



# SACRAMENTO REGION Coordinated Rural Opportunities Plan

March 2024

## Sacramento County Profile





# Introduction

The Coordinated Rural Opportunities Plan (CROP) is funded by the Department of Conservation’s Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation (SALC) Program and is a joint effort between the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG) and Valley Vision. CROP is part of the [Rural-Urban Connections Strategy](#) (RUCS) to enhance rural economies and the natural assets that drive them. CROP will result in comprehensive profiles of each

county in the Sacramento region, in addition to a region-wide profile. The profiles will serve as valuable resources for identifying priority areas for infrastructure investments and programs that will strengthen the region’s food and agricultural cluster. Furthermore, CROP will provide county and regional leaders the opportunity to address infrastructure investment challenges and collectively come together to find solutions that will add to the region’s agricultural sustainability and long-term economic health and resiliency.

Agriculture is deeply rooted in the rich history of the Sacramento region and continually contributes to its unique identity. Leading America as the Farm to Fork Capital, the Sacramento region provides \$2.2 billion in farmgate output value, and the agricultural economy is valued at more than \$12 billion.<sup>1</sup> The food and agriculture cluster consists of crop production, packaging and processing, distribution, and related operations and industries. Although the agricultural sector sustains the region’s robust economy, infrastructure challenges are impeding the ability of the six counties to advance sustainable food production and supply chains, statewide and globally.

## FOOD SYSTEM INFRASTRUCTURE



Improves the efficiency, sustainability, and productivity of the local food system



Increases access to nutritious, local, and seasonal foods in historically disinvested communities



Supports the viability of agriculture, addresses climate challenges, and helps preserve valuable farmlands



Creates new jobs, supports food and ag-related businesses, spurs innovation, and provides economic opportunities



## Background:

# Sacramento County

Sacramento County is noteworthy as the home of the State Capitol of California, the fifth largest economy in the world. The [county's population](#) is 1,572,453 with seven incorporated cities ranging in size from 769 persons in Isleton, to more than 518,000 persons residing in the City of Sacramento. Sixty-two percent of the county's residents live within its unincorporated areas, from suburban areas and urbanizing areas near the cities, to more low-density rural areas located throughout the county, especially in the southern parts. Residents who live in unincorporated yet urbanized areas rely upon the County to provide city-like services.

The city of Sacramento is located at the confluence of the Sacramento and American Rivers. The county's land base extends from the low-lying lands in the southwest parts of the county between the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers - the Sacramento San-Joaquin

Delta (Delta) - north to about ten miles beyond the State Capitol and east to the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. The Delta includes approximately 500,000 acres of waterways, levees, and farmed lands extending over portions of five counties: Solano, Yolo, Sacramento, San Joaquin, and Contra Costa. It is the largest estuary on the West Coast and provides direct access to the San Francisco Bay. The Delta is one of the most fertile regions of the county and accounts for much of the county's agricultural production. There are also rangelands in the eastern area of the county, as well as a notable agricultural area known as the Sloughouse. While the rivers provide numerous invaluable resources for the region, the region and county also are at high risk for flooding. The region is often considered to be the most at-risk region in America for catastrophic flooding, relying on an aging system of levees, weirs, and bypasses and Folsom Dam to reduce its flood risk.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.spk.usace.army.mil/Missions/Civil-Works/Sacramento-Levee-Upgrades/>



## Sacramento County's Top Five 2022 Commodities

- |                |                |
|----------------|----------------|
| 1. Wine Grapes | 4. Poultry     |
| 2. Milk        | 5. Aquaculture |
| 3. Pears       |                |

The top 5 commodities in Sacramento County were valued at \$401,426,000 in 2022, a 6% increase from \$377,520,000 in 2021.

The county has a strong agricultural heritage and its diverse agricultural landscape includes farms, ranches, orchards, and vineyards producing a variety of crops such as rice, tomatoes, pears, and grapes, as well as dairy and livestock commodities. The county's gross value of agricultural commodities increased 5% in 2022 to \$602,751,000 compared to the 2021 gross production value. Wine grapes were the highest-valued commodity in the county, followed by milk, pears, poultry, and aquaculture. The increase in value for 2022 is partially attributable to the increase in the price of milk, and the value of pears and aquaculture. However, climate variability impacts agriculture in the county. For example, pollination was poor in 2023, as the temperatures and rain kept the bees in their boxes during pollination.<sup>3</sup> While many probably think more of the urban aspects of Sacramento County (the largest population in the region), the \$600 million agricultural output in the county ranks second in the entire six-county region in terms of agricultural economy.

Agriculture in the county occurs on smaller scales across many jurisdictions (including growing urban ag opportunities discussed below), but the majority of production occurs in the unincorporated area. As such, many of the examples and recommendations in this profile focus on the County of Sacramento, in collaboration with other partners such as other local jurisdictions or conservation entities. Indeed, Sacramento County is the only county in the region that has an Agricultural Advisory Committee. The goal of the Committee is to provide assistance and guidance in the implementation of the Sacramento County General Plan, including the Agricultural Element, to provide recommendations to the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors regarding land use modifications that may impact agricultural operations in the County, and to provide input on applications and administration for Williamson Act contracts.

