Grant Program; Department of Conservation: Climate Smart Land Management - Capacity and Technical Assistance Program



## + CORNERSTONE 02

### SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF A ROBUST AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY

The strategies recommended under Cornerstone 2 lay out potential tools, initiatives and actions to spur investment in the regional food system as well as funding and financing strategies from local community organizations, and County, State and Federal governments.

#### OBJECTIVE D:

*PROVIDE AN ORGANIZATIONAL FRAMEWORK THAT BRINGS TOGETHER DIVERSE STAKEHOLDERS TO BUILD TRUST, CAPACITY AND ULTIMATELY SHARE THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF TAKING ACTION AT A REGIONAL SCALE TO BUILD A HEALTHY, RESILIENT AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY.*

#### LEAD STRATEGY 2

Enhance trust and collaboration among the agricultural community, key stakeholders and County leadership and staff by convening a quarterly Agricultural Roundtable.

##### Actions:

- Organize the Project Partners group and Core Co-Hosts to provide oversight and leadership of the strategies.
- Convene regularly to invigorate stakeholders around the prioritization and implementation of strategies. Stakeholders could include (but not limited to), the agricultural community, conservation partners, local agencies, farmworker advocates, farmworker-serving agencies, and community non-profits. Consideration could also be given to providing for a multilingual advisory group of farmworkers themselves.
- Identify a long-term organizational model that focuses on collaboration and empowerment, while staying responsive to changing circumstances and requirements.
- Identify and apply for funding sources to implement the prioritized strategies in the Plan.

**Potential Funding Sources:** California Department of Conservation's Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation (SALC) Planning Grants (also for implementation); community and other foundations



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**OBJECTIVE E:**

**SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF A DIVERSE, VIBRANT, AND INNOVATIVE AGRICULTURE ECONOMY.**

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**STRATEGY 2A**

Increase institutional impact on improving the economic viability of agricultural-related businesses by creating an “Agricultural Program Manager” within the County government focused on improving the economic vitality of agricultural related businesses.

**Actions:**

- Integrate new responsibilities into an existing County staff position or create a new position tasked with implementation of strategies that involve the County either as lead or as a collaborating partner.
- Develop a job description for an “Agricultural Program Manager” position that could act as a facilitator and coordinator in ensuring implementation of the strategies and ongoing County efforts including: Farmland mitigation, Right-to-Farm ordinance, and farmworker housing.
  - + *Job responsibilities would include: Working directly on policy projects involving agricultural economic development, coordinating inter-agency efforts, engaging with the UCCE on the quarterly roundtable (Lead Strategy 2) and collaborating with the ag community to receive feedback.*
  - + *In addition, to support agricultural producers in navigating the complexities of regulations, the Agricultural Program Manager position could also act as a liaison to facilitate and expedite agricultural projects in Ventura County by assisting farmers and ranchers with the permitting process and to catalyze/streamline these projects. Alternatively, an additional part time position could be created to fill this role.*

**Potential Funding Source:** County general fund

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**OBJECTIVE F:**

**PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR FARMERS IN REGULATORY COMPLIANCE AND ACCESS TO CAPITAL.**

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**STRATEGY 2B**

Establish a position or program to assist growers in gaining access to capital, grant funding, and other incentive programs.

**Actions:**

- Assess funding opportunities to increase organizational capacity at the *Farm Bureau of Ventura County* or similar agricultural advocacy organization to create a new staff position focused on monitoring economic and business development programs, conservation incentives, and other available federal, state, and local funding to assist growers in navigating the various programs and understand the different options and economic ramifications.
- Responsibilities could also include:
  - + *tracking and providing growers with information that could help them build and innovate their businesses, both economically and environmentally (water, regulations, climate change, pest management, etc).*
  - + *assistance in raising capital, managing permitting, and land access for farmworkers seeking to become farm owners, including the unique and complex needs of those developing alternative business structures such as land trusts and cooperatives that allow farmworkers to pool their resources.*

**Potential Funding Sources:** California Agricultural Leadership Foundation (CALF), USDA Rural Development (RD) Programs, California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) Programs

## STRATEGY 2C

Determine the infrastructure required regionally to increase the amount of locally grown food reaching local markets and to capitalize on the burgeoning local market as an economic outlet and opportunity to diversify.

### Actions:

- Building on the *Ventura County Economic Impact* report (refer to Appendix B), and *Food Processing in Ventura County*, complete an update and/or study to assess the current state of local food production, processing and distribution in the region. This includes gathering data on the types of crops grown, the availability of processing and storage facilities, and the distribution channels that are currently in place.
- Conduct market research to determine the demand for Ventura County grown food locally and in Los Angeles, Orange, and Santa Barbara Counties. This includes surveying consumers, analyzing sales data, and consulting local wholesale buyers.
- Based on the data collected above, identify gaps in the infrastructure that may be preventing locally grown food from reaching local and regional markets.
- Develop a “*Local Food Infrastructure Plan*” to address the identified gaps and the infrastructure needed to support the production and distribution of locally grown food. This may involve identifying the need for:
  - + *new processing and storage facilities using sustainable design practices,*
  - + *expanding existing facilities, and/or*
  - + *establishing new distribution channels such as multiple food hubs to increase processing and distribution capacity.*
- Implement the Plan by working with the **Ag Roundtable**, local agencies, key stakeholders and the farming community to secure funding, land and resources.

**Potential Funding Sources:** California Energy Commission, Food Production Investment Program; California Enterprise Development Authority (CEDA); California Freshworks Fund; USDA Agricultural Marketing Services (AMS); USDA National Institute for Food and Agriculture; USDA Rural Development





### **Moving Toward Local Demand for Food with Local Production: The 25% Shift - The Benefits of Food Localization for Northeast Ohio & How to Realize Them**

*The 25% Shift study analyzes the impact that a 16-county Ohio region could achieve by moving a quarter of the way toward fully meeting local demand for food with local production.*

*It suggests that a 25% shift could create over 27,000 new jobs, providing work for about one in eight unemployed residents. It could increase annual regional output by \$4.2 billion and expand state and local tax collections by \$126 million. It could increase the food security of hundreds of thousands of people and reduce near-epidemic levels of obesity and Type-II diabetes. It could also significantly improve air and water quality, lower the region's carbon footprint, attract tourists, boost local entrepreneurship, and enhance civic pride. Standing in the way of the 25% shift are obstacles. New workforce training and entrepreneurship initiatives are imperative for the managers and staff of new or expanded local food enterprises. Land must be secured for new urban and rural farms. Nearly a billion dollars of new capital are needed. Consumers in the region must be further educated about the benefits of local food and the opportunities for buying it. To overcome these obstacles, the study offers recommendations that focus on creating "meta-businesses" that can support the local food movement on a cash-positive basis. Such as:*

- *Mobilizing consumers in the region to buy local food, by creating local debit, credit, and gift cards, and purchasing platforms that better connect local food businesses to one another and to government procurement agencies.*
- *Increasing the competitiveness of local food businesses by the creation of local business alliances that facilitate peer learning and new kinds of delivery services, local-food malls, and joint procurement cooperatives.*
- *Making more capital available to local food businesses, by establishing new revolving loan funds, municipal food bonds, and a local stock market.*
- *Supporting a new generation of local food entrepreneurs, by deploying a network of food-business incubators and "food hubs" operating in concert within a network of enterprise support.*

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## **STRATEGY 2D**

**Promote the purchase of local agricultural products to strengthen the local economy, enhance community resilience and foster community connections.**

### **Actions:**

- Promote climate smart agricultural practices.
- Assess current laws or regulations that may impact the ability to spend the funds identified on the promotion of local agricultural products.
- Utilize the **Ag Roundtable** (Lead Strategy 2) to gather inputs and ideas for promoting local produce.
- Consider an evaluation method that considers suppliers' environmental practices as well as the labor standards for agricultural workers, such as certification under the Equitable Food Initiative as certification under the Equitable Food Initiative.
- Promote the purchase of local agricultural products through educational and branding materials that communicate the benefits of purchasing local agricultural products.

**Potential Funding Sources:** USDA Agricultural Marketing Services (AMS): Local Agriculture Market Program's (LAMP) Farmers Market; Local Food Promotion Programs (FMLFPP); Regional Food System Partnerships (RFSP)

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## OBJECTIVE G

**SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW FARMS AND FARMERS TO PROVIDE DIVERSITY AND LONG-TERM RESILIENCY IN THE LOCAL AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY.**

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### STRATEGY 2E

Establish a program targeted to support succession planning, new farmers, employee-owned businesses, and existing farmworkers and employees in accessing land and securing equitable land tenure, with a focus on turnover of local land ownership and facilitating land ownerships to family or BIPOC and small farm businesses.

#### Actions:

- Assess needs of beginning and immigrant farmers, currently in the County or interested in starting farming operations in the County, for land access, technical assistance and financial assistance. Research and understand the current landscape of land access and tenure in the region, including the challenges and barriers that farmers, farmworkers and employees face.
- Explore incubation programs in the model of the *Agriculture and Land Based Training Association* (ALBA) in the Salinas Valley and how that might inform a similar program in Ventura County.
- Review local regulations that may be impacting family/local succession of agricultural lands.
- Develop robust succession planning resources to aid current landowners in pro-active solutions that consider land conservation and economic vitality in their transition plans.
- Explore the idea of partnerships with land trusts and conservancies who could make land available to former farmworkers in order to meet environmental and social equity goals.
- Develop a clear mission and goals for the program, and identify specific strategies and actions that will help you achieve those goals.
- Track outcomes and follow-up actions of the Robert Wood Johnson funded work of CAUSE, MICOP, and Lideres Campesinas to explore the potential for farmworkers to develop collective forms of land management such as agricultural land trusts or cooperatives in the County. Using data from their work, assess the various barriers to land tenure and management facing farmworkers, and create policies and/or initiatives to address those barriers.
- Work with the **Ag Roundtable** and community stakeholders to advocate for policies and regulations that support equitable land access and tenure.
- Consider offering financial assistance or other resources to help new farmers and farmworkers get started, such as low-interest loans or grants.
- Continue to foster a supportive and inclusive community of farmers, farmworkers and stakeholders to provide support and resources for those working to access land and secure equitable land tenure.

**Potential Funding Sources:** USDA, ag lenders, niche lenders that help support new farmer operations such as California FarmLink

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## **OBJECTIVE H**

***GROW AND RETAIN A SKILLED WORKFORCE, TO LEAD THE COUNTY'S AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY INTO THE FUTURE BY PROMOTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF QUALITY FARMWORKER HOUSING AND AGRICULTURAL JOBS TRAINING.***

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### **STRATEGY 2F**

**Build on Ventura County's farmworker housing ordinance and the work of House Farm Workers! to incentivize/catalyze building farmworker housing.**

**Actions:**

- Identify the specific challenges and barriers that farmworkers in the County face when it comes to finding affordable, safe and stable housing.
- Encourage quality farmworker housing that results in the best long-term outcomes for farmworkers and the agricultural sector. Farmworkers benefit from housing suitable for families that can establish roots in the community, is located near basic services and existing urban areas, and includes basic human needs such as a kitchen and laundry facilities.
- Research best practices and other successful models of farmworker housing efforts and use this information to hone the ordinance to the specific needs of Ventura County's farming community.
- Work with County, agency staff, House Farm Workers! and other advocacy groups to advocate for policies and regulations that support the building of farmworker housing, such as zoning changes or tax incentives.
- Explore partnerships and collaborations with third-party, experienced nonprofit housing organizations, or other organizations that may be able to support these efforts.

**Potential Funding Sources:** To be determined





## STRATEGY 2G

Develop multipartner programs that provide training and opportunities for the agricultural jobs of the future.

