



SACRAMENTO REGION  
Coordinated Rural Opportunities Plan

March 2024

**Sutter 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.

## 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

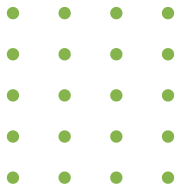


Supports the viability of agriculture, addresses climate challenges, and helps preserve valuable farmlands



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

Agriculture is deeply rooted in the rich history of the Sacramento region and continually contributes to its unique identity. Leading America as the nation’s Farm to Fork Capital, the Sacramento region provides \$2.2 billion in farmgate output value. The food and agriculture cluster consists of crop production, packaging and processing, distribution, and related operations and industries, valued at more than \$12 billion.<sup>1</sup> 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.



# Background: Sutter County

Sutter County was one of California’s original 27 counties founded in 1850 when it entered statehood. The County’s two incorporated cities include Yuba City and Live Oak, and its unincorporated rural communities are Meridian, Sutter, Robbins, Rio Oso, Trowbridge, Nicolaus, and East Nicolaus. Sutter County’s estimated population is 98,952, with most residents (63%)

living in Yuba City (69,478) or Live Oak (9,515).<sup>2</sup> The county’s low average population density is due to its characteristic topography and landscape, as it is home to the “world’s smallest mountain range,” the Sutter Buttes, and is surrounded by hundreds of thousands of acres of extensive agricultural land, open spaces, and natural resources.<sup>3</sup>

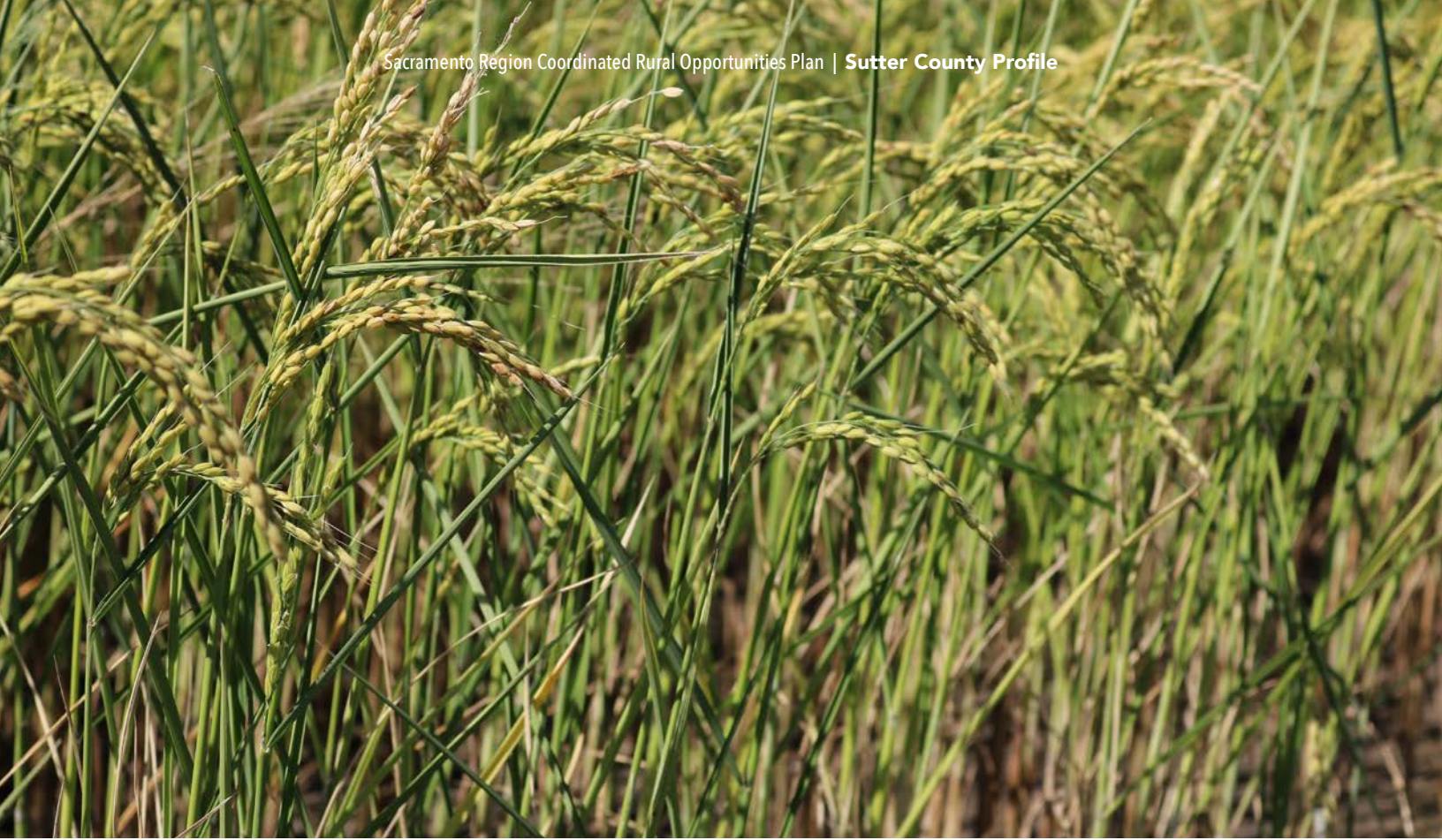


## Sutter County’s Top Five Commodities

- |             |            |
|-------------|------------|
| 1. Rice     | 4. Prunes  |
| 2. Tomatoes | 5. Walnuts |
| 3. Peaches  |            |