3 <https://agcomm.saccounty.gov/AGCommMeeting/Minutes%20-%20April%2010%202023.pdf>



# Water Infrastructure

Sacramento County's water resources include four rivers, numerous streams, the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, and an extensive groundwater basin. The county is bordered on the west by the Sacramento River, a significant source of surface water for municipal, agricultural, and recreational uses. The Folsom Dam and Reservoir, located in the eastern part of the county, has a storage capacity of one million acre-feet and provides water supply, flood control, power generation, and recreation. The lower American River flows from Folsom Dam to its confluence with the Sacramento River. The Cosumnes River and a portion of the lower Mokelumne River flow across the South County, providing water for municipal and agricultural use, and supporting significant wetlands and riparian habitat, such as the Cosumnes River Preserve. The county's many streams provide a limited supply of water for agricultural and recreational uses.

The groundwater basin below the county surface has a freshwater storage volume estimated at more than 30,000,000 acre-feet, making 100 feet the average depth to access groundwater. A majority of the recharge of the groundwater basins takes place along the American and Cosumnes Rivers, with additional recharge from the Sacramento River and local streams.

Groundwater provides more than one-half the water supply for municipal and agricultural water uses in Sacramento County.<sup>4</sup> Groundwater Sustainability Agencies are trying to better understand how to project agricultural growth or shrinkage throughout the county to have a better understanding of what the groundwater conditions are. The Agricultural Element in the General Plan states the County shall actively encourage groundwater recharge, water conservation, and water recycling by both agricultural and urban water users.<sup>5</sup> Opportunities for groundwater recharge and conjunctive use have been explored proactively, such as Harvest Water.

Harvest Water is a new project through the Regional Sanitation District (Regional SAN, now Sac Sewer) and will provide reliable, high-quality recycled water to agricultural lands and existing habitats in southern Sacramento County in place of groundwater. SacSewer recently completed the EchoWater Project, which spanned more than a decade and upgraded the region's sewage treatment process to tertiary (final stage of the multi-stage wastewater cleaning process). Completion of this historic project makes it possible to deliver Harvest Water. Funded in part by a \$291.8 million Proposition 1 grant from the California Water Commission, Harvest Water is California's largest agricultural water recycling

4 <https://planning.saccounty.gov/LandUseRegulationDocuments/Documents/General-Plan/Conservation%20Element%20-%20Amended%2009-26-17.pdf>

5 <https://planning.saccounty.gov/PlansandProjectsIn-Progress/Documents/Agricultural%20Element%20-%20Amended%2012-17-2019.pdf>

project and is expected to produce 16.3 billion gallons of water per year, which can supply 16,000 acres of agricultural land.<sup>6,7</sup> Construction began in January 2024 and is expected to last until 2027. Construction activities include the development of a new pumping station at the EchoWater Resource Recovery Facility and a series of pipeline projects that will allow for the delivery of recycled water to various locations. Once fully operational, Harvest Water is expected to increase groundwater storage up to 370,000 acre feet - over one-third the volume of Folsom Lake. This new supply of recycled water will facilitate groundwater recovery, support sustainable agriculture, and will strengthen local habitats, including the Delta, benefitting both nature and people. In addition to the Harvest Water program, other methods to replenish the aquifer system should be pursued.

Omuchumme-Hartnell Water District (OHWD), a water district located in the Consumnes River Basin, has historically purchased and managed supplemental water from the Central Valley Project for the benefit of District agricultural users adjacent to the Consumnes River and Deer Creek. In recent years, however, the number of riparian diverters has decreased, leading the Water District to develop and create new projects that will enhance the water supply for its landowners and the region. The District is working with several universities, including UC Davis, to study how fast and effective recharging aquifers can happen when flooding agricultural fields, such as vineyards. Increasing water levels in the Consumnes River Basin will reduce the pumping cost for customers; the higher the water level in the basin, the less energy it takes to pump the water and the more efficient the pumps become.<sup>8</sup> Instead of building new pipelines or canals to deliver surface water, the District is using the underground water basin to store and transport water.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to the study, DWR awarded funding to OHWD to construct a Groundwater Recharge Project near the Cosumnes River. The project uses two existing diversion points on the Cosumnes River to flood dormant agricultural fields in the off-irrigation season between November and March when streamflow is high and excess water is available. The project diverts water in normal years to recharge the groundwater aquifer when sufficient diversion water is available in the river. The OHWD received a permit for this project, which includes two existing pump houses and pipelines, and the installation of two additional pump houses and a conveyance system. Groundwater recharge efforts such as the project with OHWD help the region balance flood control and water supply reliability by capturing, moving, and storing water, especially from heavy rainfall from atmospheric rivers.

Water management and flood risks in Sacramento County are linked to conditions upstream. Historically, both the Feather and the Sacramento Rivers cannot contain the amount of water that comes down the watershed, and as a result, the rivers overflow their banks, which turn into the Butte Basin, the Sutter Basin, and the Yolo Basin that convey the flows. As the waters recede, the nutrients added to the soil make it suitable for agriculture. However, such storm events typically carry debris and sediment, which clog the irrigation channels and need to be cleaned up afterward. The Sacramento Weir was built in 1916 and is located approximately four miles upstream of the Tower Bridge. The primary purpose of weirs along the Sacramento River is to protect the City of Sacramento from excessive flood stages in the Sacramento River channel downstream of the American River.