### Actions:

- Identify the skills and knowledge that will be needed in the agricultural jobs of the future, including researching industry trends, consulting with experts and ag industry leaders, and conducting a needs assessment with potential employers and employees.
- Identify potential partners, including workforce development and workforce retraining organizations, Community Colleges, State Colleges and the University, industry leaders, R&D clusters, and community organizations, to envision and help train for jobs of the future (including robotics and automation); and to invest in training facilities.
- Utilize the **Ag Roundtable** in (Lead Strategy 2) and the **Rural Urban Connections Program** (Lead Strategy 4) to convene potential partners and agricultural stakeholders to help develop a Plan, including objectives, curriculum, delivery methods, and resources needed.
- Build on ongoing work to develop a **field supervisors training program** at Ventura College with a dual focus on workforce development for emerging leaders in the agricultural workforce as well as improving working conditions for all workers by strengthening field supervisors' knowledge of labor laws, "soft skills", and developing positive relationships with their crews.
- Secure funding for the program, including grants, sponsorships, or other forms of funding from foundations and/or employer training programs.
- Identify a Partner organization that would house the program into the future.
- Implement the Plan which could include recruiting and training instructors, developing marketing and outreach strategies, and working with funding partners to adapt the program to meet the needs of participants.

**Potential Funding Sources:** Government grants and funding programs (e.g. USDA, CDFA), High Road Training Partnerships (H RTP) Foundation grants, Industry associations, employer partnerships or private donations

# + CORNERSTONE 03

## ENSURE A VIABLE AGRICULTURAL LAND BASE

This Cornerstone focuses on recommended strategies that utilize a blend of incentives, policies, and land use tools to support investment in, and the security of the agricultural land base while streamlining permitting and encouraging climate-smart agricultural practices.

### OBJECTIVE 1

*PROMOTE COMMUNITY INVESTMENT, AWARENESS AND INVOLVEMENT IN THE LONG-TERM PROTECTION OF WORKING LANDS.*

### LEAD STRATEGY 3

Explore the creation of a County-wide non-regulatory “Resiliency District” (pursuant to California Public Resources Code sections 5500 et seq) focused on protecting and investing in the County’s agricultural lands. The District’s mission would be to work closely with local farmers and ranchers to help them invest in and preserve the County’s working lands.

#### Actions:

- Explore a ballot measure and associated campaign to establish a County-wide non-regulatory District, in collaboration with the agricultural community, to carry out long-range agricultural conservation planning and purchase voluntary easements or land as an investment strategy to support landowners and business operations. The following steps could be taken:
  - + Convene the **Ag Roundtable** (Lead Strategy 2) and **Urban-Rural Connections Program** (Lead Strategy 4) to identify a steering committee representative of agricultural and community interests to guide the exploratory process and potential campaign.
  - + Identify the goals and objectives of the **Resiliency District** which would be to focus on the preservation of agricultural lands critical for food security, water recharge, fire risk reduction and other social and cultural benefits. Socio-economic goals may include focused support on small and economically disadvantaged farmers, former farmworkers who have transitioned to becoming farm owners, and BIPOC and immigrant farmers.
  - + Develop a Plan for the **Resiliency District** that outlines the types of conservation efforts that could be undertaken, such as acquisition of conservation easements or the implementation of management practices to protect and invest in critical agricultural lands.
- Explore an appropriate funding source, such as a special tax, to finance the acquisition of partial or in-fee interests in lands, including purchase of development rights on a voluntary basis. Develop and implement a campaign strategy - Build support and campaign for the **Resiliency District** by engaging with community members, building coalitions with supportive organizations, educating the public about the measure and making the case for community investment in agricultural lands.. One such support organization could be the Trust for Public Land that provides campaign support for developing conservation finance projects such as conservation districts.

**Potential Funding Sources:** Trust for Public Land (campaign partner); Private foundations, individual donors, local, state (California Department of Conservation) and federal government agencies



### **A Conservation District Created by the Community**

*The Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation & Open Space District was created and funded with a quarter-cent sales tax in a 1990 proposition vote that was led by a community grassroots effort. In November 2006, voters overwhelmingly approved Measure F, which reauthorized the District and extended the quarter-cent sales tax through 2031. The District has protected over 122,000 acres and ranks as one of the top open space and farmland conservation programs in the nation.*

*One of the key reasons for the District's success is its strong commitment to preserving and promoting the county's rich agricultural heritage. **The District works closely with local farmers and ranchers to help them protect, invest in, and preserve thousands of acres of agricultural lands.***

*Another key factor is its focus on partnerships and collaboration. The organization works closely with other government agencies, non-profit organizations, and community groups to leverage resources and expertise in order to achieve its conservation goals.*

*Finally, **the Districts' success has also been based on raising public awareness and support for the importance of conserving agricultural lands.** Through outreach and education programs, the organization has helped to build a strong base of support among the local urban and rural populations which in turn has helped to secure funding and resources for its programs and initiatives.*

### **STRATEGY 3A:**

**Update and strengthen the Right-to-Farm Ordinance to raise public awareness in all sectors of the local community (consumers, farmers, and policy/decision makers) about the importance of co-stewarding the agricultural industry for long-term resilience.**

#### **Actions:**

- Utilize the **Ag Roundtable** and **Rural Urban Connections** program to review the existing right-to-farm ordinance and assess needed updates and next steps.
- Research state legislation on right-to-farm ordinances and similar ordinances throughout California to understand the challenges and opportunities that such ordinances create, and ensure that the goals of the ordinance are clearly communicated and address the challenges unique to Ventura County.
- Develop a proposal for the changes to be made and engage with local decision makers and stakeholders to ensure buy-in, support of updates, and inclusion of new technologies in farming.
- Draft revisions to the ordinance code and follow the local process to amend the ordinance.
- Develop an outreach program and related materials to promote awareness of the value of agriculture, as well as the important role of alerting homebuyers to the realities of living near farming operations.

**Funding Sources:** County general fund

## OBJECTIVE J

### INVEST IN A VOLUNTARY CONSERVATION EASEMENT PROGRAM.

#### STRATEGY 3B (INTERIM STRATEGY TO LEAD STRATEGY 3):

Stand up a voluntary Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement (PACE) program that prioritizes conservation of agricultural land as an investment in the land base.

##### Actions:

- Secure grant funding to support PACE program development.
- Develop an acquisition and stewardship plan for future voluntary participation of land owners. Key factors include:
  - + *Building on past efforts and models, including the Ventura County Sustainable Agricultural Lands Gateway, and The Nature Conservancy's Santa Clara River Floodplain Easement Program.*
  - + *Engaging County agencies, such as LAFCO and the Cities in Ventura County in the planning process.*
  - + *Exploring other innovative types of easements being used in other communities that provide additional resources for utilizing beneficial environmental and social practices. Consideration could also include how to give priority to small farmers and former farmworkers as well as invest in alternative agricultural business models such as cooperatives and land trusts to increase diversity of farm ownership.*
  - + *Identifying and implementing a sustainable financial/funding model, including SALC grant funding, agricultural mitigation fees (Land Use Policy AG-1.1) and / or real estate transaction fees or other fees or assessments.*
  - + *Identifying and establishing the administrative structure for the PACE program, including the feasibility of hiring a central PACE Program administrator.*
  - + *Developing and adopting a preferred acquisition strategy, using refined mapping to identify strategic properties that maximize carbon and other environmental co-benefits, and which are essential to sustain the local agricultural economy.*
- Develop an outreach program and related materials to educate landowners about the benefits of conservation easements.

**Potential Funding Sources:** SALC

#### STRATEGY 3C

Secure the future of Ventura County agriculture by expanding capacity to develop agricultural conservation easements and acquisition projects, with the intent of supporting long-term production agriculture in the County.

##### Actions:

- Develop an “Ecosystem Services” approach to partnering between agricultural and conservation stakeholders where agricultural land is kept in production through dedicated preservation efforts. Ecological conservation efforts enjoy incidental benefits from working lands and may collaborate on projects with a shared vision of long-term production agricultural use of these conserved lands .
- Utilize the *Ag Roundtable (Lead Strategy 2)* and *Rural-Urban Connections* program (Lead Strategy 4) to build strong relationships between conservation partners, the farming community and County agencies.
- Develop a clear plan of action of how conservation and agricultural interests can come together to achieve the shared goal of preserving critical agricultural lands.

**Potential Funding Source:** SALC (see Capacity Grants)

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## OBJECTIVE K

**EXPLORE OPPORTUNITIES TO “THINK REGIONALLY” AND ESTABLISH COOPERATIVE PARTNERSHIPS WITH LOCAL AGENCIES TO BUILD COORDINATED AND COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES TO INVESTING IN AND PROTECTING FARMLAND.**

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### STRATEGY 3D

Develop a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program that encourages infill development in urban areas.

#### Actions:

- Build on the modeling and prioritization findings from *Ventura County Sustainable Agricultural Lands Gateway* to identify those lands most at risk of development, climate stresses and/or other criteria and provide a financial incentive to willing sellers, such as a conservation easement, for selling their development rights.
- Research similar programs throughout California and nationally to understand the challenges and opportunities of such a program including:
  - + *the potential role of a TDR program to direct development away from high natural hazard areas such as fire or flood prone areas,*
  - + *the potential GHG reduction benefits of a TDR program to accelerate infill development in appropriate locations where conflicts with agricultural uses is minimized,*
  - + *understanding the common challenges to implementing a successful TDR program, and*
  - + *assessing the long-term benefits to the community by preserving critical agricultural lands, compensating the farming community for development rights, and moving development to a more suitable and sustainable location.*
- Utilize the **Ag Roundtable** and **Rural Urban Connections** programs to convene local and regional agencies, ag interests and community stakeholders to build support for such a program and to explore potential areas to be included, partner agencies and common goals.
- Develop and implement a TDR Plan based on the modeling, research and community/agency collaboration.

**Potential Funding Sources:** SALC

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### STRATEGY 3E

Explore cooperative planning agreements to enable a regional, unified approach to long-term protection and investment in working lands.

#### Actions:

- Utilize the **Ag Roundtable** and **Rural Urban Connections** program to engage cities in the County and explore cooperative planning agreements that address growth pressures in the areas immediately outside city boundaries. (MOU's, JPA's, and/or pass through agreements).

**Funding Sources:** SALC, CDFA

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## OBJECTIVE L

**ENCOURAGE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF INFRASTRUCTURE AND SUPPORTIVE USES THAT FACILITATE THE GROWTH OF THE REGIONAL AGRICULTURAL ECONOMY.**

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### STRATEGY 3F

**Implement measures and/or reforms to regulations and development standards so farmers may diversify and better utilize their land.**

**Actions:**

- Pursue revisions to zoning ordinance regulations and/or development standards to streamline the establishment of agricultural-supportive uses, such as value added processing, storage areas, equipment yards, equipment staging, food hubs, and farmworker housing.
- Utilize key findings and recommendations from the *Economic Impact Analysis* (Appendix B) and other regional reports, including *Food Processing in Ventura County*, by Applied Development Economics and others to explore processing opportunities and related activities.
- Research existing ordinances and regulations to identify specific provisions that could be updated to enhance or expand utilization of agricultural lands.
- Utilize the **Ag Roundtable in** Lead Strategy 2 to develop the goals of the potential updates and explore, together, the modifications to achieve those goals.
- Develop and implement modifications to ordinances and/or development standards based on the research and community/agency collaboration.

**Potential Funding Sources:** SALC, County general fund



**FARMERS’ ABILITY TO CAPTURE THE ADDED ECONOMIC BENEFIT FROM VALUE ADDED FOOD PROCESSING IS CRITICAL TO THEIR LONG-TERM ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY.”**

*-Food Processing in Ventura County Report, Applied Development Economics*

## + CORNERSTONE 04

### CATALYZE COMMUNITY CO-STEWARDSHIP OF AGRICULTURE

The Plan crafts a multifaceted *Rural-Urban Connections* strategy that fosters co-stewardship of a vibrant agriculture sector as a foundation for community health, well-being and identity, climate change resilience, and a diverse, equitable economy.