The top 5 commodities in Sutter County were valued at \$411,686,000 in 2022, down 8.9% from \$452,268,000 in 2021<sup>4</sup>

2 <https://dof.ca.gov/forecasting/demographics/estimates-e1/>  
3 <https://www.suttercounty.org/home/showpublisheddocument/2874/637555888741800000>  
4 <https://www.suttercounty.org/home/showpublisheddocument/5932/638023990424900000>



Agriculture and food production is a major industry, making up approximately 20% of the total economic output of all industries in the county.<sup>5</sup> With over 2,100 producers - 90 % of whom are family farms - Sutter County's food and agricultural sector is valued as a half-billion-dollar industry.<sup>6</sup> Sutter County is committed to preserving its long-standing agricultural heritage and high-quality farmlands. As such, the County has adopted several goals and policies to maintain a viable agricultural industry by sustaining its current agricultural operations, diversifying its food and agricultural economy, and promoting agricultural businesses. The County not only aims to preserve agricultural lands, but also has goals set in place to ensure that agricultural operations exist in harmony with adjacent areas, preserve its abundant natural resources, and promote agritourism services and scenic attractions.<sup>7</sup>

The county's agricultural sector will continue to be an economic driver in the region with its agricultural base protected, though challenges remain. The county's gross value of agricultural production decreased by 8.9% in 2022, from \$621,366,000 to \$568,883,000. The decrease in agriculture production in 2022 was largely due to a 64% decrease in the value of walnuts. Rice prices increased by 54%.<sup>8</sup> Tomato processing, cling peaches, and prunes also went up in value, even as prices and acreage decreased. Agriculture in Sutter County occurs at various scales, with most of the production in the unincorporated area. Each county also has an Agricultural Commissioner's office appointed by its Board of Supervisors to administer county-wide activities in support of agriculture. Given this nexus, many of the examples and recommendations in this profile focuses on the County of Sutter as a potential lead, while also highlighting the role of additional partners such as other local jurisdictions, regional agencies, special districts or conservation entities.

5 <https://www.suttercounty.org/home/showpublisheddocument/2874/637555888741800000>

6 [https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Online\\_Resources/County\\_Profiles/California/cp06101.pdf](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Online_Resources/County_Profiles/California/cp06101.pdf)

7 <https://www.suttercounty.org/home/showpublisheddocument/2874/637555888741800000>

8 <https://www.suttercounty.org/home/showpublisheddocument/7106/638386556019370000>

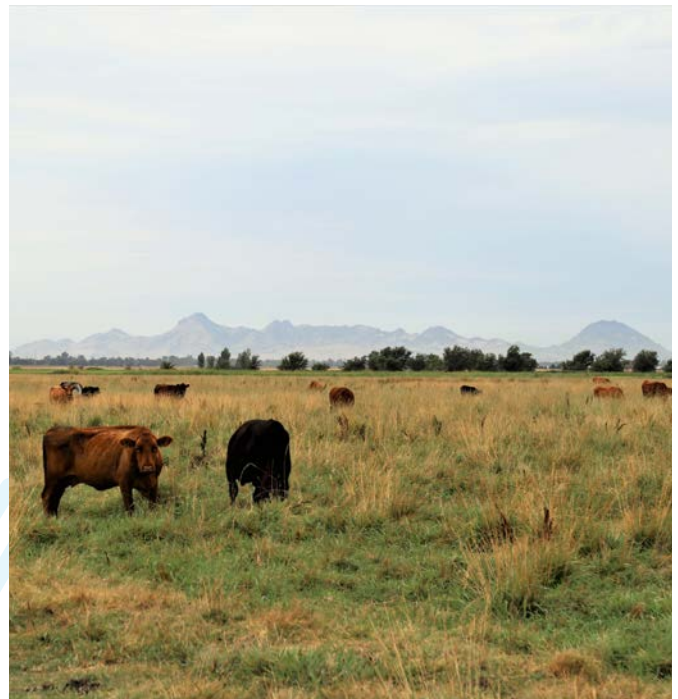


# Water Infrastructure

Sutter County sits atop the Sacramento River Basin, bordered by the Sacramento River on the west and the Feather River to the east. A unique feature in the county is the Sutter Bypass, which is only one of two major bypasses in the Sacramento Valley, diverting floods away from urban areas. The area around the Sutter Bypass, including the Tisdale Bypass, is designated as a wildlife area, with a total of 3,200 acres.<sup>9</sup> The site is home to a diverse ecosystem and is a riparian habitat, typical of the growth adjacent to rivers and streams. The wildlife area provides a home to many species of plants and animals and also offers diverse recreational activities for residents and visitors.

The Feather River and the Bear River are two of several tributaries that flow throughout the county. Both tributaries and the Sacramento River provide agricultural, wildlife, and recreational benefits to the county.<sup>10</sup> Due to the proximity to main water sources, Sutter County historically has had abundant surface water and groundwater which are managed by several water purveyors that divert and transfer surface water. However, aside from the major rivers and tributaries, there are no other significant reservoirs for surface water within the county.<sup>11</sup> Like many other rural areas in the Sacramento Valley, Sutter County continues to face growing challenges to water resources management, especially during cyclical periods of severe drought and heavy precipitation.