6 <https://www.sacsewer.com/harvest-water/>

7 <https://youtu.be/hFLufWNOoO0?si=SAQhdqJYbuXblsr>

8 <https://spectrumnews1.com/ca/la-west/environment/2023/03/14/farmers-and-researchers-working-to-shore-up-california-s-water-woes>

9 <https://ohwd.org/about-us>





Sacramento Weir

Managed by flood forecasters, the Sacramento Weir consists of 48 gates that must be manually opened to divert Sacramento and American River floodwaters to the west down the mile-long Sacramento Bypass to the Yolo Bypass.<sup>10</sup> Unlike dams or levees - which are designed to store water - weirs divert water and are only used in extreme rain events, with an average of five to ten years between utilization. Flood forecasters from the Department of Water Resources' Division of Flood Management provide the necessary predictive information to weir operators who manage the number of opened gates to control the river's water surface elevation. To help the region manage atmospheric rivers in the future, the U.S Army Corps of Engineers funded \$350 million to widen the Weir by constructing an additional passive weir that will allow floodwater to flow into the Yolo Bypass without the operation of manual gates. The manual gates will be used less frequently as a result and only opened during severe flooding events. The project will increase the level of flood protection for multiple communities in the counties of Sacramento and Yolo, including the cities of Sacramento and West Sacramento, and is a key component to a larger vision for multi-benefit projects in the region. When it's not flooded, the land can still

be used for agriculture. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Central Valley Flood Protection Board, Department of Water Resources, and the Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency broke ground on the Sacramento Weir expansion project in 2023 and estimate that the project will be completed by December 2026.<sup>11</sup>

The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta is the hub of California's water supply, supplying fresh water to two-thirds of the state's population and millions of acres of farmland. This estuary provides a habitat critical to the survival of many fish and wildlife species. It is also a rich agricultural area, a recreational destination, and a complex ecosystem that is home to a variety of wildlife. The Delta and its unique communities are also a major source of agritourism for both Sacramento and Yolo counties. The Sacramento River Delta region has a vast levee system that protects agriculture and the communities in the Delta. The long-term sustainability of the Delta and the region and state's freshwater supply is under threat from floods, rising sea levels, earthquake damage, aging levees, invasive species, and contaminants. The Delta ecosystem is also facing numerous threats that impact native plants, animals, migratory waterfowl, and fish. The Delta Conveyance project is discussed in detail in the Food System and Governance section below.

<sup>10</sup> <https://water.ca.gov/News/Blog/2024/Feb-24/Weirs-on-the-Sacramento-River-100-Years-of-Flood-Control>

<sup>11</sup> [https://water.ca.gov/-/media/DWR-Website/Web-Pages/Programs/Flood-Management/Flood-Planning-and-Studies/Central-Valley-Flood-Protection-Plan/Files/CVFPP-Updates/2022/CVFPP\\_U22\\_layout\\_v4.pdf](https://water.ca.gov/-/media/DWR-Website/Web-Pages/Programs/Flood-Management/Flood-Planning-and-Studies/Central-Valley-Flood-Protection-Plan/Files/CVFPP-Updates/2022/CVFPP_U22_layout_v4.pdf)

Many of the county's farmlands are prone to flooding, particularly in the southern portion of the county. An extensive system of levees and pumps has been developed to reduce flood damage in these areas; however, a majority of the levees are privately owned, making the costs of maintenance and repair challenging. The storms in early 2023 had a devastating impact on the county, especially in the southern portion of the county where several levees were destroyed, agricultural lands were flooded, and residents were trapped. In January 2023 a Presidential Emergency Declaration was issued for Sacramento County among others. More than \$38 million in losses were reported by area farms. Lost revenues included damaged crops, dead livestock, and damaged infrastructure.

When the flooding struck, commercial agricultural producers were forced to evacuate. In many cases, animals and equipment that couldn't be loaded onto trailers and moved were left behind, and crops were left unprotected. Farmers were not allowed back into the area until the water receded. There wasn't a system in place to enable law enforcement to determine who could safely return to check on crops, livestock, and equipment. The County held a series of community meetings to discuss how to create the new program that would allow qualified agriculture and livestock producers safe passage to their properties and

created the Ag Pass Program. The new Program provides guidance and direction for local governments and non-governmental organizations on how to safely allow accredited agricultural workers back onto their property to assess their businesses.<sup>12</sup> In any case, many of the levees that were damaged and required repairs still have not been fixed due to cost. Funding from FEMA and the County for levee repairs is limited, and the County and Reclamation District (RD) 800 are working to secure funding directly from Congress and/or the Legislature through different appropriation packages. Privately owned levees do not typically meet Army Corps of Engineer requirements, and thus do not qualify for FEMA, if damaged. This is an ongoing challenge for RDs managing privately owned levees across the county, with major public safety risks.


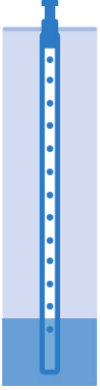

Other flooding risks arise from development. The urbanization of areas in Sacramento and throughout Placer and El Dorado Counties has increased the proportion of land covered by impervious surfaces, which negatively impacts the flow of natural streams and results in a higher risk of flooding. Additional Green Stormwater infrastructure and Low Impact Development in urban areas, such as rain gardens, swales, and permeable pavers would slow, redirect, and filter water through the soil instead of overwhelming the rivers through rapid runoff which can lead to flooded farmlands, roads and communities.