#### OBJECTIVE M

*COORDINATE AND ENHANCE PUBLIC EDUCATION AND AWARENESS EFFORTS TO HELP THE GENERAL PUBLIC FEEL CONNECTED TO AND INVESTED IN VENTURA COUNTY AGRICULTURE.*

#### LEAD STRATEGY 4

Establish a Rural-Urban Connections (RUCS) Program at UCCE to help bridge the urban - rural divide.

##### Actions:

- Create the operational structures and secure the resources necessary to provide a collaborative framework for coordinating, supporting and enhancing existing public education and awareness efforts to help the general public feel benefited by, connected with, invested in and proud of the conservation, resilience and prosperity of Ventura County agriculture.
- Responsibilities would include the coordination and facilitation of a quarterly **Ag Roundtable (Lead Strategy 2)** as well as developing ag awareness campaigns with messaging around specific timely issues, such as the feasibility of developing a **Resiliency District (Lead Strategy 3)**.
- Ensure that the voices, perspectives, and contributions of farmworkers are included in the RUCs program to both build connections between local agriculture and communities and increase equity by improving access to affordable, healthy, fresh produce for low-income communities and communities of color.

**Funding Sources:** SALC; USDA Agricultural Marketing Services (AMS); Regional Food System Partnerships (RFSP)





THERE IS ANOTHER WAY TO EXPRESS THIS ETHIC OF STEWARDSHIP: NOT AS A BILL OF RIGHTS, BUT AS A BILL OF OBLIGATIONS. FOR FARMING TO REMAIN A HEALTHY COMPONENT OF THE LOCAL ECONOMY, CULTURE AND SOCIETY, THE INDUSTRY IS OBLIGED TO RESPECT THE ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY OF ITS RESOURCE BASE AND TO OPERATE IN HARMONY WITH THE BROADER COMMUNITY. AND JUST AS FARMERS MUST ACT AS GOOD STEWARDS OF THE LAND TO REMAIN VIABLE, SO ARE MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY OBLIGED TO ACT AS GOOD STEWARDS OF THE AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY IF THEY WISH TO ENJOY THE BENEFITS IT PROVIDES. THESE INCLUDE LOCAL ECONOMIC STABILITY, THE AESTHETIC VALUES OF A RICH AND DIVERSE LANDSCAPE, AND A HEALTHY AND AFFORDABLE FOOD SUPPLY.

*- A Community of Good Stewards: Building a Sustainable Food System in Ventura County, Ag Futures Alliance (AFA)*

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## STRATEGY 4A

### Develop partnerships to increase ag-related climate resilience.

Take advantage of the skills, knowledge, and capacity of the wide range of agencies, organizations, private businesses, private landowners, farmerworkers, ag organizations, community organizations, educators and tribes in Ventura County. Many are already working on a particular climate hazard and promoting coordination among these organizations can help build trust, increase capacity, and ultimately share the benefits and responsibilities of taking action at a regional scale to build climate resilience.

#### Actions:

- UCCE staff and the UCCE Advisory Board, with input from additional partners and stakeholders, will develop a three-year plan for the RUCs program collaborative framework, including identification of activities, a budget, funding sources, and any additional needed operational structures (such as subcommittees).
- With UCCE as the backbone organization, the RUCs program manager will engage partners to establish the key elements of a collective impact model with a common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities and continuous communication.
- In collaboration with partners, RUCs will develop and promote a portal with a searchable database of organizations and events, job boards, resources, etc.

**Funding Sources:** USDA Agricultural Marketing Services (AMS): Regional Food System Partnerships (RFSP), Strategic Growth Council Regional Climate Collaboratives (RCC) Program

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## STRATEGY 4B

### Develop an artist-led and art-driven cultural initiative that conveys to the public the importance of agriculture to the local economy and identity.

#### Actions:

- Develop a *Working Lands, Working Artists* program to support artists' creations in a range of media, which inspire and deepen the public sense of connection to Ventura County agricultural landscapes, culture and traditions.
- Provide opportunities for children and youth to explore and express what local food and farming mean to them by engaging them in programs such as the *River of Words* contest.

**Funding Sources:** National Endowment for the Arts

## OBJECTIVE N

### DEVELOP SCHOOL CHILDRENS' FOUNDATIONAL KNOWLEDGE ABOUT AGRICULTURE AND AGRICULTURAL CAREER PATHWAYS.

#### STRATEGY 4C

Support development of school childrens' foundational knowledge about agriculture by enhancing agricultural literacy and education programs at K-12 educational institutions and on farms.

##### Actions:

- Conduct a biennial survey of formal and informal agricultural education programs, including tracking perceived program gaps.
- Develop a collaborative plan for addressing program gaps.
- Disseminate the survey results and the plan for addressing program gaps.
- Develop, facilitate, and help fund a network of ag educators, including identifying a key point of contact, especially in the high schools
- Organize an annual ag education conference.
- Track and enhance connections between K-12 and colleges.
- Offer professional development opportunities and training sessions for teachers and counselors.
- Facilitate coordination with non-profit organizations, such as SEEAG, The Rodale Institute and collaboration with formal education programs.
- Consider developing a grade 5 - grade 8, place-based agricultural education module.
- Track and help support school garden demonstration sites.
- Develop and foster school-based arts programs that are related to agriculture activities, landscapes, and traditions.

**Funding Sources:** California Department of Food and Agriculture Farm to School Incubator Grant Program

#### STRATEGY 4D

Facilitate young people's exploration and pursuit of diverse careers in agriculture with an emphasis on career opportunities within Ventura County.

##### Actions:

- Conduct a Needs Assessment.
- Develop more high school classes offered by Community Colleges in coordination with new Internships and practical job training opportunities.
- Support the work of SEE-AG and AGKids805.
- Develop new work-based learning programs in partnership with employers.
- Provide engaging information that prompts students to become informed about and explore these careers (could be modeled on the [www.100plusjobs.org](http://www.100plusjobs.org)).
- Provide career training for agricultural workforce (at all levels) in the County

**Funding Sources:** Community Economic Resilience Fund (CERF); and other Workforce Development programs funds



#### **SEE AG: Opening Eyes to Agriculture Since 2008**

*Since 2008, SEEAG has impacted the lives of over 100,000 students and community members in Ventura County free of charge. Their mission is to educate students and the greater community about the farm origins of our food and agriculture's contribution to our nutritional well-being through hands-on classroom and outdoor experiential S.T.E.M. based learning. This includes farm field trips, experiential learning and the Ventura County Farm Day which they founded in 2013. Their vision is to inspire local communities to have a deep appreciation for agriculture and the hands and lands that feed us to ensure the future viability of agriculture in rural and urban areas.*

## OBJECTIVE 0

**DEVELOP AND LAUNCH A “GROWN IN VENTURA COUNTY” (OR SIMILAR) TO CONNECT CONSUMERS TO THE AGRICULTURAL LANDSCAPE SURROUNDING THEM.**

### STRATEGY 4E

**Develop a “Grown in Ventura County” (or similar) regional brand to support recognition and awareness of the importance of working lands to the health and resiliency of the region.**

#### Actions:

- Build on parallel strategies described in this document to create a positive feedback loop between land use policy, conservation programs, and economic development efforts. On-farm education and agritourism is a key piece.
- Develop the brand as a campaign with a shared label/ logo, messaging and promotional activities.
- Assess development of a wayside signage program (including digital)
- With partners, develop corollary activities such as promotion of on-farm education and agritourism, through the RUCs online portal and sponsored events as well as educating consumers in the ways in which Ventura County farmworkers are supported by the community, (such as the *Ventura County Farmworker Resource Program* and other future initiatives).
- Develop a local agriculture literacy assessment tool, similar to the one used in Colorado.

**Funding Sources:** USDA Agricultural Marketing Services (AMS): Local Food Promotion Programs (FMLFPP); Regional Food System Partnerships (RFSP)

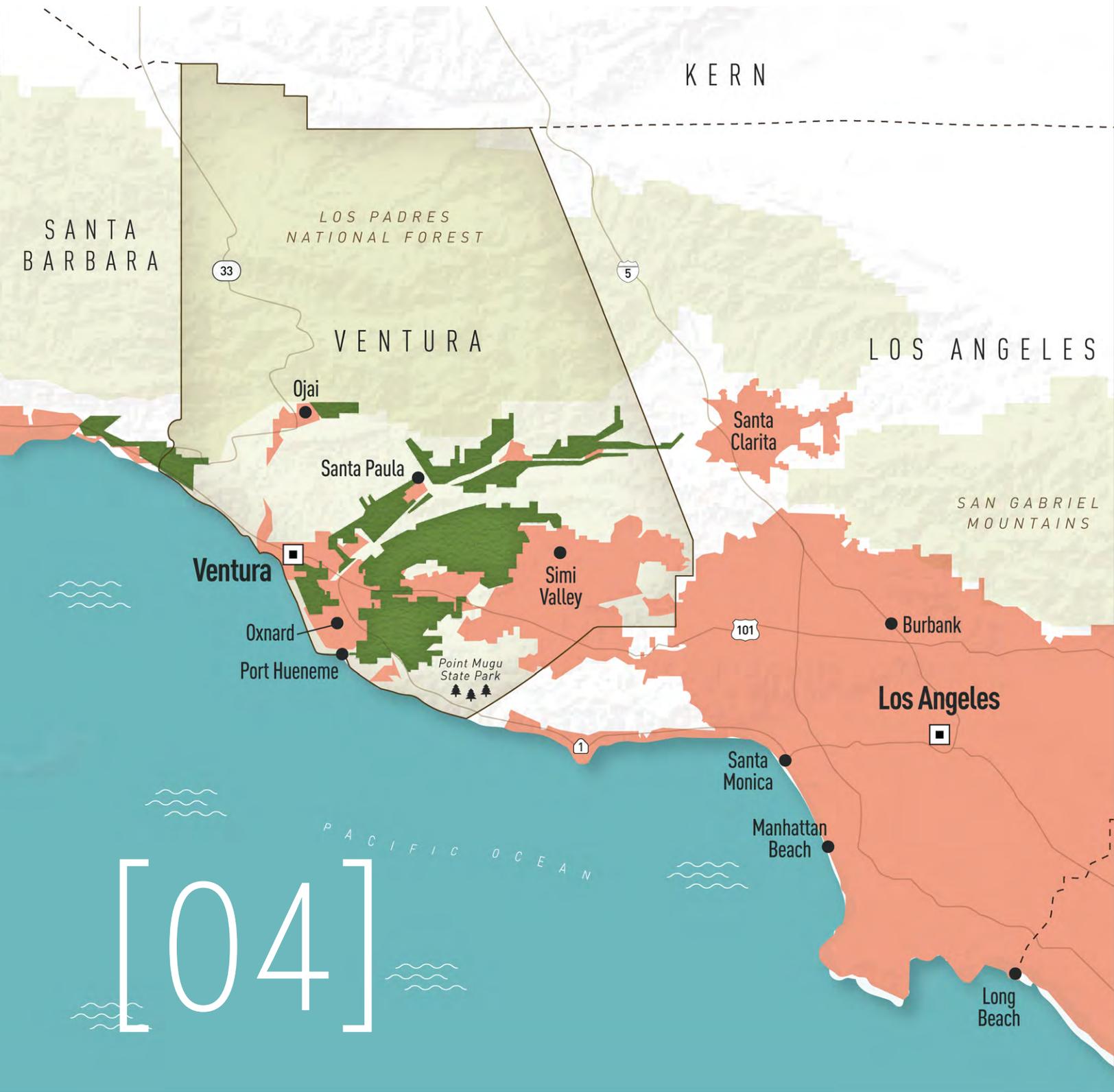


#### Capay Valley Grown

*Capay Valley is an area located northwest of Sacramento in Yolo County. Capay Valley Grown is an example of how a region can begin to differentiate itself through a shared label/logo, shared marketing efforts, and promotional events that raise the visibility of the region’s products.*