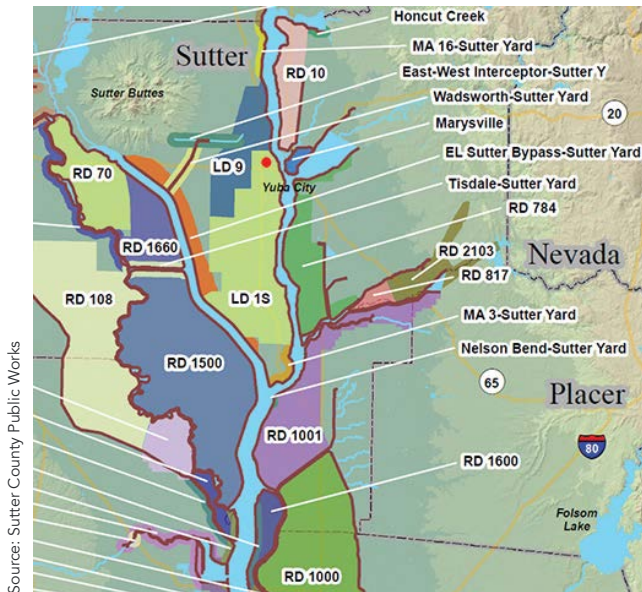
Approximately 70% of the county is in a floodplain, which constrains development and economic expansion. Often, roads critical for agriculture and goods movement are flooded due to runoff from irrigation, storms, and a lack of drainage infrastructure or inadequately maintained drainage infrastructure. The county also has old stone pipes that are failing and cause problems with flooding when they fail. These conditions lead to chronic road closures and require residents and agricultural operators among others to reroute.



<sup>9</sup> <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Lands/Places-to-Visit/Sutter-Bypass-WA>  
<sup>10</sup> <https://www.suttercounty.org/home/showpublisheddocument/824/637474371331570000>  
<sup>11</sup> <https://www.suttercounty.org/home/showpublisheddocument/824/637474371331570000>

Sutter County has over 260 miles of levees, and approximately 70 miles of the county's levees protect Yuba City and Live Oak from floods.<sup>12</sup> The levees are managed by eight levee-maintaining agencies including Levee Districts and Reclamation Districts. With the changing climate, the region will face increasing periods of heavy precipitation. Natural flood events from heavy rains affect the Sutter Bypass levees; they have caused widespread seepage in levees in several areas along the Sutter Bypass, which damages crops in the nearby areas. With the increasing intensity and frequency of severe weather events, levees must be structurally sound to prevent seepage and levee failure.

**Map 1 of levee-maintaining agencies in and around Suter County**



Source: Sutter County Public Works

Levees on the eastern side of the Sutter Bypass south of Yuba City need improvement.<sup>13</sup> Levees in the southern portion of the county are State-owned and need full repair. Although Sutter Butte Flood Control Agency (SBFCA) and the Department of Water Resources (DWR) signed a partnership agreement to do critical repairs on four areas along the Sutter Bypass east levee - which will significantly decrease flood risk for areas south of Yuba City, the Sutter Bypass still requires total repair to strengthen flood protection.<sup>14</sup>

Due to weather-related events, the Bureau of Reclamation also has been increasing releases from Shasta Dam to the Sacramento River upstream of Sutter County. While this will benefit Sacramento Valley farmers and water customers, the increased water releases through Shasta operations make it harder for farmers to reliably plan crop production and rotation and are an additional challenge for flood management.<sup>15</sup> For example, the winter storms in 2023 led to record precipitation. Shasta Lake was almost at full capacity and significant flooding from the Sacramento River was a risk.

The Shasta Dam and Enlargement Project, part of the Central Valley Project, will increase water supply and reliability for agricultural, municipal, and environmental purposes; however, there is significant pushback from the Winnemem Wintu Tribe, whose land was first taken for dam construction in 1938. Raising the dam would flood the remaining Winnemem Wintu lands and permanently inundate active ceremonial grounds, ancient village sites, burials, and dozens of sacred natural sites.<sup>16 17</sup>

Along with heavy precipitation, the region is expected to experience prolonged drought. Within the county, persistent drought has been costly to businesses that rely on the growth and production of crops such as rice, other water-intensive crops, and their by-products. For example, rice acreage in Sutter County decreased dramatically in 2021 from 2020 due primarily to drought and limited water availability. Sutter County is among one of the top rice producers in the State, but as a result of the continued drought in 2022, the county experienced a 33.6% loss in annual planted rice acreage compared to the prior year.<sup>18</sup> Groundwater recharge would help address water availability during dry years. When there is a particularly dry year or period, groundwater systems are at risk of overpumping due to the limited supply of surface water.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.suttercounty.org/government/county-departments/development-services/public-works/water-resources/floodplain-management-and-flood-information/flood-protection-fact-sheet>

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.sutterbuttefflood.org/admin/upload/CA\\_DWR\\_Awards\\_SBFCA\\_SutterBypassCriticalRepairs\\_Funding\\_1.11.23.pdf](https://www.sutterbuttefflood.org/admin/upload/CA_DWR_Awards_SBFCA_SutterBypassCriticalRepairs_Funding_1.11.23.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.sutterbuttefflood.org/admin/upload/CA\\_DWR\\_Awards\\_SBFCA\\_SutterBypassCriticalRepairs\\_Funding\\_1.11.23.pdf](https://www.sutterbuttefflood.org/admin/upload/CA_DWR_Awards_SBFCA_SutterBypassCriticalRepairs_Funding_1.11.23.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.cbsnews.com/sanfrancisco/news/shasta-lake-nearly-filled-to-the-brim-following-remarkable-winter-storm-turnaround/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.usbr.gov/mp/ncao/slwri/docs/feasibility/slwri-final-fr-full.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.nodamraise.org/#:~:text=The%20U.S.%20Department%20of%20the,and%20funding%20appropriation%20is%20required>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.sfchronicle.com/climate/article/California-rice-farming-Colusa-17428137.php#photo-22909581>