The photo shows the damage of a privately owned levee that did not qualify for FEMA funding.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.sacounty.gov/news/latest-news/Pages/Ag-Pass-Program-To-Assist-Farmers-During-Disasters.aspx>



Structural Actions	Contribution to Sacramento Regional Water Bank	Total Capital Cost (Estimated)
 <b>System Interties</b>	Installing interties between water systems could facilitate sharing of supplies among water providers in the Sacramento region. This would help distribute more surface water into the region in wet periods and allow the use of more groundwater throughout the region during dry periods.	\$50 M
	<b>Groundwater Well Rehabilitation</b> Rehabilitating up to 16 existing groundwater wells could increase the volume of water that could be recovered from the Water Bank during dry years. Recovery operations would be carried out consistent with local Groundwater Sustainability Plans.	\$16 M
	<b>New Groundwater Well Installation</b> Installing up to 37 new groundwater wells could increase the volume of water recovered from the Water Bank during dry years. Recovery operations would be carried out consistent with local Groundwater Sustainability Plans.	\$124 M
	<b>Groundwater Injection and Recovery Well</b> Installing or retrofitting up to 18 wells with both injection and recovery capability could store – or “deposit” – more water in the Water Bank during wet years for use during dry periods. These are commonly known as Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR) wells.	\$57 M
 <b>Booster Pump/ Pressure Reduction</b>	Installing booster pumps and pressure reduction equipment could address pressure differences between water systems, improving the ability of water providers to share supplies with neighboring communities in the Sacramento region.	\$41 M
<b>TOTAL NEAR-TERM INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS</b>		<b>\$288 M</b>

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The American River Basin Study is a comprehensive watershed-level look at projected climate change impacts on the Sacramento region. While not directly tied to agriculture, initiatives identified in the Study, such as the RiverArc project and the Sacramento Water Bank, will provide significant improvements to water supply reliability and sustainability that will benefit growers in the county. The RiverArc project benefits Folsom Reservoir and the Lower American River by shifting diversions to the Sacramento River to increase available flows in the Lower American River by up to 43,000 acre-feet annually. This will reduce climate risks from drought and increasing temperatures, and conserve the Lower American River’s unique habitat and biodiversity.

The Sacramento region’s Water Bank, another adaptation strategy identified in the American River Basin Study, is a groundwater aquifer project that can hold enough water to fill

Folsom Reservoir twice, and can offset the loss of snowpack projected with climate change. Currently, the Water Bank can sustainably recharge enough water to serve over 180,000 average homes for a year, but more could be done to increase groundwater storage and recharge. A \$300 million investment is needed to boost the Water Bank’s storage and withdrawal capacity, which could serve 270,000 Sacramento-area homes for a year.

Other issues relevant to the county’s agricultural water supply, quality, and uses relate to well permitting and water runoff. Related to agricultural water supply, Executive Order N-7-22 signed in March 2022 requires Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSA) to approve new well permits for agriculture.<sup>14</sup> Permits requiring GSA approval include any new wells producing greater than two acre-feet annually, and any alterations to existing wells that require a permit.

13 <https://gxn.190.myftpupload.com/water-bank/growing-the-bank/>

14 <https://www.gov.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/March-2022-Drought-EO.pdf>

Related to water quality, funded through a stormwater utility fee, the County of Sacramento partners with the cities of Sacramento, Citrus Heights, Elk Grove, Folsom, Galt, and Rancho Cordova as part of the [Sacramento Stormwater Quality Partnership](#) (SSQP).

The goal of the SSQP is to educate and encourage the community to protect local waterways from the impacts of urban water runoff, which impacts river waters used for agriculture. SSQP could help implement and coordinate urban runoff management plans to identify better areas for green infrastructure, and the sources of pollutants,

and can identify best management practices to support improved water quality in the streams. Relevant to agricultural water quality is the work of the Sacramento-Amador Water Quality Coalition (SAWQA), one of 10 sub-watershed groups that make up the larger Sacramento Valley Water Quality Coalition. SAWQA covers the southern portion of Sacramento County and all of Amador County and is made up of roughly 6,000 irrigators whose fees cover the costs of water quality monitoring and reporting, to meet requirements of the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board’s Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program (<https://www.amadorrcd.org/about-us>).

## Water Infrastructure Recommendations

CATEGORY	RECOMMENDATION
<p><b>Groundwater Recharge, Water Recycling, Water Reliability and Adaption</b></p>	<p>The region has several major comprehensive water infrastructure initiatives underway or planned to help manage the county and the region’s water supply and support long-term adaptation strategies including dealing with the impacts of climate change. Sacramento County, local jurisdictions, water special districts, and partners should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritize groundwater recharge and explore multi-beneficial projects that both address flood risk and recharge of the groundwater basins.</li> <li>• Identify funding sources, partnerships and strategies to address the funding gaps for the Harvest Water project, the RiverArc Project, and the Water Bank Project, among others. See chart above.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Levees</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A funding mechanism is needed to repair and strengthen privately-owned levees and levees managed by RDs. For example, Reclamation District 800 is a small district in charge of levees along the Consumnes River; it is \$8.5M+ in debt after last year’s storms. All breaches from last year have been fixed but there are still weak areas that need to be improved. The Delta levees are also at risk from multiple factors. The County is working with RDs to identify and secure funding sources.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Coordinated Runoff Manager Programs</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement coordinated urban runoff management programs which include actions to identify causes of degradation; establish and enforce legal authority to control those sources; and implement best management practices to address identified problems, including decreasing runoff and improving stormwater quality. Investments in Green Stormwater Infrastructure are needed to address the risks of flooding due to urbanization and increased runoff.</li> </ul>



