



2021 Sacramento Region Food System Action Plan

November 2021

Building on the region's many agricultural and food assets, the Regional Action Plan lays the foundation for a more equitable, sustainable, and thriving future that supports the food needs of all of our communities for generations to come. Its purpose is to summarize and outline opportunities for collaborative action that strengthen the food system in the Sacramento region.

The Sacramento Region Community Foundation and Valley Vision have developed the Regional Action Plan to address new realities in our food system. It leverages our existing strengths and accounts for the growing impacts of climate change and new hardships spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Regional Action Plan provides a common framework for the investment strategies, leadership, and mechanisms needed to transform our food system into one that provides more equitable, accessible, and healthy food sources and opportunities for residents living in El Dorado, Placer, Sacramento, and Yolo counties.



Photo courtesy of Andrew Nixon, CapRadio



Overview

The Sacramento region is geographically situated at the heart of one of the world’s largest agricultural economies. With 1.5 million acres of farmland, we produce an enviable variety of high-quality crops and food products shipped around the globe—making food and agriculture one of our most prized economic sectors. Our region has long served as a global innovator and leader in sustainable agriculture, food, health, and research. The region proudly enjoys a rich heritage as America’s Farm to Fork Capital, officially adopting the brand in 2012.

Why the region needs a food system action plan

Food system resilience is paramount to a viable future, both within the Sacramento region and around the globe. Unfortunately, local food systems everywhere are under increasing pressure.

Environmental impacts, inequitable resource and distribution systems, supply-chain disruption, next-generation workforce gaps, and disparities in food security threaten the long-term sustainability of our food system and the communities it serves.

The Sacramento region’s ability to understand, prepare for, and withstand existential threats is critical. Simultaneously, there are many new resources and innovations that will help transform regional food systems. By leveraging existing strengths and opportunities identified in the Regional Action Plan and working together to seek shared solutions, we can catalyze our food system into one that works for all.

How? By identifying and enacting integrated strategies for strengthening our food system into one that is equitable, sustainable, and thriving — now and for generations. That’s exactly what the Regional Action Plan is designed to do.

The Regional Action Plan builds on the seminal Food System Action Plan published in 2015, which laid early groundwork for investments, facilities, partnerships, and capacity building. While many important accomplishments have occurred as a result, hardships caused by the pandemic, wildfire, and drought, require a response to new demands.

Six-point action plan

Using extensive stakeholder engagement, community surveys, and public opinion research through Valley Vision’s Food System Resilience Poll, we’ve identified top priorities across six Strategic Focus Areas. Challenges, assets, and opportunities are identified for each, culminating in a series of cross-cutting recommendations where further action and investment are needed.

For more detailed information, consult the full version of the Regional Action Plan, which provides a comprehensive blueprint and specific actions and recommendations. What follows is a high-level summary of the Regional Action Plan’s top recommendations.

Six Strategic Focus Areas



Viability of Agriculture



Key Metrics: 29% of all farmers in the region are new to agriculture. 95% are white. The average size of local farms is 196 acres. Lack of access to land and capital are major barriers for new farmers.

OUR REGIONAL ASSETS	CHALLENGES WE FACE	RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>The region possesses many assets, including farmer and technical assistance programs, an abundance of prime farmlands, and world-renowned agricultural innovation at UC Davis and other area colleges. We also excel in agrifood tech innovation and have an abundance of research labs, accelerators, and incubators. The region embraces its Farm to Fork culture and residents value natural, open spaces and farmlands, according to the Food System Resilience Poll findings.</p>	<p>Costs associated with farming, growing pressures to convert valuable agricultural lands to other uses, access to ample and reliable water supply, and concerning environmental and extreme weather events (drought and heat) threaten future food system viability. Access to land, capital, and technical assistance also present major barriers.</p>	<p>Increase funding mechanisms and investment for more equitable access to capital, land, equipment, and broadband access especially for new, Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), and smaller enterprise farmers.</p> <p>Strengthen and/or increase farmer training programs and urban agriculture, develop new market opportunities including agritourism, expand institutional procurement, and leverage state and federal resources.</p>



Key Metrics: 83% of Sacramento area residents are concerned about climate threats to the food system, according to Food System Resilience Poll findings. More than 30%-40% of food is wasted along the supply chain.