During wet years, flood risks are elevated. While the State and Federal governments provide some funding for flood protection, the need is greater than the available funding. The partnership agreement between the SBFCA and DWR is a noteworthy example of leveraging state and local partnerships to strengthen flood protection in vulnerable areas, such as the Sutter Bypass - which is owned and maintained by the State. The partnership also positions SBFCA to compete for future federal and state funding to implement levee improvement projects.<sup>19</sup>

Implementation of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) in 2014 indirectly resulted in a smaller allocation of water in the Sutter Subbasin off the Sacramento River. According to Sutter County stakeholders, the agricultural sector in Sutter County typically receives 75% of the requested water allocation, but since the passage of SGMA, coupled with persistent drought, only 9% of the requested water allocation has been provided to growers in

recent years. The new Sustainable Groundwater Management Grant Program from DWR will help the County acquire equipment for real-time groundwater monitoring.<sup>20</sup> Sutter County's Groundwater Sustainability Agencies include the cities, water districts, reclamation districts, and the County.

The County recently received \$8.5 million from DWR to support water management. The funding will be dedicated to improving monitoring and data gaps within the Sutter Subbasin and will support reporting requirements and improvements to groundwater flow models. Grant dollars also will help fund a groundwater sustainability finance study and a pilot program to provide farmers with irrigation system upgrades, and underrepresented communities.<sup>21</sup>



<sup>19</sup> [http://sutterbutteflood.org/admin/upload/CA\\_DWR\\_Awards\\_SBFCA\\_SutterBypassCriticalRepairs\\_Funding\\_1.11.23.pdf](http://sutterbutteflood.org/admin/upload/CA_DWR_Awards_SBFCA_SutterBypassCriticalRepairs_Funding_1.11.23.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> [https://www.appeal-democrat.com/news/dwr-awards-millions-to-sutter-county-ywa-grants-to-fund-groundwater-recharge-projects-data-monitoring/article\\_2abd132a-51c1-11ee-ab0d-33bf33b6168a.html](https://www.appeal-democrat.com/news/dwr-awards-millions-to-sutter-county-ywa-grants-to-fund-groundwater-recharge-projects-data-monitoring/article_2abd132a-51c1-11ee-ab0d-33bf33b6168a.html)

<sup>21</sup> [https://www.appeal-democrat.com/news/dwr-awards-millions-to-sutter-county-ywa-grants-to-fund-groundwater-recharge-projects-data-monitoring/article\\_2abd132a-51c1-11ee-ab0d-33bf33b6168a.html#:~:text=During%20the%202023%20water%20year,over%2Dpumping%2C%20officials%20said](https://www.appeal-democrat.com/news/dwr-awards-millions-to-sutter-county-ywa-grants-to-fund-groundwater-recharge-projects-data-monitoring/article_2abd132a-51c1-11ee-ab0d-33bf33b6168a.html#:~:text=During%20the%202023%20water%20year,over%2Dpumping%2C%20officials%20said)

## Water Infrastructure Recommendations

CATEGORY	RECOMMENDATION
<p><b>Levee and Other System Improvements</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The State, the County, levee and reclamation districts, federal agencies, private landowners, and regional stakeholders should partner to generate funding for priority improvement projects on state-owned levees such as the Sutter Bypass.</li> <li>• The County should work with key parties on a plan to identify other improvements on privately owned levees and a strategy with stakeholders to address critical gaps.</li> <li>• There are 10-12 culvert pipe failures in the county. The County is trying to acquire funding and clearance for environmental permits to repair the pipes. Some of the culverts are managed by water and reclamation districts.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Groundwater Recharge and Conjunctive Water Use</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Sustainable Water Management Strategy for the Sacramento Valley identified optimal locations for strategic flooding of farmland to maximize groundwater infiltration.<sup>22</sup> Building on this research, the County should work with SACOG to identify promising locations for groundwater recharge that would support both agriculture and sustainable groundwater use. County-wide modeling would ensure farmers are not restricted/impacted when a well is added or changed. The County could partner with groundwater sustainability agencies to pursue Sustainable Groundwater Management Implementation Grant Program funding from the Department of Water Resources to identify these locations.</li> <li>• The County and subbasin’s Groundwater Sustainability Agencies could accelerate conjunctive water use (i.e. using groundwater during dry years and surface water during wet years) by providing grants to farmers who are willing to capture rainwater on their land and utilize water efficiently for their agricultural operations, such as Flood-MAR (Managed Aquifer Recharge) projects. The program could be operated as a revolving loan fund, where recipients pay back the cost of the infrastructure investment over time; such repayments can then fund the next set of water management projects.</li> </ul>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.sacog.org/post/sustainable-water-management-strategies-specialty-crop-expansion-sacramento-valley>