# Land Use and Housing

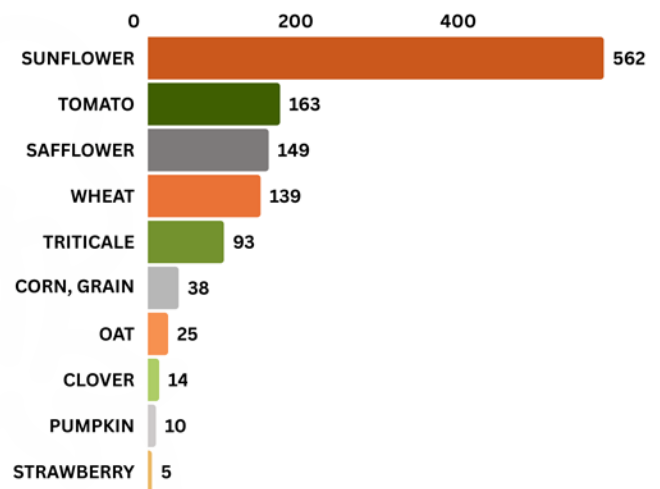
Agricultural land is facing pressures from urban development. While the Agricultural Element of the County’s General Plan has a goal of protecting important farmlands from conversion and encroachment, the General Plan also includes planned conversion of agricultural land to urban uses.<sup>15</sup> The County established an Urban Service Boundary (USB), which is supposed to be the ultimate growth boundary for the unincorporated area. However, new development continues to occur outside of the boundary and on prime agricultural land. Between 1988 and 2018, the county lost more than 73,000 acres of agricultural and grazing lands to urban and other uses, with more than 37,000 acres of that (51%) being Prime Farmland, for an average of more than 2,400 acres lost per year.<sup>16</sup> While more recent data is not available, the county is continuing to lose large amounts of agricultural land to urban uses, particularly in the Natomas area and in the South County near Elk Grove and Wilton. Development near agricultural land often encourages landowners to sell their agricultural land, which also could impact renewals of the Williamson Act contracts.

The Upper Westside Project, a new development proposed in Natomas, is located on prime agricultural land. Except for a 534 acre agricultural buffer, the rest of the area - over 1,532 acres

- will be lost to development. Figure 1 shows the diversity of crops that are at risk of loss from the Upper Westside Project. Biological conservation is the planned mitigation for the project; however, biological easements have restrictions and are not guaranteed to support agriculture. Urban/community gardens have also been proposed as a mitigation measure for the project, and while a community garden will support the health and resilience of the new community, it does not support agriculture in the same way the land is being used today.

Figure 1

## Top 10 Crops grown by acreage in the Upper Westside Project Planning Area



Source: Sacramento County Agriculture Department

<sup>15</sup> <https://planning.saccounty.gov/PlansandProjectsIn-Progress/Documents/Agricultural%20Element%20-%20Amended%2012-17-2019.pdf>  
<sup>16</sup> State of California, Department of Conservation, Farmland Mapping and Preservation Program.



The South Sacramento Habitat Conservation Plan provides mitigation measures for the loss of biodiversity, but not for the loss of agricultural land, and as a result, the ag industry is generally not supportive of the Plan. The County has a policy in its General Plan to mitigate the loss of agricultural lands, but it does not have a program in place that would provide a process for mitigation. The County also does not have the funds or mechanisms to purchase agricultural land for conservation easements when the land is up for sale.

Many projects that were approved decades ago also present a challenge to the preservation of ag land along with water resource management. For example, development pressures for housing in communities such as Rancho Murieta and south of Highway 50 in Folsom - which are dependent on the Cosumnes River for water supply - impact water resource management and supply for agricultural communities in the southern portion of the county. There is ongoing interest in splitting large agricultural parcels into tracts of minimum-size lots intended for

buyers whose primary interests are large estates, speculation, or other non-farming priorities, which challenges efforts to maintain contiguous agriculturally productive land. In addition to the pressures from housing development, similar to other counties in the region, farmers are aging and some of them are selling since they can't find farm operators to take over the land.

Sacramento is considered the urban core of the region, and many communities in the county are interested in urban agriculture. While zoning codes are often not written to specifically prohibit urban agricultural activities, the absence of a specific ordinance may deter potential growers. Sacramento County is the only county in the region with an Urban Agriculture Ordinance. The ordinance reduces restrictions on agricultural uses in residentially zoned areas and lists three allowable urban agricultural activities: community gardens, market gardens, and community farms. Defining urban agriculture as a permitted land use encourages growers to invest in long-term practices, such as regenerative and climate-smart agriculture, can address food security needs, and supports the Farm-to-Fork culture.<sup>17</sup>



<sup>17</sup> <https://planning.sacounty.gov/LandUseRegulationDocuments/Pages/Urban-Agriculture-Ordinance.aspx>

Housing for the farm workforce is an ongoing challenge. The County General Plan has increased flexibility and accountability for providing on-farm housing for relatives and other employees who work on the farm. Many farms require on-site housing of farm employees. The County Zoning Code allows one accessory dwelling per 5 acres in Permanent Agricultural zones (i.e., AG-160, AG-80, AG-40, and AG-20), provided that such dwellings are occupied by at least one employee who receives a major portion of his or her income from such on-site employment. The Planning Department is in the process of changing the Zoning Code to remove this qualification. This will make it easier to provide on-site housing to farm employees.

The current Zoning Code, however contains no provisions to facilitate verification that accessory dwellings are agricultural employee

residences. A maximum density of one accessory dwelling per 5 acres could encourage developers or other landowners to establish residential settings for nonfarmers in Permanent-Agricultural zones indistinguishable from housing in Agricultural-Residential zones. Such housing is incompatible with intensive commercial agriculture that takes place.

The food and agricultural industry cluster is a major economic driver for the region, is an important economic asset for the county and its communities, and is a valued part of the county's heritage, identity, and quality of life. Agriculture must remain viable for the cluster to thrive. Without the enactment of effective buffer policies or boundaries by the County, urban encroachment will make farming difficult, which will push farmers out of the industry.