*Launched in 2004, it is a partnership among twenty-three farm and ranch charter partners that wanted to increase the marketability and visibility of their products and their region. The partners of Capay Valley Grown strive to sell a sense of place with their products, including information that conveys value to end-users while creating transparency about the farming community, the importance of place, ongoing stewardship efforts, and the commitment to quality. Capay Valley Grown partners continue to explore strategies to get as close to customers in Yolo County and Northern California as possible to maximize freshness, flavor, and consumer confidence. This includes:*

- *Creating and publishing “Capay Valley Harvest”, a quarterly insert in local newspapers,*
- *Conducting the Capay Valley Grown Field Day, which offers tours, presentations on topics such as value added products, county ordinances that support agriculture, and marketing of local agricultural products.*
- *Running the Capay Valley Grown website, which provides farm biographies and a calendar of agricultural related events in the region, and*
- *Creating the Capay Valley Farm Shop, a farmer and community owned food hub that markets and distributes food from more than 40 small and mid-sized farms and ranches in Yolo County*



## [04]

## BACKGROUND &amp; CONTEXT.

## 4.1 REGIONAL AND LOCAL CONTEXT

**Land and Population Growth**

The variety of geography, terrain, and climate in Ventura County affords the region a diverse agricultural landscape. The greatest share of the County's prime farmland is located on the Oxnard Plain, stretching from the Pacific Ocean inland to the foot of the Santa Monica Mountains, the Ventura hillsides, and the town of Saticoy. Other prime farmland occurs in the Santa Clara River Valley, from Saticoy inland to Piru, as well as on the floors of the inland Las Posas, Santa Rosa and Tierra Rejada valleys. Farmland of statewide importance is distributed throughout the county in large swaths around Ventura, Oxnard, Port Hueneme, Camarillo, Fillmore, and Ojai. Lesser value farmland categories are located on the fringe of the valley, while grazing land covers much of the foothills from Lake Casitas and Lake Piru south to the communities of Thousand Oaks and Simi Valley along the Los Angeles County line.<sup>1</sup>

This agricultural land makes up 27 percent of the total land area of the county, and 57 percent of county land not under control of federal agencies such as the Forest Service or the Bureau of Land Management. Due to overall real estate values in the Los Angeles region and the limited supply of agricultural land in Ventura County, agricultural land values in the County are among the highest in the state.

According to the *California Department of Conservation's Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP)*, Ventura County saw a loss of 12 percent of its important farmland and a 7 percent loss of grazing land from 1984 to 2018.<sup>2</sup> Currently the County contains 118,272 acres of important farmland and 197,714 acres of grazing land, for a total of 315,986 acres of agricultural land.

By 2040, the County's population is expected to increase to over 965,000 (a 13 percent increase

over 2016) by 2040, with the unincorporated areas projected to increase to 113,600 residents (16 percent increase over 2016) by 2040. This is a slower rate of growth than the county has experienced in the past.<sup>3</sup> While much of this growth will be directed into existing urban areas due to the Save Open Space and Agricultural Resources (SOAR) ordinances, there is on-going development pressure on lands within the rural areas of Ventura County. With SOAR set to expire in 2050, there is future risk of intensive speculation and pressure to develop rural agricultural lands to accommodate the region's housing and urban growth needs. Even with agricultural land values being high in the County, these lands are often far less expensive and easier to develop than land in urban areas. Already the county, the Los Angeles region, and the state as a whole are facing an affordable housing crisis due to growth of jobs and a shortage of affordable housing stock.

<sup>1</sup> Ventura County General Plan 2040, Agricultural Resources Background Report, September 2020

<sup>2</sup> CA Department of Conservation, Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) defines "Important Farmland" as Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Unique Farmland, and Farmland of Local Importance.

<sup>3</sup> Ventura County General Plan 2040, Agricultural Resources Background Report, September 2020.

## VENTURA COUNTY AGRICULTURE

- **Number of commercial farms: 2,135**
  - ✦ *Less than 10 acres: 963 (45%)*
  - ✦ *Less than 50 acres: 1,674 (78%)*
- **Total agricultural land (as of 2018): 315,986 acres**
- **Approximately two thirds of agricultural land in the County is grazing lands.**
- **Top five crops by sales: strawberries, celery, lemons, raspberries, nursery stock**
- **Ventura County consistently ranks in the top 10 of California counties in terms of total crop value.**





## Water

***The story about Ventura County agriculture is not complete without an understanding of future water availability.*** The Ventura County 2040 General Plan Background Report identified that “*Adequate water supply is a current and ongoing concern in Ventura County due to climate change and drought, the related declines in river flows and reservoir levels, historic overdraft of several local groundwater basins, curtailment of groundwater supplies in southern Ventura County, new groundwater well prohibitions, and reduced deliveries of imported water.*” Water demand in Ventura County has nearly tripled over the last 25 years, and is expected to double again by 2050. Groundwater is the largest single source of water in Ventura County. It provides about 67 percent of the locally utilized water in the County with agricultural demand accounting for 68 percent of the total demand for groundwater in the county<sup>4</sup>. Most water used for agriculture in Ventura County is extracted from groundwater basins beneath the Oxnard plain and the cultivated valleys.

## Agricultural Economy

***Ventura County is one of the leading agricultural counties in the United States.*** Its \$2 billion in annual crop production value ranks tenth in California. It is a major producer of specialty crops such as fruits and vegetables for the fresh produce market. Fruit and nut crops dominate the agricultural economy in the County, accounting for over 60 percent of total crop value in 2020 at \$1.2 billion. Second and third in value by major category are vegetable crops at \$0.5 billion and nursery stock at \$0.2 billion. Combined, these three categories generate 97 percent of the agricultural value in Ventura County. As of 2020, total farm employment in Ventura County averaged 25,100 jobs, a nearly 50 percent increase since 1990, while overall county employment has only increased by 27 percent over the same period.

<sup>4</sup> Ventura County Public Works Agency. [Groundwater Resources - Ventura County Public Works Agency](#), accessed on November 30, 2022.

## 4.2 THE RESILIENT AGRICULTURAL LANDS INITIATIVE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS & RELATIONSHIP TO REGIONAL PLANS

Development of this Strategic Plan involved mapping of agricultural resources, engaging local stakeholders, examining the existing County and City land use policies and agricultural protection policies, evaluating best practices and successful models of agricultural preservation and seeking guidance from experts around California. Five key priorities shaped the development of the Plan:

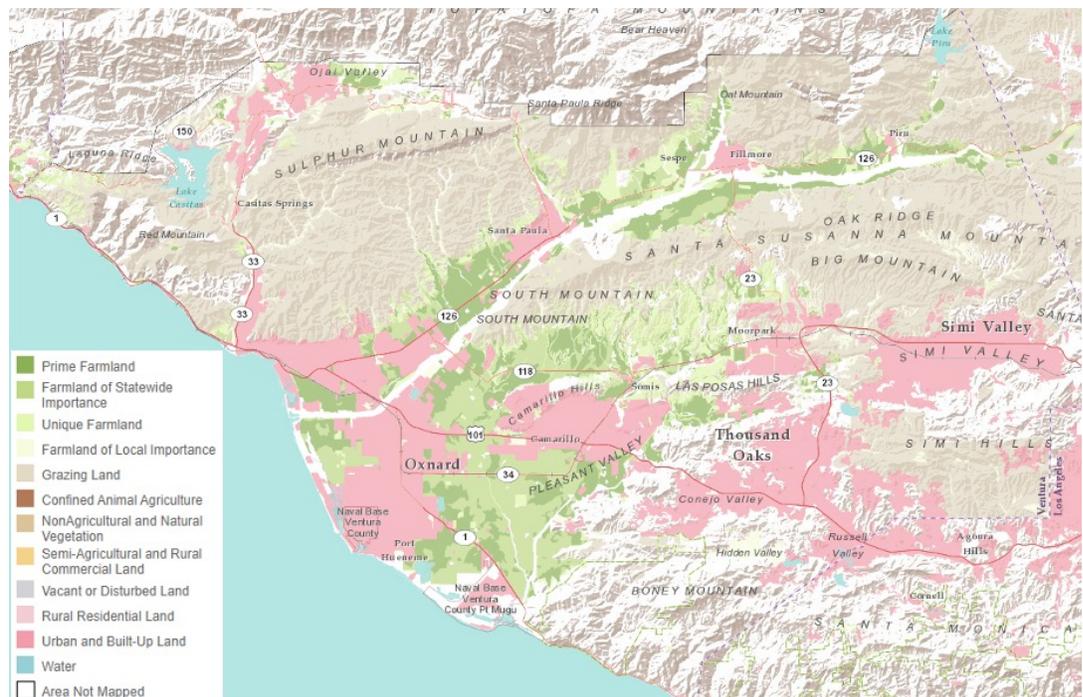
- 1) Understanding the multi-faceted aspects of Ventura County’s agriculture;
- 2) Exploring innovative solutions and options for sustaining and building the viability of future Ventura County agriculture, including existing tools and innovative incentive programs and designing various options that are relevant to Ventura County agriculture;
- 3) Responding directly to stakeholder and community concerns;
- 4) Crafting strategic actions that stakeholders and the community could embrace to successfully accomplish the Plan’s vision; and
- 5) Building awareness and ownership so that stakeholders co-create the foundational strategies as well as the organizational structure that allows a multitude of actors to accomplish the work laid out in this Plan.

The methodology used to develop the foundational strategies and actions is described below.

### 1. Mapping Agricultural Lands and Modeling Risks

A comprehensive mapping of existing agricultural resources and characteristics in Ventura County was central to the development of the strategies. An initial step was the creation of a map-based collaborative platform, the Ventura County Sustainable Agricultural Lands Gateway. Based on Data Basin technology, the Gateway was built to help stakeholders evaluate the current and future agricultural landscape. Built with approximately 200 data layers relevant to Ventura County, the Gateway is a tool for the community to continue to use now and in the future, to implement agreed upon strategies to secure the County’s agricultural future.