## Water Infrastructure Recommendations Continued

CATEGORY	RECOMMENDATION
<p><b>Conveyance Infrastructure</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yuba City’s wastewater treatment facility located on the City’s south side processes seven million gallons of water a day. Infrastructure to move the treated wastewater to rice fields could help conserve water for agricultural uses. The County should work with the levee districts and the Basin Irrigation and Drainage Authority (BIDA) - a Joint Powers Authority between Reclamation District 500 and Sutter Mutual Water Company - to identify the conveyance infrastructure needed to effectively move the treated wastewater.</li> <li>• Many of the drainage ditches throughout the county are not properly maintained, resulting in garbage and debris that impact the flow of water and contribute to road flooding. The County should partner with BIDA and the Sutter County Water Agency to identify areas within their drainage system that require maintenance and develop an improvement plan to address the repairs.</li> <li>• Modified intake structures to pull water for agriculture are needed. The source of the water can come from storm events, water in the Bypass, irrigated water released off the farms, or the aforementioned treated wastewater from Yuba City’s wastewater treatment facility.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Well Permitting Processes</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The County should create a county-wide plan to identify criteria and processes for streamlining the process for approving the permitting wells, building upon work done to date.</li> </ul>





# Land Use and Housing

Agriculture dominates the county's land uses, along with natural and recreational resources and rural residential uses.<sup>23</sup> The agricultural industry is the economic engine in Sutter County. The county is characterized by long-standing agricultural traditions and family farmers who have been in the industry for generations. While the average size of farms is large in Sutter County (329 acres), 75% of farms are less than 179 acres. Many of the crops grown in the county, including peaches, rice, and walnuts, are exported and help feed the world, which is a point of pride for the community. Ninety-nine percent of the county's farmgate value comes from crop sales, and only one percent is attributed to livestock. Due to the economic and environmental importance of the industry, agriculture and open space areas are set aside for long-term conservation and are prioritized by local governments and residents.

Like many counties, Sutter County agriculture faces pressure from urbanization, higher production costs, shifts in commodity prices, and increasing regulations.<sup>24</sup> Even though there are policies in place to manage new growth, there is also pressure to transition open space and agricultural lands to urban developments. Sutter County has experienced moderate growth over the past two decades, concentrated in the two incorporated cities, Yuba City and Live Oak.

As stated in the 2030 General Plan, new urban growth will follow current land use trends, with planned infill development focused largely in Yuba City, Live Oak, and locations labeled as "Growth Areas," such as the [Sutter Pointe Specific Plan](#), which will encompass approximately 7,550 acres of open space land in south Sutter County.<sup>25</sup>

One way the County is working to protect agricultural land is through zoning. In the County's 2030 General Plan update, the County introduced a new agricultural designation: AG-20: 0.05 du/gross acre (20-acre minimum parcel size), AG-40: 0.03 du/gross acre (40-acre minimum parcel size) AG-80: 0.01 du/gross acre (80-acre minimum parcel size).<sup>26</sup> This new land use designation supports agriculturally-designated lands and closes a loophole that previously allowed agricultural land to be subdivided for ranchette-style homes. It allows Sutter County to promote long-term land use for agriculture and preserve sacred lands, such as the Sutter Buttes. However, there remains significant pressure for "leapfrog" development that could impact the contiguity and viability of agriculture in the county.

23 <https://www.suttercounty.org/community/visitors/county-history/sutter-county-at-a-glance>

24 <https://www.suttercounty.org/home/showpublisheddocument/2874/637555888741800000>

25 <https://www.suttercounty.org/government/county-departments/development-services/planning-services/sutter-pointe-specific-plan>

26 <https://www.suttercounty.org/home/showpublisheddocument/2874/637555888741800000>

Accessing land for agricultural operations is a challenge for small-scale growers and younger/beginning farmers. While the County's minimum parcel requirements for agricultural purposes are intended to prevent further subdivision of land, a barrier that smaller, younger, and beginning farmers face is the cost of land and the availability of smaller parcels. Agricultural land prices in California are increasing, which gives farmers an incentive to sell land and move to areas that have cheaper land, such as Butte County. Outside investors are coming into the county and buying up prime farmland to increase their investment portfolios and obtain access to water, resulting in a shift of long-standing generational farming practices. Using agricultural land as an investment can discourage farmers from implementing sustainable practices and long-term investments, as the sole purpose of the land is to make a profit. The drought also forced farmers to lease additional land so as to have access to a wellhead to be able to continue farming. This additional cost has been disruptive and a barrier for some producers.

Approximately 15% of Sutter County's agricultural lands are protected under the Williamson Act;<sup>27</sup> however, there is a tension between keeping the lands enrolled under the Act to preserve agriculture and the cost to the County in terms of less tax revenue. Additionally, smaller-scale farmers are not incentivized to voluntarily acquire agricultural conservation easements, due to large parcel size requirements. Sutter County should continue to work - in coordination with local entities - in both the protection of open spaces as well as strategies to translate farmgate production into capturing more value-added activities and ecosystem services.

Agriculture supports vital ecosystem services in Sutter County including through conservation easements. Many farmers implement practices wherein agriculture contributes to sustainable water resource management and habitat ecosystems. These valuable contributions often are not formally captured but are important. The rice industry in Sutter County is a leader in environmental stewardship, as exemplified by Montna Farms. Montna Farms was the state's first conservation easement on ricelands and is a model for the region's rice fields. Montna Farms has about 2,000 acres under the easement, which provides habitat for waterfowl and shorebirds for migration, wintering, or breeding.<sup>28</sup> Montna Farms has a trial program for its rice fields in the Sutter Bypass that helps the salmon population. February is peak waterbird migration in the Sacramento Flyway, so Montna Farms leaves water in the rice fields for the birds until the end of February and then transitions the land in early March, without a delay in planting.<sup>29</sup> Montna Farms also creates wide, flat levees in the rice fields to provide nesting areas for birds throughout the year, which is critical as Sutter County had to close salmon fishing because there was no food available for the salmon. This innovative project showcases the value of mutual benefit partnerships between the agricultural industry, environmental organizations and public agencies, as demonstrated by the collaboration of the California Rice Commission, rice farmers, Ducks Unlimited, the California Department of Fish and Game, and the Nature Conservancy, among others.