## Land Use and Housing Recommendations

CATEGORY	RECOMMENDATION
<p><b>Land Use Mitigation/ Conservation Easements</b></p>	<p>The County, local jurisdictions, and conservation partners should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a program for land trusts, including the California Farmland Trust, to work with developers to create agricultural conservation easements. There is an opportunity for land trusts to manage the process and work with developers to ensure the land has been mitigated. A conservation bank or tool would be helpful and a county measure to fund the bank could be a possible solution. This would help the County and local jurisdictions strengthen their policies to ensure development on agricultural land is mitigated 1:1. The Agriculture Advisory Committee can help guide this process.</li> <li>• Pursue opportunities to create mitigation banks, environmental mitigation sites, wildlife refuges, or other natural resource preserves wherein substantial agricultural activities that are compatible with the protection of high habitat values continue, but incompatible activities and conversion for development are precluded by conservation easements.<sup>18</sup></li> <li>• Encourage the establishment of conservation easements that combine preservation of agricultural uses, habitat values, and open space on the same property where feasible.</li> <li>• Seek to concentrate development in existing communities to help preserve agricultural viability, consistent with the Blueprint.</li> </ul>

<sup>18</sup> <https://planning.saccounty.gov/PlansandProjectsIn-Progress/Documents/Agricultural%20Element%20-%20Amended%2012-17-2019.pdf>





# Transportation & Broadband Infrastructure

Sacramento County jurisdictions have to balance increasing growth and urbanization while maintaining rural roads, which are in continual need of improvement. The average Pavement Condition Index (PCI) in Sacramento County is 58 and declining, which means that roads are “at risk” and will need more expensive structural improvements as a consequence. Rural roads and other arterial roads leading to agricultural lands and farms are in especially poor condition, which discourages agritourism, makes goods movement/farm to market challenging, and presents safety risks, including for traffic safety and for evacuation routes such as for flooding events.

Several specific rural agricultural areas across the county are in significant need of transportation improvements. Wilton Bridge is an area that is vulnerable to storms, and Highway 16 has persistent safety challenges. The County’s Department of Transportation is applying for major grants for projects between Rancho Murietta and Wilton and currently has several maintenance, repair, and improvement projects underway in the Delta that would support both ag operations and agritourism. Improvements to many of the rural agricultural roads need to be funded by local revenues, in that they are not part of the federal aid network. Securing funding for such projects continues to be a challenge, especially given the likewise pressing maintenance need in the more suburban and urban parts of the county.

And as Sacramento County jurisdictions continue to grow, the need for an expanded transportation network can also impact agricultural operations. For example, the Capital Southeast Connector Expressway Project is a major transportation initiative that will develop a 34-mile four-lane expressway from Interstate 5 to Highways 99 and 50, connecting the cities of Elk Grove, Rancho Cordova, and Folsom to El Dorado Hills, by passing the city of Sacramento’s urban core. The project is intended to reduce congestion, improve road safety and access, improve farm-to-market routes, and create an integrated preserve system through the South Sacramento Habitat Conservation Plan. The initial segments are underway. Due to concerns that the project would put agriculture at risk in Sheldon and surrounding communities, along with growth pressures from the fast-growing suburbs along the route, the Sacramento Valley Conservancy received a SALC grant to pursue an agriculture and rangeland buffer along the southeastern edge of the Sacramento urban area. The SALC project will support sustainable agricultural uses, protect sensitive wetlands, provide habitat for species such as salmon and Swainson’s hawk, and promote groundwater recharge and regional water quality goals. Establishing a contiguous agricultural buffer that further links existing conserved areas will provide continuity for wildlife and shield open lands from development pressures.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> [https://sgc.ca.gov/meetings-events/council/2022/docs/20221215-Item5B\\_Attachment1.pdf](https://sgc.ca.gov/meetings-events/council/2022/docs/20221215-Item5B_Attachment1.pdf)





Regarding broadband infrastructure, as the region's most populated county, Sacramento County has the largest number of unserved and underserved households in the region. There are major infrastructure and connectivity gaps in the county's rural areas, including in the Delta and the south areas. In addition to limited fiber infrastructure, farmers and ranchers report that cell phone coverage is poor, which is a challenge not only for accessing and utilizing precision agriculture technologies for resource management, business operations, and mandated reporting, but also for public safety and emergency services. This is critical given recent events such as flooding and levee breaks in the South County, and vulnerabilities in the Delta communities.

Very little public or private investment has been made to address these gaps. The County is proactively working to identify funding resources, especially for emergency services, and leverage partnership opportunities to improve broadband availability, adoption, and affordability in the county's high-need areas. The historic investments

California is making through its Broadband For All initiative is leveraging new federal and state funding. Through the State's latest round of broadband infrastructure funding through the Federal Funding Account (FFA) program, Sacramento County is eligible to receive over \$38.7 million in funding. Applications that were submitted by the city of Sacramento and Internet Service providers in September 2023 totaled almost \$138 million. Thus, while there will be significant new resources available for county infrastructure projects, they will not be at the scale needed. Proposed unfunded applications could possibly be submitted in future rounds of other infrastructure funding, including the federal funding that will be coming to the state by the end of 2024 through the BEAD program (Broadband Equity Access and Deployment). The State's development of its own open-access Middle-Mile network will include 164 miles of infrastructure in Sacramento County, with 62 leased miles, 97 joint build miles, and 5 constructed miles. This network could be a resource to extend "last mile" infrastructure projects to priority unserved rural areas.