**FIGURE 1.**  
THE VENTURA COUNTY PROJECT ASSESSMENT AREA (DEFINED BY THE MOST RECENT STATE FARMLAND MONITORING AND MAPPING PROGRAM (FMMP) DATASET)



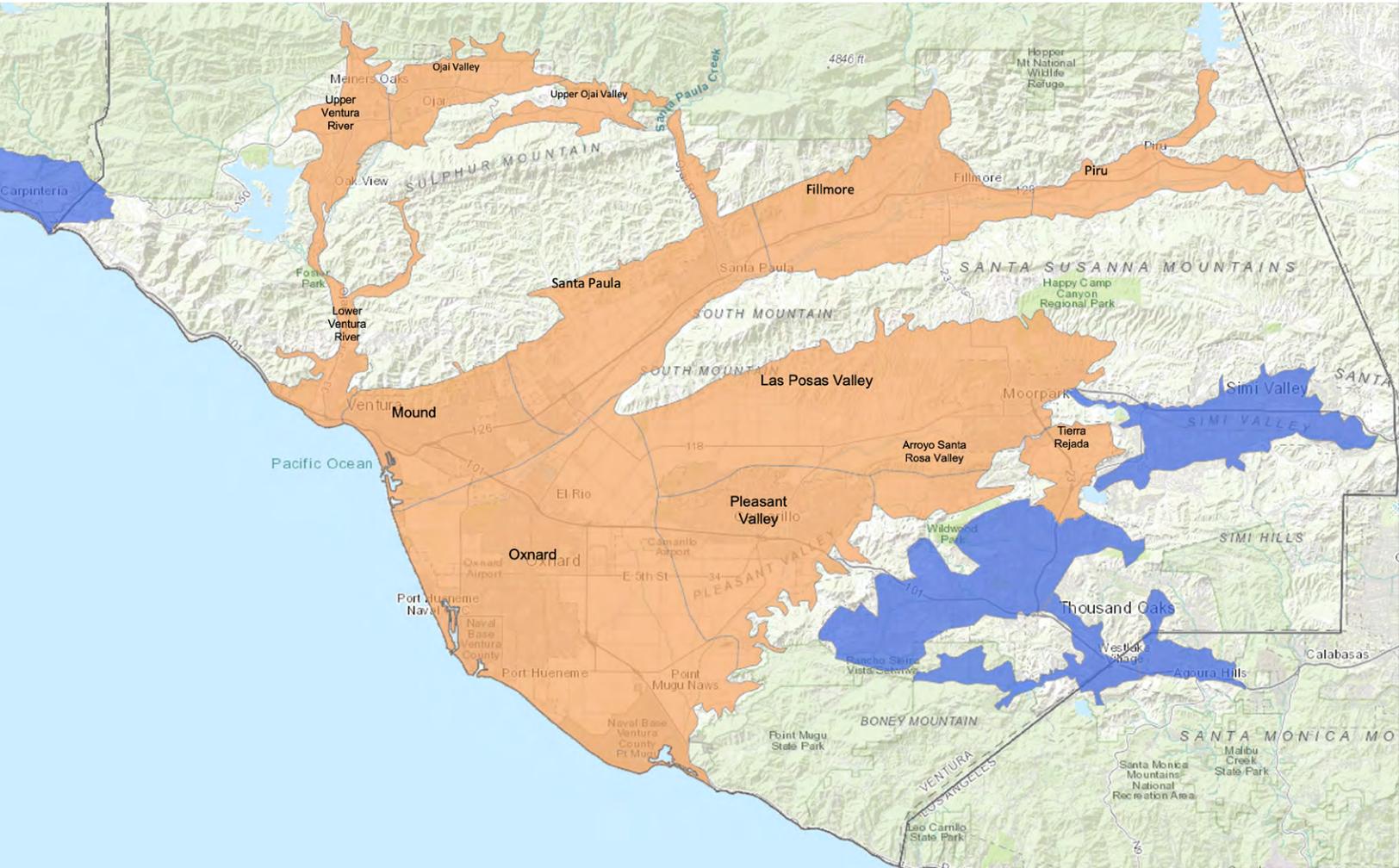
Using the Gateway as a platform, a second step in the mapping process was the creation of a map-based risk assessment model, using software called Environmental Evaluation Modeling System (EEMS) which focused on the agricultural region of Ventura County as defined by the state *Farmland Monitoring and Mapping Program* (Figure 1). This modeling platform consists of a highly transparent fuzzy logic framework that supports the involvement of stakeholders in co-creating the model. This process resulted in the following outputs, which have guided the development of the Initiative's key strategies:

- 1) Defined and mapped relative importance of agricultural lands, as currently exists without current or projected stresses that may pose risks to the viability of agriculture in the future.
- 2) Risk assessment based on current and future climate stressors in the region. This was done by creating a set of stress models varying by different climate future projections. Three climate general circulation models (CNRM-CM5, MIROC5, and GFDL-CM3) were evaluated for the 2010 – 2039 time period.
- 3) Prioritization criteria based on climate stressors, plus other factors, for identifying and prioritizing agricultural land for its best use and for targeting investment and policy given current conditions and future projections. A project stakeholder subgroup selected 13 criteria to create individual subbasin profiles that represented important yet different potential stressors for each. These 13 criteria are defined in Table A:

**TABLE A. CRITERIA FOR IDENTIFYING AND PRIORITIZING AGRICULTURAL LAND**

<b>CRITERION</b>	<b>CHARACTERIZATION</b>
<b>Groundwater Resource Stress</b>	Combination of relative degree of groundwater banking index & groundwater availability
<b>Impaired Soil Chemistry</b>	Combination of relative concentration of salinity & sodicity in soil
<b>Number of Extreme Heat Days</b>	Combination of current number of extreme heat days & change in number of extreme heat days
<b>Max Annual Temperature</b>	Relative mean value of future projected max annual temperature
<b>Annual Precipitation Stress</b>	Combination of historic mean annual precipitation & projected future precipitation
<b>Water Recharge Deficiency</b>	Relative groundwater banking index
<b>Climatic Moisture Stress</b>	Combination of projected future water input from precipitation & projected future climatic water deficit
<b>Climatic Water Deficit</b>	Combination of historic & projected future climatic water deficit, which is potential minus actual evapotranspiration
<b>Housing Burden</b>	Summarized from CalEnviroScreen
<b>Poverty Level</b>	Summarized from CalEnviroScreen
<b>Potential Flooding Risk</b>	Relative percent area within FEMA flood hazard zones
<b>Invasive Plants</b>	Mean number of 10 invasive plant species evaluated
<b>Wildfire Risk</b>	Relative percent area within wildland-urban interface and intermix

In developing **Prioritization Criteria**, the main agricultural subbasins were used as the reporting unit since so much of agriculture viability in the County is tied to the groundwater basins. These subbasins are: *Upper Ventura River, Ojai Valley, Upper Ojai Valley, Lower Ventura River, Mound, Santa Paula, Filmore, Piru, Oxnard, Los Posas Valley, Pleasant Valley, Arroyo Santa Rosa Valley, Tierra Rejada.*



**FIGURE 2. THE AGRICULTURAL GROUNDWATER BASINS OF VENTURA COUNTY. (PLACEHOLDER)**

Results from the stress modeling and the additional prioritization criteria were integrated into the Gateway, allowing interested stakeholders to review each subbasin individually and analyze the relative impact of climate and social factors on agriculture in that area. Now and moving into the future, the Gateway is a tool available to the Ventura County community to increase understanding of the agricultural lands that are likely to remain resilient and productive given future conditions and the higher stressed agricultural lands that will be most impacted by climate, water stresses, and other factors. Taking data results in mind, the community

will be able to prioritize areas for investment, program development, crop changes, and policy changes to strategically protect the lands that have local and global significance to food production.

Key findings on the mapping and modeling process can be found in Section 4.3. Based on these findings, Chapter 3 of this Plan takes the initial step of identifying strategies, programs and actions that will help to align existing and future agricultural land use policies, County programs and plans, and approaches to fostering interagency and community collaboration to support a vibrant agricultural economy and landscape.

## 2. A “Network” Approach for Community and Stakeholder Engagement

The development of this Plan was supported by a **Project Partners Team** comprised of a group of representatives from farm operations, farming advocacy groups, community organizations, and local land trusts, as well as staff from the County Resource Management Agency, the Agricultural Commissioner’s Office, UC Cooperative Extension, and the County Executive Office’s Sustainability Division. A group of **local subject-matter experts** with knowledge in the fields of agriculture, water, economics and education further assisted the development of the foundational strategies in this Plan by identifying additional relevant stakeholders, synthesizing data, helping to create prioritization criteria, and evaluating models and strategies.

The Ventura County Farm Bureau, the Ventura County Community Foundation (VCCC) and the Ventura County Civic Alliance (VCCA) provided trusted community leadership as **Local Conveners** to act as a liaison to the larger community, and help to raise awareness about the Initiative’s goals as well as informing and helping to lead outreach efforts, mapping and data collection. The Local Conveners also supported the development of the strategies in raising the “right questions” and ensuring that representatives of constituent groups that have been historically underrepresented were involved in the **Project Partners Team**.

In addition to the **Project Partners Team** and **Local Conveners**, the engagement effort was supported by a **Local Engagement Lead** to ensure that input into the development of the strategies was as inclusive of the agricultural community as possible, to help identify and invite the Local Conveners, to provide local context and background on research and outreach efforts and to connect the consulting team to local subject-matter experts that have essential knowledge to support the work.

The **Project Partners Team** met for over an 18-month period via Zoom, resulting in a collaborative

engagement process with multistakeholder input to inform the creation of strategies and at key milestones in the development process of this Strategic Plan. The Project Partners reviewed and provided feedback on work products and reports, in collaboration with the stakeholder groups described below, resulting in a better understanding of the many tools necessary for a successful, multi-pronged effort to secure Ventura County’s agriculture into the future. In addition, throughout the process, the Cultivate Team engaged one-on-one with the local subject-matter experts and members of the Project Partners team. This collaboration process and these connections proved invaluable to the development of various work products, both adding a local lens and allowing for various stakeholders in the community to take part in shaping the project.

The Farm Bureau, VCCA, and VCCF, and Project Partners helped to identify key **community stakeholders** and **agricultural community stakeholders**. These two sets of stakeholders participated in three workshops each: 1) a kick-off; 2) initial input, and 3) input on findings and draft strategies (for a total of six workshops).

Two subgroups of stakeholders formed for specific project studies and met regularly at key points in the project to guide the work and provide local expert knowledge. The **Education and Awareness Subgroup** supported the development of the Agricultural Education and Awareness Strategy Report and the **Risk and Opportunity Assessment Subgroup** supported the development of the Map-based Agricultural Risk Assessment.

This “Network” approach for community engagement activated important conversations among the members of the Project Partners Team, including government agencies and key stakeholders, that created a basis for implementation of this Strategic Plan. Details of the stakeholder engagement process and stakeholder lists can be found in Appendix E, Stakeholder Input Report.

### 3. Existing Ventura County Agricultural Preservation Policies and Programs

A variety of interrelated land use policies, private landowner actions, and economic forces have shaped existing land use patterns within Ventura County over the decades. This section briefly summarizes the existing policy framework that was evaluated in the 2040 County General Plan and Background Report as a basis for the development of additional agricultural land preservation policies, programs and policy updates that are included in Chapter 3.

#### ***Ventura County Existing Policy Framework***

In its guiding principles, the **Ventura County General Plan 2040**, adopted in 2020, presents its commitment to “[Promoting] the economic vitality and environmental sustainability of Ventura County’s agricultural economy by conserving soils/land while supporting a diverse and globally-competitive agricultural industry that depends on the availability of water, land, and farmworker housing.”

The **General Plan Land Use Element** has three primary rural land use designations: Agricultural, Open Space, or Rural. For agricultural lands, the County maintains General Plan designations and zoning that limits the type of land uses allowed on agricultural lands and limits the density to 40 acres per unit, and with minimum lot sizes of 40 acres. This designation ensures that parcel sizes remain viable for farming rather than other development purposes and restricts conflicting uses into farming areas.

The **General Plan Agricultural Element** presents a suite of policies and implementation measures to preserve agricultural lands, minimize conflicts between agricultural and urban land uses, support the agricultural sector as a leading economic driver, and enhance the sustainability of agriculture in the county by transitioning away from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources. The **General Plan Economic Vitality Element** presents policies to encourage the growth and expansion of new, innovative agriculture-related business opportunities as well as encourage the expansion of value-added agricultural products within the Existing Communities land use designations. The

**General Plan Housing Element** presents policies and measures to support farmworker housing needs. In 2021, the County updated its Farmworker Housing Ordinance which amended existing requirements for agricultural worker housing, added new housing options and development standards, and simplified the permitting requirements.

The **General Plan Climate Action Plan (CAP)** addresses the impacts of a changing climate on agriculture as well as the impacts of agriculture on the climate. In addition to the impacts of more frequent drought on water supply, the CAP indicates that the quality of groundwater resources near the coast is deteriorating from saltwater intrusion from sea-level rise. The CAP also estimates that increases in flow rates of the Ventura River Watershed may inhibit natural groundwater recharge, which is the primary water supply to the county’s agricultural sector. Increased temperatures will increase rates of evapotranspiration in plants, which would increase water demand, thus requiring improved irrigation systems and more resilient water supplies. To prepare for these conditions, the CAP advises that “Ventura County, local water districts, and other stakeholders will need to continue to evaluate the vulnerability of the county’s water supply systems and networks through collaboration with water-related Federal, State, and local agencies and organizations.”