<sup>27</sup> <https://www.suttercounty.org/home/showpublisheddocument/2874/637555888741800000>

<sup>28</sup> <https://sandcountyfoundation.org/our-work/leopold-conservation-award-program/al-montna>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.growwest.com/news-2/growing-together-spring-2021/turning-passion-into-results-in-rice-conservation/>

While the County’s land use designations help preserve agriculture, more housing is needed for people who work on the land, including owners, operators, growers, and the workforce. New laws allow farmers to finance new properties, such as Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs), which are often costly and financed by leveraging the value of the existing home. Some growers are hesitant to house farmworkers, migrants, or seasonal workers for fear of losing their crops due to stringent housing regulations. The Department of Labor can seize all produce grown on the farm if small housing upgrades, such as a leaky faucet, are needed during the time of inspection.

The Office of Migrant Services partners with the Regional Housing Authority to provide migrant families with seasonal housing at the [Yuba City Migrant Housing Center](#), but additional housing is needed, especially because Sutter County hires 51% of farm labor, which is the highest in the region.<sup>30</sup> Seasonal housing is offered May 1 - October 31; however, applicants must provide sufficient documentation to verify that their residency has been outside a 50-mile radius of this migrant center for at least three months out of the preceding 6-month period, which encourages displacement.

### Land Use and Housing Recommendations

CATEGORY	RECOMMENDATION
<p><b>Housing Availability</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The County should explore options for enabling housing on agricultural parcels for those engaged in farming; otherwise, additional housing for farm owners, operators, growers and workers should be concentrated where there is already sewer and road access, such as areas next to urban centers that have an AG-20 designation.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Farmland Conservation</b></p>	<p>The County should prioritize investments and funding in programs such as the Williamson Act and conservation easements to preserve farmland as working lands and protect them from residential development pressures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The County should encourage conservation easements as a tool for preserving prime farmland and work with growers, agricultural stakeholders, the Sutter Buttes Regional Land Trust, and other beneficiaries to promote the value of conservation easements and assist more farmers and landowners in applying for easements.</li> <li>The County should proactively work with landowners to encourage them to remain enrolled in the Williamson Act. An accessible education program about the benefits of the Act provided to farmers, landowners, and elected officials could be a helpful resource to keep agricultural land in production.</li> </ul>



<sup>30</sup> [https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Online\\_Resources/County\\_Profiles/California/cp06101.pdf](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Online_Resources/County_Profiles/California/cp06101.pdf)



# Transportation & Broadband Infrastructure

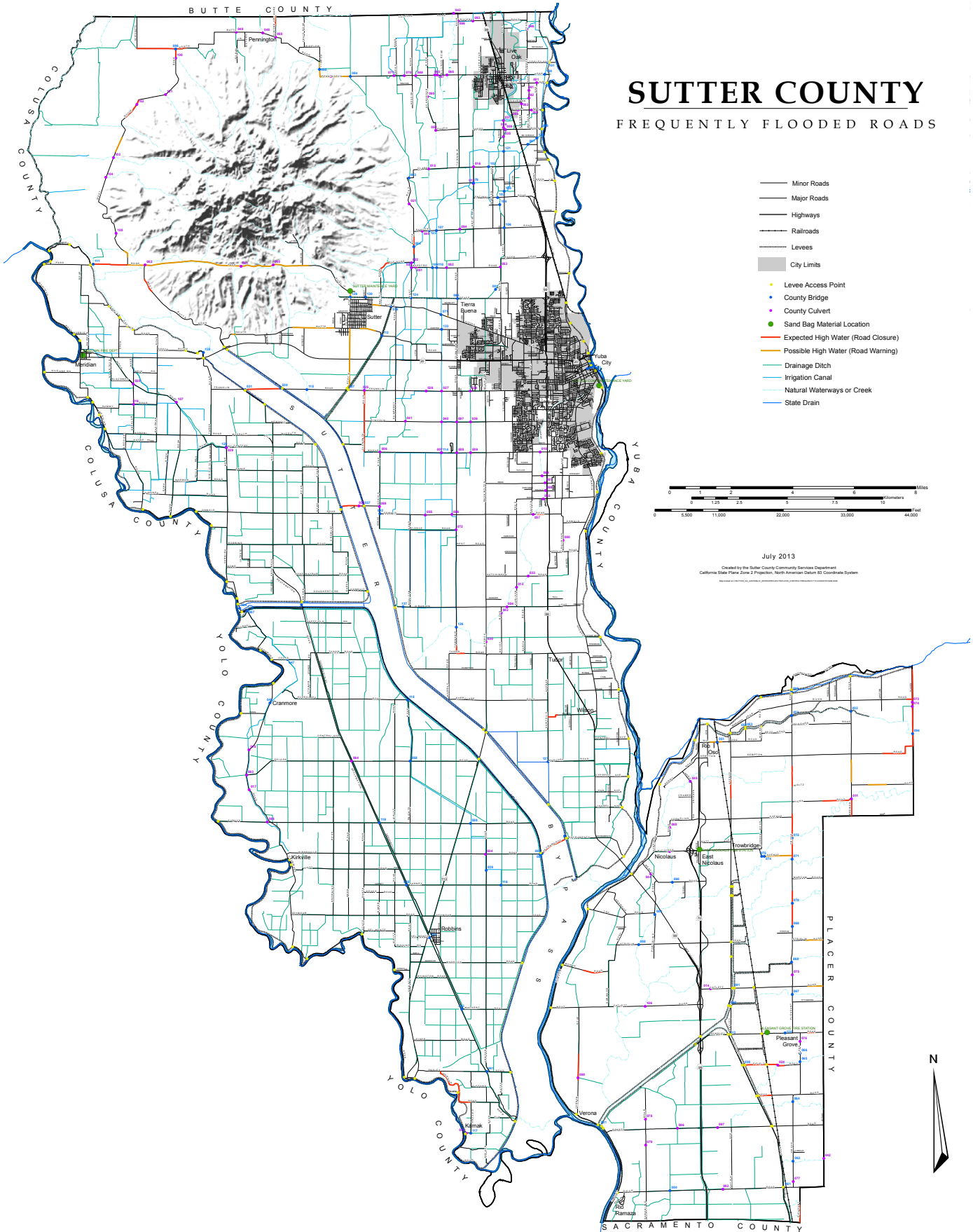
Sutter County's roads are deteriorating and are not designed for the daily heavy-duty truck and heavy machinery use incurred through goods movement and agricultural uses in particular. The Pavement Condition Index (PCI) measures conditions on regional roadways on a scale of 0 to 100. As for other rural counties, pavement conditions in Sutter continue to deteriorate as need outpaces funding.<sup>31</sup> SACOG estimates that Sutter County's PCI is 59 - just under the threshold for "good," and considered "at risk."