## Transportation Infrastructure Recommendations

CATEGORY	RECOMMENDATION
<p><b>Road Maintenance, Repairs, Improvements</b></p>	<p>Sacramento County jurisdictions should, in collaboration with SACOG and other partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritize and address road safety and road maintenance and improvements needed for rural roads, serving the agricultural economy, especially in the South County, and the Sloughhouse areas.</li> <li>• Improve ingress and egress in the Delta communities.</li> </ul>

## Broadband Infrastructure Recommendations

CATEGORY	RECOMMENDATION
<p><b>Project Readiness</b></p>	<p>Sacramento County jurisdictions should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore partnership opportunities with Internet Service Providers to build broadband infrastructure in priority unserved rural areas, including through the upcoming BEAD funding.</li> <li>• Review their infrastructure/broadband policies and ordinances to ensure readiness for timely permit processing of infrastructure projects and identify assets that could be leveraged such as rights of way, antennas, utility poles, and so forth.</li> <li>• Collaborate with SACOG and Caltrans on potential joint use/dig once/dig smart projects linking broadband and transportation, including coordinating with the development of the State’s new Middle-Mile Open-Access Network and other transportation projects.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Cell Phone Coverage</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The County should identify areas with limited cell service/dead spots in the county’s agricultural areas to prioritize investment projects.</li> </ul>



# Food System and Governance



The county's food system and governance issues cover a wide range of touchpoints. Although Sacramento is branded as America's "Farm to Fork Capital," there is often a disconnect between agriculture and the public. Much of the food that is grown in the county is not consumed within the county; it is instead exported to other regions, states, and countries, including where value is added through processing, packaging, and distribution. Increased opportunities for local procurement, such as contracts with schools, hospitals, restaurants, large event centers, and state and local agencies should be explored. An institutional procurement strategy would support local consumption and production for the agricultural and food production sector, and would improve the disconnect between this important economic asset and the public.

The mainstay of the agriculture grown in the county falls in the unincorporated area. The County's General Plan has a goal to enhance the viability of the county's agricultural economy; however, there are several challenges. Currently, the County Zoning Code prohibits or severely restricts many agritourism activities. For instance, the Zoning Code prohibits farmstand operators in agricultural zones from selling crops grown off the premises unless a conditional

use permit is granted.<sup>20</sup> Farmstand operators usually need to provide a large variety of fruits and vegetables throughout the year to attract and maintain customers. While the County's provision is intended to restrict imported goods from being sold at local farms, it puts pressure on the grower to produce diverse crops for the farmstand, and limits aggregation from and support for neighboring farms. Approval from the Environmental Management Department is also required for farm stands, produce stands, community stands, and agricultural markets. Additional permitting is required for events at these locations.

The County's Agricultural Element promotes sustainable agriculture and aims to protect agricultural resources, emphasizing the importance of preserving farmland and open space to maintain the county's agricultural heritage and protect natural resources.<sup>21</sup> The County has a [Winery, Farm Stand, and Farm Stay Ordinance](#) which guides proper use, reduces restrictions on agricultural uses in residentially zoned areas, and allows farmers and wineries to conduct agricultural tourism activities on their farms, such as farm tours and stays, farm stands, and farm-to-fork events. The Ordinance also specifies the types of activities that are allowed in

<sup>20</sup> [https://planning.saccounty.gov/InterestedCitizens/Documents/Adopted\\_Ag\\_Tourism\\_Ord\\_0612.pdf](https://planning.saccounty.gov/InterestedCitizens/Documents/Adopted_Ag_Tourism_Ord_0612.pdf)  
<sup>21</sup> <https://planning.saccounty.gov/PlansandProjectsIn-Progress/Documents/Agricultural%20Element%20-%20Amended%2012-17-2019.pdf>



specific zoning classifications, which can mitigate potential problems between landowners, farmers, and neighbors.<sup>22</sup> Many of the Ordinance’s policies are outdated and should be revised to reflect the value of agritourism for the county’s economy and culture, and the potential to expand diversified markets for growers.

Agritourism is not as strong in the Sacramento County area of the Delta as its potential and there are opportunities here and across the county to expand. New wineries are opening in Sheldon, Wilton, and the Sloughouse area on the southeast side of the county. Produce stands such as [Davis Ranch](#) in Sloughouse which are U-Pick are successful and could be a model for

of agricultural lands are in production. Many of the fields are flooded after harvest and provide feeding and resting areas for resident and migratory birds and other wildlife. This practice helps maximize the wildlife values of agricultural areas and lessen opportunities for agricultural pests.<sup>23</sup> Sacramento County has designated Delta lands for long-term agricultural use and protects them through several mechanisms, including the Agricultural Element in the General Plan, establishing buffers between agriculture and other approved uses, such as residential.

The Delta Conveyance project is on the horizon. Part of the State Water Project (SWP), it is managed by the Department of Water Resources.



agritourism across the county. Harvest festivals such as the annual Pear Fair in Courtland are additional agritourism opportunities. The county’s agricultural bounty is also featured at the annual Farm-to-Fork Festival on the Capital Mall in September and is a good opportunity to promote agritourism for the county’s rural areas.