Agricultural emissions comprised 13 percent of the inventory of the greenhouse gas emissions in unincorporated Ventura County In 2015. The agricultural sector’s impact on climate includes a wide range of Green House Gas (GHG) generating activities including crop burning, enteric fermentation, manure management, farm equipment operation, pesticide use, and fertilizer applications. The General Plan and CAP offer a suite of policies aimed at agricultural measures that can contribute to mitigating the impact of climate change such as encouraging the use of renewable fuel powered equipment, water-saving irrigation techniques, increases carbon sequestration, crop diversification, and developing a program to increase the sales of regionally grown produce.

The County has taken several actions to direct growth away from agricultural and open space lands. The County administers the **Williamson Act Program** (California Land Conservation Act of 1965, “LCA”) which protects agricultural land by providing tax incentives to property owners who agree to keep their land in commercial agricultural production. All land with an Agricultural land use designation in the General Plan is considered an Agricultural Preserve under the LCA. The LCA is implemented through three contract types: 10-year LCA Contract, the 20-year Farmland Security Zone Area Contract (FSZA/LCA), and the 20-year Open Space Contract (OS/LCA). These contracts intend to preserve agricultural land and discourage its premature conversion to non-agricultural uses. Among other things, the LCA Guidelines establish eligibility criteria for these contracts. As of 2023, Ventura County had 1,136 LCA contracts totaling 131,367 acres.

The **Guidelines for Orderly Development** were originally adopted by the Board of Supervisors, all city councils within Ventura County, and the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) in 1969 and revised in 1996. They are an effort to improve the clarity of relationships between local agencies with respect to urban development projects. The intent of the Guidelines is threefold: (1) clarify the relationship between the cities and the county with respect to urban planning; (2) facilitate a better understanding regarding development standards and fees; and (3) identify the appropriate governmental agency responsible for making determinations on land use requests.

Beginning in 1967, several cities and the County began adopting **greenbelt agreements**. These are voluntary agreements between the County and one or more cities to limit development of agricultural and/or open space areas within the unincorporated county. Through greenbelt agreements, cities commit to not annex any property within a greenbelt while the County agrees to restrict development to uses consistent with existing agricultural or open space zoning. There are seven greenbelts in Ventura County covering approximately 164,000 acres collectively.

**Save Open Space & Agricultural Resources (SOAR)** is a series of voter initiatives that individual jurisdictions in the County adopted to protect open

space and agricultural land. The County of Ventura adopted the countywide SOAR ordinance in 1998 and renewed it in 2016 to extend to 2050. The County SOAR ordinance requires countywide voter approval of any change to the General Plan involving the Agricultural, Open Space, or Rural land use designations, or any changes to a General Plan goal or policy related to those land use designations.

In addition to the **County SOAR ordinance, City SOAR ordinances/initiatives** were enacted in eight of the 10 cities: Ventura, Camarillo, Oxnard, Simi Valley, Thousand Oaks, Moorpark, Santa Paula, and Fillmore. The cities of Camarillo, Fillmore, Moorpark, Oxnard, Santa Paula, Simi Valley, and Thousand Oaks adopted SOAR ordinances to establish voter-controlled urban growth boundaries, known as City **Urban Restriction Boundaries (CURBs)**. CURBs are lines around each city that require voter approval to allow city annexation and development of land outside of the CURB boundary.

The **Farmworker Resource Program** within the County’s Human Services Agency focuses on building trust and relationships with farmworkers, promoting and enhancing the agricultural industry in Ventura County, attracting farmworkers to Ventura County as a first-choice destination to work in agriculture, advising farmworkers of existing labor laws protecting them, and assisting farmworkers in navigating public agencies and seeking resolutions to workplace issues.

The **Ventura County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo)** approval is required for any expansion of Urban Service Areas and it has established a set of policies intended to guide development away from existing agricultural lands. The Commission will grant approval to proposals that result in the conversion of prime agricultural or existing open space land use to other uses: 1) only if the Commission finds that the proposal will lead to planned, orderly, and efficient development; or 2) a site analysis presents findings for insufficient non-prime agricultural or vacant land. In making the determination whether conversion will adversely impact adjoining prime agricultural or existing open space lands, the Commission considers a set of factors to guide its decision. LAFCo will not approve the inclusion of territory subject to an active Land Conservation Act contract.

### **Other Relevant Efforts in Ventura County**

The development of this Plan considered other significant efforts to preserve and protect Ventura County agricultural lands and their economic viability. The State of California’s **Sustainable Groundwater Management Act** (SGMA) is driving several efforts to mitigate the overdraft of groundwater basins that will have future impacts on the viability of agriculture in Ventura County. SGMA required the establishment of **Groundwater Sustainability Agencies** (GSAs) to manage the State’s high- and medium-priority basins and subbasins; the GSAs in turn are required to develop and implement *Groundwater Sustainability Plans* (GSPs) to bring extractions and recharge of those basins into long-term balance. Although nine basins in Ventura County fall into the high or medium priority categories, of particular concern are the critically overdrafted Oxnard and Pleasant Valley basins, principal source of irrigation water for the Oxnard Plain. Unless new sources of water are identified and developed, achieving the SGP sustainability targets for those basins could force large-scale land fallowing in the county’s most productive agricultural region. The **Fox Canyon Groundwater Management Agency**, which manages those basins as their GSA under SGMA, established a pilot water market for the Oxnard Basin in 2016. The market allowed well owners to buy and sell pumping allocations, providing a financial incentive to increase irrigation efficiency and giving growers more flexibility in adapting to drought. Although the pilot ended in 2019, its revival is contemplated under the GSPs for the Oxnard and Pleasant Valley basins

The vision of the **Ventura County Resource Conservation District** (VCRCD) 2019-2023 Strategic Plan supports many of the actions that this *Initiative* seeks to achieve, namely, collaborating with community stakeholders and government agencies to facilitate the protection, enhancement and resilience of agricultural and natural resources while promoting greater community involvement, dialogue and education in doing so. Included in its goals and relevant to this Plan, the VCRCD prioritized the following over the 2019-2023 period: improve water quality and quantity; establish a fire prevention program; expand the use of soil-based practices linked to climate resilience; address invasive and pesticide resistant species through education programs and management projects; hold easements and manage mitigation projects; and become active in habitat mitigation programs.

In 2015, the **Ventura County Economic Development Collaborative** commissioned the report, *Food Processing in Ventura County* to address the need and opportunity to increase the level of value-added processing in the County to better support the farming community and a comprehensive food systems strategy. The report concluded that there is substantial market potential to expand food processing in the County and that expansion of food processing capacity is a critical element in developing a regional food systems strategy that benefits all stakeholders – growers, workers, supply chain businesses, and consumers- and contributes to economic opportunity, social equity and environmental balance.



**THE VALUE OF ECOSYSTEM SERVICES PROVIDED BY VENTURA COUNTY’S FARM AND RANGELAND RANGES BETWEEN APPROXIMATELY \$174 MILLION AND \$491 MILLION PER YEAR.**

In collaboration with the Ventura County Agricultural Commissioner's Office and Ventura County UC Cooperative Extension, the Community Environmental Council (CEC) released a report in 2021, *Cultivating Resilience in Ventura County*, to assess the disaster-related impacts and needs of agricultural producers in the county and identified six opportunities to advance producers' resilience in the face of disasters. The report advises that success of these opportunities will require collaboration between and among Ventura County regulators, emergency responders, policy-makers, community foundations, farmworker advocates, technical assistance providers, and agricultural leadership.

Though the **Ventura County Ag Futures Alliance (AFA)** is no longer active, it is worth noting the achievements of this alliance, which was formed in 1999 by growers

and others concerned about agriculture's survival. The purpose of AFA was *"To support and enhance an interdependent and viable agriculture in Ventura County in perpetuity, through an alliance that values dialogue and cooperation, and where a diversity of affected views and interests are represented."* Membership included stakeholders from the agricultural, environmental, farm labor, distribution, and civic sectors. The AFA roundtable met regularly for about a decade, and during that time published a series of issue papers addressing the need for increased farmworker housing in the region, pesticide use near schools, land-use principles to mitigate ag-urban conflicts, and community stewardship of agriculture. The last of these was the focus of a 2006 countywide summit titled *"Building a Community of Good Stewards."* (Refer to Appendix F) and serves as the inspiration for Cornerstone 4 of this initiative.



VENTURA COUNTY HAS ONE OF THE 10 LARGEST AGRICULTURAL ECONOMIES AMONG ALL COUNTIES IN THE UNITED STATES

## State Initiatives and Programs

It is the policy of the State of California that agriculture is a strategic resource necessary to support a sustainable food production and delivery system as well as a vibrant natural resource base in California that promotes healthy citizens, thriving communities and a healthy environment. The California State Board of Food and Agriculture developed an action guide, the California Agricultural Vision (AgVision) 2017, which presents a vision to support this policy: “*Californians take pride in their innovative thriving California farmers and ranchers for their contributions to a healthy population and planet.*” AgVision outlines recommendations for five strategic priority areas, which include water, regulatory environment, labor/human capital, resource protection and stewardship, and outreach and communications.

In October 2020, Governor Gavin Newsom issued Executive Order N-82-20, known as the 30 x 30 Initiative. This executive order sets a goal to conserve 30 percent of the state’s land and coastal waters by 2030. This guides possible actions to achieve that goal, prioritizing nature-based solutions to fight against climate change. One of the plan’s core commitments is to protect California’s food supply, which would include supporting food sustainability programs for soil health and pollinator protection, providing training and professional development for jobs related to outdoor activities and conservation, and promoting climate smart land management.

The **California Department of Conservation** administers several programs that support many of the actions that this Initiative seeks to achieve. The Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program (SALC) supports California’s greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction goals by making strategic investments to protect agricultural lands from conversion to more GHG-intensive uses. The program provides three types of awards: acquisition capacity grants, planning grants (including initial and implementation), and agricultural conservation easement grants. The goals of SALC are to: Protect agricultural lands that support infill and compact development; contribute to carbon neutrality; support sustainable land management; support coordinated land use planning; and Support Executive Order N-82-20 (see the 30x30 Initiative described above). The **Multibenefit Land Repurposing Program** (MLRP) provides block grants to increase regional capacity to repurpose agricultural land to reduce reliance on groundwater while providing community health, economic well being, water supply, habitat, and climate benefits. The **California Farmland Conservancy Program** supports local efforts to establish agricultural conservation easements and land improvement projects for the purpose of preserving important agricultural land resources and enhancing sustainable agricultural uses. The **Working Lands and Riparian Corridors Program** provides funds specifically to resource conservation districts to restore or enhance riparian corridors on agricultural lands.

See Appendix A, Agricultural and Working Lands Conservation Incentives & Tools, for a detailed list of other state and federal programs that may support the actions of this Plan.