Roadway conditions near agricultural lands are poor and improvements are needed. As a vast majority of farmland in Sutter County is located in a floodplain, roadways quickly flood when it rains and when fields are irrigated. Improved and maintained drainage ditches to more efficiently redirect water will improve conditions during rain events and when fields are irrigated. See Map 2 on page 14 the location of frequently flooded roads across the county. In addition, roads in the county's rural areas often lack shoulders or clear recovery zones that can accommodate

both heavy-duty trucks transporting agricultural commodities and other users such as seasonal and daily commuters, pedestrians, and cyclists. As well, accessing highways is dangerous within Sutter County and has resulted in fatalities and injuries.

Based on data from the California Statewide Local Streets and Roads Needs Assessment, many factors cause unsafe road conditions. Because of the various daily uses of rural roadways and many users subject to unsafe road conditions, there is a growing need for transportation infrastructure restoration and overhaul in Sutter County. Maintaining a rural transportation network is challenging, yet several examples exist of successful models. The County recently received a regional grant from the Maintenance and Modernization discretionary funding round for its Maintenance Paving Project, which will support safer evacuation routes in the event of flooding and better connect Sutter County's rural areas to its economic centers.

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.savecaliforniastreet.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Statewide-2020-Local-Streets-and-Roads-Needs-Assessment-Final-8-4-21.pdf>



Sutter County has seen a significant increase in the number of commercial trucking yards in both the incorporated areas near residences and in agriculture-zoned areas that were previously active farmland. The County does not have consistent land ordinance standards or policies for the development of commercial parking yards, but has recently studied potential truck yard locations through a grant from SACOG.

Competitive transportation funding programs typically seek projects that contribute to greenhouse gas reduction benefits, and preservation of agricultural land is not often a criteria in these programs. However, preserving agricultural land contains sprawl, resulting in fewer vehicle miles traveled (VMT) in the county and region. To secure future federal funding (e.g., Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act), Sutter County should work with neighboring counties and local agencies to develop joint applications for Rural Complete Streets projects that support the agricultural sector as well as return climate benefits to the county and region.

Rural and agricultural communities do not have reliable access to broadband service when compared to urban areas.<sup>32</sup> Sutter County has the highest number of farms in the region that lack access to the Internet. According to the USDA Census of Agriculture, 21% of farms in Sutter County do not have internet access, limiting farm operations' ability to access online sales, conduct regulatory reporting, and adopt cutting-edge and resource-conserving agriculture technologies.<sup>33</sup> It also impacts agriculture-serving and value-added businesses in rural areas such as food processors and agritourism operators. This affects timely decision-making and decreases the competitiveness of local agricultural businesses. Overall, these challenges directly impact the county's agricultural industry and its ability to innovate and expand.

The Connected Capital Area Broadband Consortium (CCABC), using recently updated California State broadband maps and through consultation with jurisdictions, anchor institutions, and farmers, has identified priority unserved and underserved areas in Sutter County's rural communities.<sup>34</sup> More than 2,800 households are identified as unserved in the county and many consider the number to be undercounted. Figure 1 below shows the unserved areas in the county, which are spread throughout at low densities, given Sutter County's rural character. Areas in need of broadband infrastructure are noted as Nicolaus, Trowbridge, Rio Oso, Robbins, and Meridian.<sup>35</sup> Significant gaps in cell phone coverage were also identified.