OUR REGIONAL ASSETS	CHALLENGES WE FACE	RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>The Sacramento region is creating more opportunities for farmers, ranchers, food producers, and others to access local markets and transition to sustainable agricultural and food production, distribution, and consumption practices.</p>	<p>Concerns surrounding environmental sustainability cut across the entire food system. The region’s propensity for severe drought is especially detrimental to small farmers who do not have access to lower levels of groundwater basins and cannot afford the cost of securing water sources. Sustainable funding is needed to support infrastructure, capacity, and tools for food recovery.</p>	<p>Increase conservation easements consistent with policies that preserve land for agriculture and reduce pressure on farmers to sell their farms.</p> <p>Adopt agricultural technologies and scale partnerships to improve resource efficiencies and sustainable practices.</p> <p>Develop funding strategies, capacity, and the infrastructure needed to increase food recovery.</p>



Picture of Three Sisters Gardens

Food Economy



Key Metrics: Each dollar spent on locally-purchased food by large institutions—such as schools and hospitals—can generate up to an additional \$2.16 in local economic activity. Gaps in enrollment of CalFresh-eligible residents leaves behind \$146 million that could otherwise support farmers, distributors, and retailers.

OUR REGIONAL ASSETS	CHALLENGES WE FACE	RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>The region’s food economy is stimulated by local purchasing at farmers’ markets, urban agricultural sources, and grocery stores. Our food system infrastructure also includes new food hubs and incubators that can help smaller farmers get connected to larger markets. Localized purchasing direct from farms to source food programs at large institutions like schools and hospitals is becoming more prevalent.</p>	<p>Despite growing popularity, the region’s purchasing power by large institutions is not meeting its full potential. Institutional procurement and increased CalFresh enrollment stand as two of the region’s biggest opportunities for growing the local food economy.</p>	<p>Increase investment in a network of food hubs, food incubators, public markets, mobile markets, school central kitchens, storage and processing facilities, and community kitchens to create market channels for local sourcing.</p> <p>Broaden large-scale institutional procurement of locally-sourced food, especially for underinvested and vulnerable populations such as seniors and K-12 students.</p>

Careers in Food and Agriculture



Key Metrics: The average age of a farmer is 58 years. The average age of a skilled food and beverage processor is 56 years.

OUR REGIONAL ASSETS	CHALLENGES WE FACE	RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>New technologies and growing opportunities in agrifood tech and innovation are promising for careers in food and agriculture and can help draw a new generation of farmers and entrepreneurs. Education and workforce institutions are developing strong partnerships with employers to meet workforce gaps, including in agrifood tech.</p>	<p>An aging workforce, lack of awareness about workforce opportunities, lack of diversity, and rapidly changing technologies are hindrances leading to critical workforce gaps across the industry, putting the ability to sustain the region’s thriving food economy at risk. Climate risks are creating health challenges for workers.</p>	<p>Increase workforce development and career awareness opportunities.</p> <p>Support apprenticeships, youth programs, and programs for high-barrier adults, veterans, refugees, and immigrants to provide new skills development and career pathways.</p> <p>Support the health and wellbeing of front-line workers.</p>



Picture of Yolo Food Bank food distribution



Picture of Sacramento Food Bank and Family Services



Picture of Placer Food Bank distribution

Food Security and Healthy Food Access



Key Metrics: Almost 300,000 residents in the Sacramento region were estimated to be food insecure in 2021, representing 12.4% or one in eight residents. Valley Vision research found even higher rates of local food insecurity at 16%. The number of food insecure residents increased by 50% (on average) from pre-COVID to present levels and the amount of food distributed by food banks increased by more than 40%. El Dorado, Placer, and Yolo counties' CalFresh enrollment rates lag, at 40-50% of those who are eligible to enroll.