More broadly, across the five-county Delta area, there are 1,000 miles of rivers and sloughs lacing the region. Beginning in 1850, agricultural land in the delta was “reclaimed” through the construction of levees and drainage of the marshy islands of the area. Today, thousands of acres

The SWP was constructed to help remedy statewide water challenges by moving and storing water from where it originates to where it is needed; however, the project benefits related to SWP water supply reliability do not directly benefit the communities of the Delta.<sup>24 25</sup> The Delta Conveyance project, previously called the Delta Tunnels, will create massive disruption for communities in the Delta, which Delta farmers feel will be devastating for their agricultural operations. Construction in the county will take place over a decade, displacing soil, disrupting harvests, and impacting roadways. The concept of a [Community Benefits Program](#) has been

<sup>22</sup> [https://planning.saccounty.gov/InterestedCitizens/Documents/Adopted\\_Ag\\_Tourism\\_Ord\\_0612.pdf](https://planning.saccounty.gov/InterestedCitizens/Documents/Adopted_Ag_Tourism_Ord_0612.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> <https://planning.saccounty.gov/LandUseRegulationDocuments/Documents/General-Plan/Delta%20Protection%20Element%20Amended%20-%202009-26-17.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/52dc0a1a3ded44c9b6d33a804fdd260f>

<sup>25</sup> [https://water.ca.gov/-/media/DWR-Website/Web-Pages/Programs/Delta-Conveyance/Public-Information/DCP\\_CBP\\_Overview\\_June2022.pdf](https://water.ca.gov/-/media/DWR-Website/Web-Pages/Programs/Delta-Conveyance/Public-Information/DCP_CBP_Overview_June2022.pdf)

developed but the program would not address the project's environmental impacts. According to the [Delta Counties Coalition](#) - a consortium of five Delta Counties, including Contra Costa, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Solano, and Yolo - no amount of funds or "leave behind" infrastructure could restore the damage done to the Delta once the Tunnel is built and operating.<sup>26</sup>

In terms of dealing with resource management and climate adaptation, there are several activities underway across the county. One emerging area of interest is carbon farming. For example, the Sloughhouse Resource Conservation District was recently awarded funds through the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA)'s new Conservation Agriculture Planning Grant Program (CAPGP) for the development of various types of agricultural conservation plans, including: [Carbon Farm Plans](#), [Soil Health Management Plans](#) (Conservation Planning), [Soil Health Management Plans](#) (Design and Implementation), [Grazing Management Plans](#), and [Irrigation Water Management Design Plans](#).<sup>27</sup> The County's Climate Emergency Mobilization Task Force also advocated for various agricultural-related implementation measures for its Climate Action Plan, including increasing sequestration on agricultural lands through the development of carbon farming plans.<sup>28</sup>

The Delta area has a high concentration of light-textured soils highly susceptible to wind erosion. Tillage and other farming operations increase the rate of wind erosion and the amount of airborne dust. The County's Conservation Element includes a policy recommending no-tillage practices to reduce soil losses, which would assist farmers in reducing wind erosion and airborne dust.

Runoff of pesticides into rivers, such as the Consumnes River, has been a concern. Farmers in Sacramento are conscientious caretakers of the land they farm and many recently participated in a pesticide disposal event. Pesticide legacy disposal events allow growers to dispose of unneeded pesticides that are no longer used. Oftentimes, the events take many months of planning, resources, and staff time to manage. The last Regional Pesticide Disposal Event - for growers in Sacramento, Yolo, San Joaquin, Amador, and Calaveras counties - was held in November 2022 at the Lodi Grape Festival Grounds. The free event was funded by the Department of Pesticide Regulation. Additional Pesticide Disposal Events are needed and should take place on an annual basis.



26 <https://savethedelta.saccounty.gov/Documents/DeltaTunnelMythsandFacts.pdf>

27 <https://www.sloughhousercd.org/conservation-agriculture-planning-grant-program-capgp>

28 <https://planning.saccounty.gov/PlansandProjectsIn-Progress/Documents/Climate%20Action%20Plan/Final%20Climate%20Action%20Plan.pdf>

29 <https://planning.saccounty.gov/LandUseRegulationDocuments/Pages/Urban-Agriculture-Ordinance.aspx>



## Food System and Governance Recommendations

CATEGORY	RECOMMENDATION
<p><b>Agritourism</b></p>	<p>South County jurisdictions (Sacramento County, Isleton, Galt) should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support agricultural tourism and value-added agricultural production to strengthen the county’s agricultural economy, especially in the Delta, South County, and the Sloughhouse area.</li> <li>• Revise the County’s Zoning Code and regulatory procedures to better support agritourism activities, and update the County’s Winery, Farm Stand, and Farm Stay Ordinance. The County’s Agricultural Advisory Committee could help facilitate this process.</li> <li>• Consider creating an agritourism program to more proactively promote agritourism as part of the jurisdictions’ economic development strategy, in collaboration with Visit Sacramento and other partner organizations including local chambers, the Delta Protection Commission, and others.</li> <li>• Streamline reporting requirements for agritourism and marketing activities. Currently a Temporary Use Permit is required in Sacramento County to operate an urban agricultural stand at the site of private, community and market gardens.<sup>29</sup></li> </ul>
<p><b>Carbon Farming</b></p>	<p>Sacramento County should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with agencies such as the Resource Conservation Districts to develop projects/resources to assist growers with carbon farming plans, building off the Sloughhouse plans.</li> <li>• Work with Yolo Resource Conservation District to coordinate carbon farming planning efforts, and consider joining a carbon farming network.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Pesticide Disposal</b></p>	<p>Sacramento County and jurisdictions with agricultural activity should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with the California Department of Pesticide Regulation and neighboring counties to generate funding and capacity for Regional Pesticide Disposal Events.</li> </ul>





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