## Yolo Case Study

### **Yolo County Case Study Found a 70-Fold Difference in the Annual Rate of GHG Emissions Between Urbanized Land and Irrigated Cropland:**

*In 2012, Professor Louise Jackson with her team from UC Davis led a place-based case study to research adaptation strategies for agricultural sustainability in Yolo County. Using a local inventory of agricultural GHG emissions for Yolo County, Jackson found that emissions from cropland and rangeland were several orders of magnitude lower than urbanized land per unit area. Calculated on an area-wide basis the Yolo County’s urban areas emitted approximately 152 tons of CO2 emissions per hectare per year and by contrast, in 1990 Yolo County’s irrigated cropland averaged 2.16 tons of CO2 emissions per hectare per year. The 70-fold difference in the annual rate of emissions between urbanized land and irrigated cropland underscored the importance of land use policies, which protect existing farmland from urban development, as likely tools to help stabilize and or reduce future emissions, particularly if they are coupled with “smart growth” policies that prioritize urban infill over expansion. The research also established that since emissions from cropland and rangeland were several orders of magnitude lower than urbanized land (per unit area), local measures to protect farmland may themselves be viewed as mitigation strategies, or at the very least a means of stabilizing emissions.*

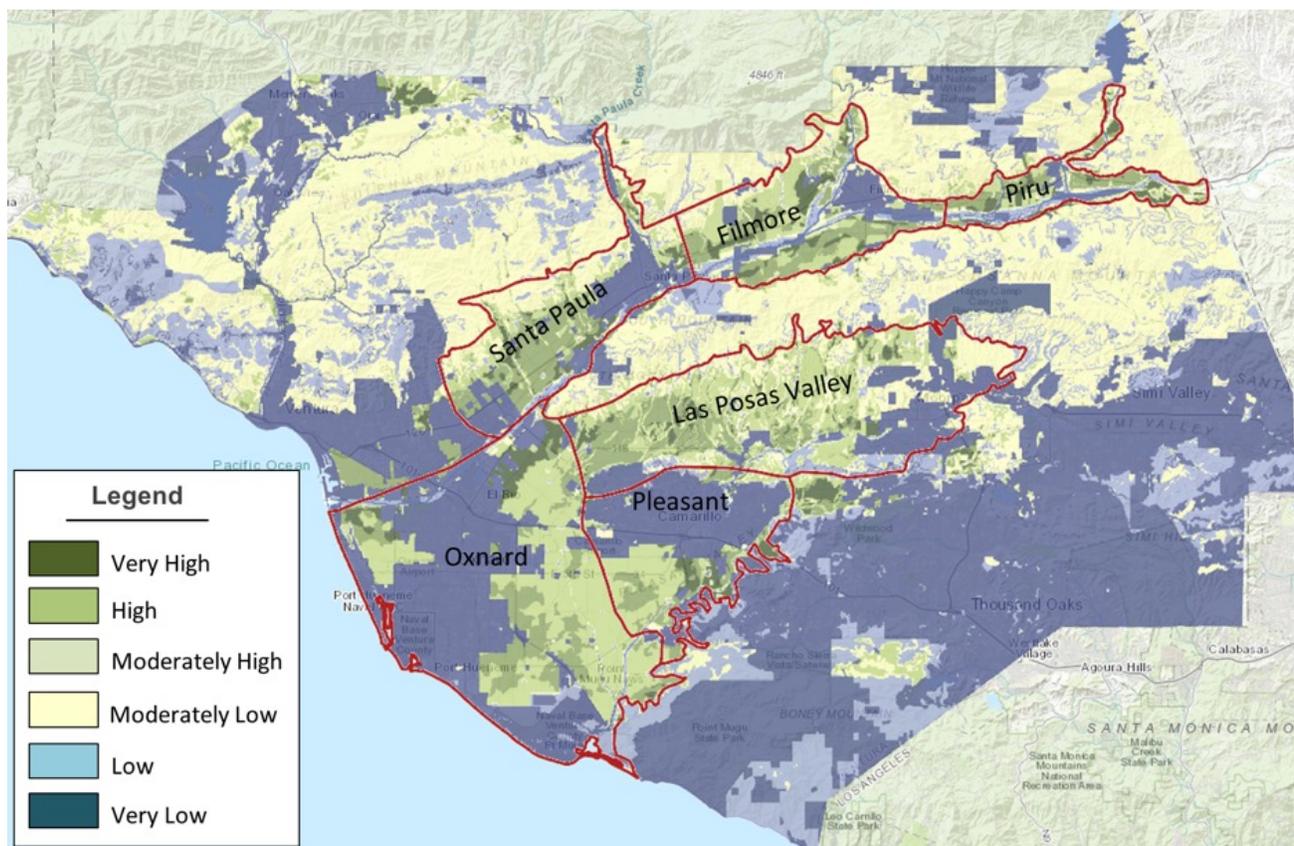
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## 4.4 KEY FINDINGS

Agriculture makes significant direct and indirect contributions to Ventura County’s economy, climate resilience, social vitality, and environmental health. To understand how to best strengthen the agricultural economy, it is helpful to first understand agriculture’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges.

### Risk and Opportunity Assessment

In defining and mapping the relative importance of agricultural land in the county, modeling results showed the concentration of the highest quality agricultural land in six of the agricultural subbasins, including **Oxnard, Las Posas Valley, Santa Paula, Pleasant Valley, Fillmore, and Piru** (Figure 3). This model includes Favorable Farmland Status based on County level Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) data as well as Good Soil Capacity based on level of Impaired Soil Chemistry (Salinity and Sodicity), Soil pH, and Soil Capacity informed by Irrigated Capability Class and Storie Index. (Storie index is a rating system based on soil properties that govern the potential for soil map unit components to be used for irrigated agriculture in California).



**FIGURE 3.** SUBBASINS IN VENTURA COUNTY WITH THE HIGHEST CONCENTRATION OF THE HIGHEST QUALITY AGRICULTURAL LANDS

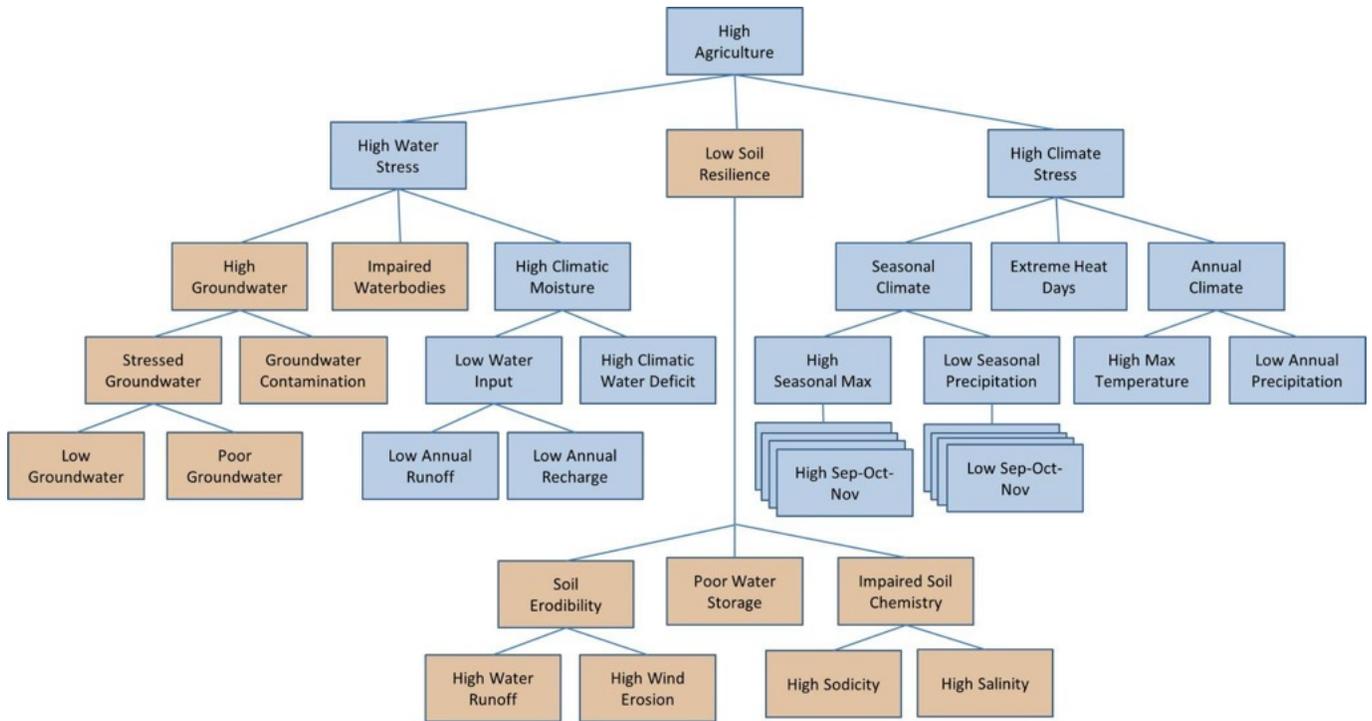


FIGURE 4. GENERAL DIAGRAM OF AGRICULTURAL STRESS MODEL

Central to the agricultural value and risk analysis was the use of a series of logic models that included participation by members of the community. The stress models developed for this assessment focused on two factors: (1) current and future water availability and (2) climate change. Soil condition was also included but to a lesser degree. For some model components (e.g., soil characteristics), the stress models used the same data inputs; however, different climate components (e.g., annual and seasonal temperature and precipitation, extreme heat days, and climatic water deficits) were different for the three climate future scenarios considered. A general diagram for the agriculture stress model is provided in Figure 4 depicting which components were held constant for all of the models (brown) and which ones differed based on future climate projections (blue).

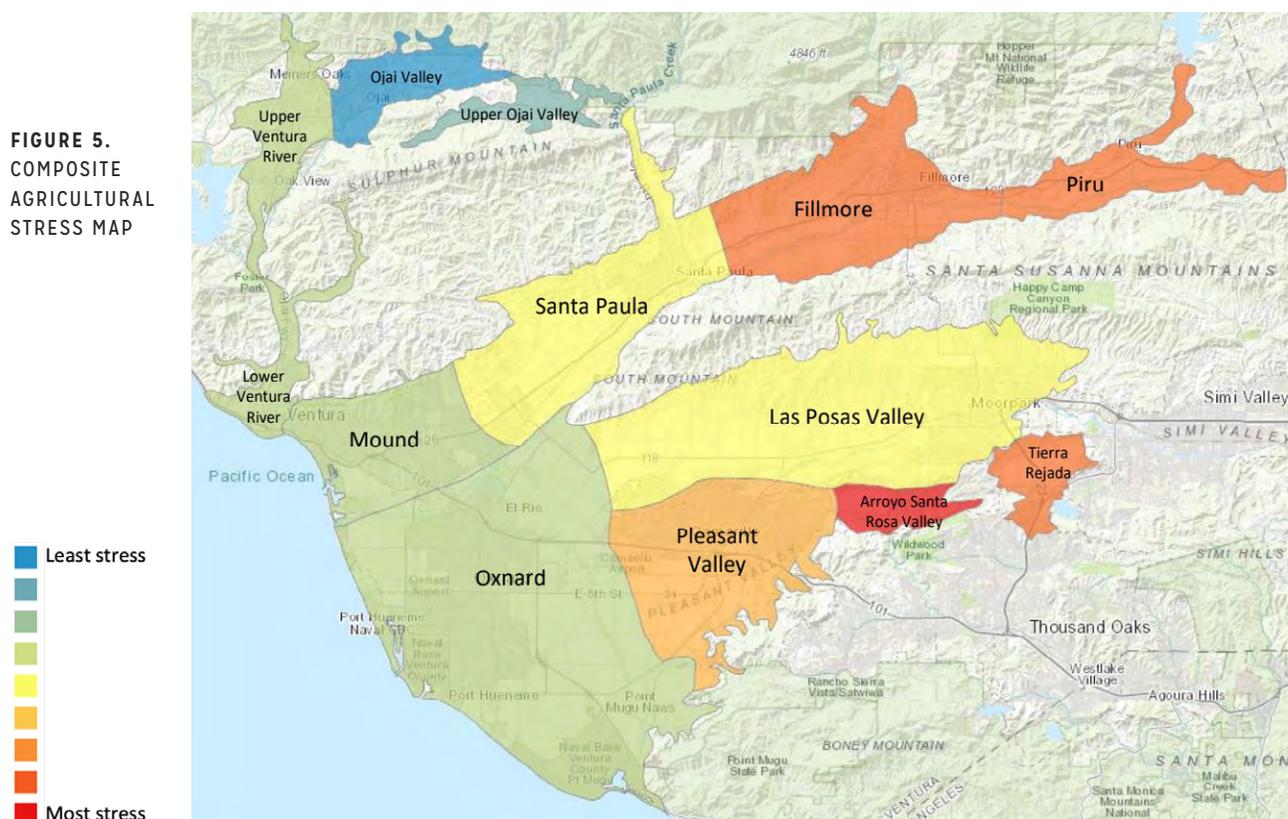
The **Risk Assessment** results identified that, of the numerous stresses on agricultural lands in the County, water availability and projected climate change are the most instrumental in driving many of the other factors such as sea-level rise, saltwater intrusion into groundwater, exotic species infestation, crop diseases, and increased wildfire frequency and severity. The stress models show the County under considerable stress even under the mildest future (warm, wet future |CNRM-CM5). In general, the region is projected to experience considerable increases in maximum temperatures (including significantly more extreme heat days) with an overall decrease in precipitation punctuated by extreme precipitation events. However, the models showed that the level and types of stress were not distributed uniformly across the County – **some subbasins showed more stress than others**. The model also found that the subbasin stress patterns remained consistent regardless of the climate future evaluated.