OUR REGIONAL ASSETS	CHALLENGES WE FACE	RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>Levels of food insecurity improved from 2015, in part due to concerted efforts by food banks and other nonprofits to strengthen the emergency food system. This system pivoted during the pandemic to handle major increases in food insecure individuals and pounds of food and meals distributed. There are multiple collaborative efforts bringing partners together to strengthen food access and health. New models such as mobile markets and food box delivery services are helping reach underserved areas lacking access to healthy fresh food.</p>	<p>Food insecurity rose during the pandemic and will remain high in the near future. There are geographic differences that correlate with economic disadvantages. Insufficient and unstable funding limits food banks' ability to effectively support infrastructure and capacity improvements, including staffing and equipment. Barriers to CalFresh enrollment include long-term lack of adequate state-funded resources for counties, administrative constraints, lack of cultural competence in food and support services, language, and misinformation.</p>	<p>Support the emergency food system with sustainable government funding for multi-year operations and expanded infrastructure, facilities, and staffing.</p> <p>Increase resources and capacity to enable counties and partners to expand CalFresh enrollment and overcome administrative and other barriers.</p> <p>Increase direct access to healthy fresh produce through farmers' markets, farm stands, urban farms, community gardens, and mobile markets.</p>



Key Metrics: More than 60% of U.S. residents report the cost of healthy foods as a barrier to access. Community gardens are important to more than half of Food System Resilience poll respondents, but many cite having no access to one, especially for communities of color and low-income residents.

OUR REGIONAL ASSETS	CHALLENGES WE FACE	RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>Nonprofit organizations, school districts, food banks, farmers, health systems, restaurants, and grocery stores have many existing partnerships to improve food and nutrition literacy. There are strong programs that expose youth to food and nutrition literacy and agriculture. Hospitals, community health centers, and colleges emphasize food literacy and its relationship to health. Urban agriculture is growing, with increasing demand for farms and community gardens.</p>	<p>Affordability of, and access to, healthy foods is a major barrier to health and nutrition. Food literacy, health, and nutrition education programs are not permanently integrated into all schools nor fully funded with long-term, multi-year funding.</p> <p>It is expensive to prepare and sustain community gardens, given requirements for land, improvements (i.e., soil, irrigation), operating expenses, and staffing.</p>	<p>Increase resources for schools, nonprofits, and farmers to expand food and nutrition literacy and marketing efforts.</p> <p>Expand local food access points in communities, including community gardens, mobile markets, urban agriculture, school gardens, farmers’ markets, and Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs).</p> <p>Increase community gardens and other community access points to expand opportunities for healthy food access, education, and nutrition.</p>

Data Sources: USDA Census of Agriculture, Other USDA reports, Valley Vision’s Food System Resilience Poll, Feeding America, Nourish California, Valley Vision AgTech Workforce Assessment, Food and Agriculture Cluster Workforce Reports/Center of Excellence at Los Rios; AgFunder Agrifood Tech Investment Report, 2021; California Dept. of Conservation; local food banks. National Farm to School Network, 2020 Factsheet.



Picture of the International Rescue Committee, New Roots Farm



Picture of Soil Born Farms



Picture of Fiery Ginger Farms

What's Next

The release of the Regional Action Plan advances Phase One of this food system effort. It provides the intersection where stakeholders, partners, policymakers, and industry leaders can collaborate, align, and leverage resources for investment priorities.

In Phase Two, we will identify specific funding models, investment strategies, and the mechanisms needed to achieve the priorities and recommendations. The culmination of this work will inform the Foundation's Strategic Initiative, "Connecting the Regional Food Economy," as well as other philanthropic, government, and public and private sector investors, partners, and stakeholders within and outside of the region.

Companion research and analysis on regional food security status, community food guides prepared by UC Davis, and a listing of new and expanded state and federal resources that can support recommendations and actions are available on [Valley Vision's](http://ValleyVision.org) website.

To stay engaged and informed about the Regional Action Plan and Phase Two, email us at FoodAndAg@ValleyVision.org.



valley vision

www.valleyvision.org

916-325-1630



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www.sacregcf.org

916-921-7723

"This plan lays down concrete steps we can take today to ensure food security and sustainability for tomorrow. By augmenting financial support for food banks, supporting additional capacity for food access, enhancing CalFresh enrollment, preparing the next generation of farmers and food entrepreneurs, and improving local market support for underserved communities, our food system becomes one that is more strongly positioned to serve the needs of a growing population and changing conditions."

Linda Beech Cutler
CEO, Sacramento Region
Community Foundation