From a climate change perspective, the subbasins that are impacted by marine influences, especially **Oxnard, Mound, and Lower Ventura River Valley**, are somewhat buffered against the most dramatic climate changes projected to occur in the County. **These areas are potentially important refugia areas for agriculture in Ventura County.** However, these are also locations that have other current and projected stresses that need to be addressed for their long-term viability. Most notable is the state of the groundwater aquifers in these subbasins, which are classified as being critically overdrafted according to the California Department of Water Resources (2020). Another potential serious viability issue unique to coastal areas is the projections of sea-level rise. In Ventura County, the Oxnard subbasin has the most to lose without intervention to protect both the built environment and well as valuable agricultural lands where as much as 20 percent of the existing agriculture lands in the subbasin could be routinely flooded.

Building on the **Risk Assessment** modeling (which was heavily focused on climate stress criteria), the prioritization analysis considered additional criteria to provide practical insights into **which agricultural lands were more likely to remain resilient and productive given future conditions** (based on climate projection impacts plus water stresses and other factors) compared to the higher stressed agricultural lands.

Based on the **Prioritization Criteria** (minus the two socio-economic inputs), modeling results for the subbasin profiles (Figure 5) show the **Arroyo Santa Rosa Valley as having the greatest overall threat to current agriculture**; however, it represents less than two percent of the County's total croplands. **Of the larger agricultural subbasins, Piru and Fillmore showed the highest level of overall stress; Pleasant Valley showed moderately high stress levels; Las Posas Valley and Santa Paula showed moderate stress levels; and Oxnard and Mound showed moderately low stress levels. The projected least-stressed subbasins regardless of size were the two Ojai subbasins.**

**FIGURE 5.**  
COMPOSITE  
AGRICULTURAL  
STRESS MAP





## Economic Contributions

The County’s temperate climate, soils and long growing season support a wide diversity of agricultural products. There are several ways to measure the County’s agricultural economy. The basic metric is the direct ‘farm-gate’ value of products produced on farmland within the County. ***In 2020, the gross value of Ventura County’s agricultural production was slightly below \$2 billion, an increase from approximately \$1 billion in 2000.<sup>5</sup> Adjusting for inflation, this represents an increase of slightly more than 25 percent over the two decades.***

Considering the acres harvested, the top three major crops by acreage include lemons, avocados, and celery, with over 10,000 acres harvested for each crop. On the basis of farm gate value, ***fruit and nut crops dominate the agricultural economy in Ventura County, accounting for over 60 percent of total crop value in 2020 at \$1.2 billion. Second and third in value by major category are vegetable crops at \$0.5 billion and nursery stock at \$0.2 billion.<sup>6</sup> Combined, these three categories generate 97 percent of the agricultural value in Ventura County.***

***Employment on the over 2,135 farms in Ventura County,<sup>7</sup> represents 25,100 jobs, eight percent of overall wage and salary employment in the County.<sup>8</sup>***

Since 1990, farm employment has increased nearly 50 percent, while overall county employment has only increased by 27 percent over the same period. Unlike other sectors of the economy which saw a decline in jobs due to the COVID pandemic, farm employment levels did not decrease beyond the usual seasonal pattern, reflecting the essential nature of agricultural activity regardless of lockdowns and other measures that adversely impacted much of the economy.

While agriculture’s direct economic output is often referenced, the total holistic economic activity associated with Ventura County agriculture as measured in indirect contributions is also an important indicator of the industry’s overall economic impact in the county. This means that economic activity from agricultural businesses generates additional jobs and businesses in other sectors that are supported by the household expenditures of the agriculture workers and the expenditures of agriculture businesses in the county.

<sup>5</sup> Crop and Livestock Reports, 2010-2020, Ventura County Agricultural Commissioner’s Office

<sup>6</sup> Crop and Livestock Reports, 2010-2020, Ventura County Agricultural Commissioner’s Office

<sup>7</sup> USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, Census of Agriculture

<sup>8</sup> The total farm employment estimates here are from the Current Employment Statistics (CES) series from the California Employment Development Department, which are considered the official state employment estimates. Estimates from various other sources, such as the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW), IMPLAN, and the 2017 Census of Agriculture are in the same general range

In 2022 dollars and on an annual basis, Ventura County's agricultural sector directly provides approximately \$1.4 million in labor income, adds \$1.4 billion in value, and generates \$1.8 billion in output. In addition to these direct contributions, ***on an annual basis the agricultural sector supports an additional 5,760 indirect and induced jobs and is responsible for \$610 million in indirect and induced value added and \$1.0 billion in output.***<sup>9</sup> The retail industry is one of the main beneficiaries of agriculture's spending within Ventura County; however, at 8.6 percent of the total annual indirect and induced impacts, it ranks below several other sectors, including the real estate/rental/leasing sector (25.7 percent), followed by Finance/Insurance (13.9 percent), Health Care/Social Assistance (11.3 percent) and Wholesale Trade (9.3 percent). These data demonstrate that the agricultural activities that occur in Ventura County's rural areas support a diverse range of economic activity that is likely to be found mostly in Ventura County's cities.

The economic value of food processing and other activities that are related to marketing and selling finished products that are made from local produce are not fully captured in the direct, indirect, and induced economic impacts as described above; however, a 2015 study of Ventura County food processing opportunities indicated that, as of 2014, food processing contributed \$814 million of annual economic output to the county economy. The benefits of food processing to Ventura County include long-term competitiveness for growers, new job opportunities for the region's labor, food security for the region, and regional quality of life. The 2015 study indicated that indirect and induced economic impacts from a food processing facility such as a fruit puree producer with 115 onsite jobs would create 200 additional jobs within the county. In addition, allowing farmers to capture economic benefits from food processing can be an important component of their long-term economic sustainability and preserving Ventura County's base agricultural production.

***In addition to economic output and jobs quantified above, Ventura County agriculture provides a range of other benefits and contributions to the local community.*** Not only is Ventura County's agricultural activity an integral part of the Ventura County landscape from a visual and aesthetic standpoint; it is also a visitor attraction. In 2017, there were 58 Ventura County farm operations that reported income from "ag tourism and recreational services" for a total of \$20.5 million in annual income.<sup>10</sup> Visitor attractions associated with local farms include tours, farm stays, and venues for public and private events. Agriculture and related activities are components of agritourism more broadly, which helps to make Ventura County a visitor destination, bringing additional economic benefits in related sectors such as retail, hospitality, and recreation.

Ecosystem services represent another real, but difficult to quantify economic contribution of agriculture. Through direct and indirect contributions, ecosystem services provide humans with the necessary provisions for life, a healthy environment, and emotional comfort. The ecosystem functions outside of the economy however, it provides natural benefits that allow the economy to function, such as crops and soil fertility. Agricultural lands are and can be managed to provide ecosystem services to the greater community by providing food, energy, climate stability, improving soil retention, contributing to natural beauty and much more. The value of ecosystem services provided by Ventura County's farm and rangeland ranges between approximately \$174 million and \$491 million per year.<sup>11</sup>

**EMPLOYMENT ON THE OVER  
2,135 FARMS IN VENTURA  
COUNTY, REPRESENTS 25,100  
JOBS, EIGHT PERCENT OF  
OVERALL WAGE AND SALARY  
EMPLOYMENT IN THE COUNTY.**

<sup>9</sup> Data is derived using the IMPLAN input-output model to estimate the indirect and induced economic impacts (i.e., "multiplier effects") of Ventura County's agricultural production within other sectors of Ventura County's economy.

<sup>10</sup> USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service. Census of Agriculture

<sup>11</sup> Data analysis is derived using "Nature's Value in Santa Clara County". Earth Economics and Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority, 2014



## Education and Awareness

The preservation of farmland and economic viability of agriculture goes well beyond the purview of direct stakeholders, including farmers, ranchers, farm workers, landowners, processors, distributors, direct-market outlets, agricultural support businesses, funders, lenders, and community organizations focused on agricultural issues. A robust agricultural economy and permanent protection of agricultural resources require public awareness, sense of connection and commitment to action.

In 2012, Ventura County and the University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE) conducted a survey of 40 programs and organizations that provide education to youth, adults, and community in the areas of agricultural literacy, nutrition, environmental, natural resources, and gardening in the County. While they found *“evidence of agriculture education in the region”*, they *concluded that many efforts operated in isolation and recommended a network of educators or subcommittee to focus on communication, connecting stakeholders with available resources, and engaging underserved groups*. The development of this Strategic Plan included creating a **Multifaceted Education and Awareness Strategy** (see Appendix D) to address this challenge. With input from stakeholders directly involved in agricultural education and awareness efforts in Ventura County, *a new program was designed, Rural-Urban Connections (RUCs), to catalyze co-stewardship of agriculture by fostering coordination of existing entities and their activities, strengthening their collective impact and helping to increase needed financial resources for current and new initiatives*. The hoped-for outcome is a political and cultural environment that supports co-stewardship of a vibrant and resilient agriculture in the County. The risks of continuing business as usual include public apathy, misinformation or lack of information, and existing organizations competing for resources. The concept is for the program to be located within the UCCE Ventura County Office and co-developed with other leading Ventura County agricultural education organizations for common benefit.



## Stakeholders Common Themes

### Key Ingredients for a Viable Agricultural Future are:

#### ADAPTING TO A FUTURE WITH LESS WATER:

*Developing economic and environmental strategies to help transition working lands to less water intensive uses such as dryland farming, rangeland, and buffer zones et al for water savings.*

#### DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS TO DIVERSIFY OPERATIONS AND BETTER UTILIZE LAND:

*Allowing and streamlining the establishment of agricultural supportive uses, such as value added processing, storage areas, equipment yards, equipment staging, food hubs, and farmworker housing.*

#### FARMWORKER HOUSING:

*Promoting the development of agricultural workforce housing.*

#### GENERATIONAL BUSINESS SUCCESSION:

*Attracting and retaining young people into agriculture and facilitating diverse ownership of agricultural lands.*

#### COMMUNITY INVESTMENT IN WORKING LANDS:

*Creating a diversity of ways for the community to be able to contribute and participate in the ongoing health and vitality of the County's working lands.*

#### SUPPORTIVE INFRASTRUCTURE:

*Developing food hubs, warehousing, distribution, equipment and farm supplies.*

#### WORKFORCE QUALITY OF LIFE:

*Cultivating a healthy workforce. Health, wages, housing, transportation, upward mobility are key to the agricultural economy.*

#### COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS:

*Developing enduring collaborative partnerships among farmers, county and city agencies, land trusts, and nonprofits, to identify and execute mutual benefit opportunities.*