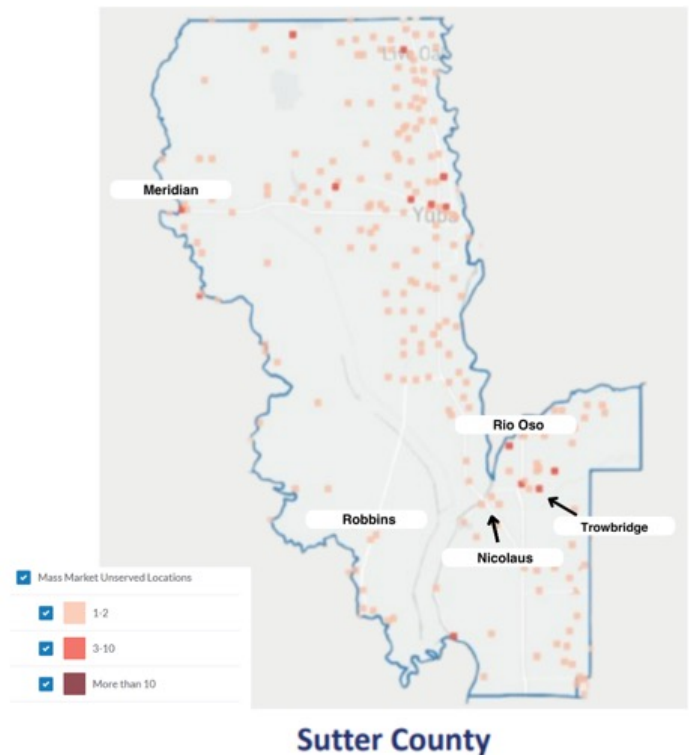


Figure 1: Unincorporated areas in Sutter County are identified by the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) as priority areas in need of broadband infrastructure.<sup>36</sup>

32 <https://www.broadbandmap.ca.gov/>

33 [https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Online\\_Resources/County\\_Profiles/California/cp06101.pdf](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Online_Resources/County_Profiles/California/cp06101.pdf)

34 <https://www.valleyvision.org/resources/connected-capital-area-broadband-consortium-memo-july-2023/>

35 <https://www.cpuc.ca.gov/industries-and-topics/internet-and-phone/broadband-implementation-for-california/last-mile-federal-funding-account/ffa-public-map>

36 <https://www.cpuc.ca.gov/industries-and-topics/internet-and-phone/california-advanced-services-fund/project-development-resources---data-and-maps>

The County has the opportunity to increase broadband access by improving broadband availability, adoption, and affordability with the historic investments California is making through its Broadband For All initiative, leveraging federal and state funding. In the State's latest round of broadband infrastructure funding through the Federal Funding Account program, Sutter County is eligible to receive over \$20.3 million in funding. Applications were submitted by a variety of providers that totaled more than \$61 million in September 2023. One of the applicants, the Golden State Connect Authority, through Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC) - of which Sutter County is a member, is planning to develop open-access municipal internet infrastructure to address gaps across the state's rural counties. 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 program). The State's development of its own open-access Middle-Mile network will include 65 acres of leased infrastructure in Sutter County and could be a resource to extend "last mile" infrastructure projects to priority unserved rural areas.

In addition, at least two Internet service providers (ISPs) are seeking to build broadband fiber infrastructure in Yuba City which could open up opportunities to expand into unincorporated areas. unWIRED Broadband announced recently that it is expanding its "fixed wireless" high-speed internet service into Sutter County. The company says its fixed wireless networks are more reliable due to the proximity of transmission towers.<sup>37</sup>



37 [https://www.appeal-democrat.com/news/fixed-wireless-high-speed-internet-expands-to-sutter-county/article\\_9722da64-4086-11ee-9d48-9335f496f905.html](https://www.appeal-democrat.com/news/fixed-wireless-high-speed-internet-expands-to-sutter-county/article_9722da64-4086-11ee-9d48-9335f496f905.html)



## Transportation Infrastructure Recommendations

CATEGORY	RECOMMENDATION
<b>Roadway Flooding</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The County should work with SACOG on a strategy to redirect flooding water in the roadway system into retention basins to help groundwater recharge.</li> </ul>
<b>Rural Transportation Network</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The County should build upon the recommendations of the new Maintenance Paving Project, to support safer evacuation routes in the event of flooding and better connect Sutter County's rural areas. With support from SACOG, Caltrans Local Assistance and other partners, Sutter County should prioritize rural complete street solutions on roadways that lack shoulders but accommodate heavy truck volumes.</li> </ul>
<b>Farm-to-Market Routes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sutter County should prioritize some roadways as farm-to-market routes. Such a designation can help demonstrate the importance of agriculture and 'tell the story' in transportation grant applications while also supporting agri-tourism. Because heavy trucks are often using these roadways, the designation could also support the necessary improvements to maintain the roadways.</li> </ul>
<b>Commercial Trucking Yards</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The County should evaluate the community and agricultural impacts of trucking yards and develop land use standards/policies for the development of truck yards. The County should also partner with the agricultural community to right-size the demand and location for trucking yards that support agriculture and reduce sprawl and development on agricultural lands. This process could lead to redesignating existing commercial truck yards in agricultural areas for the sole purposes of agricultural use.</li> </ul>

## Broadband Infrastructure Recommendations

CATEGORY	RECOMMENDATION
<b>Project Readiness</b>	<p>The County 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 its infrastructure/broadband policies and ordinances to ensure readiness for timely permit processing of infrastructure projects.</li> <li>Collaborate with SACOG and Caltrans on potential joint use/dig once/dig smart projects linking broadband and transportation, including coordinated with the development of the State's new Middle-Mile Open-Access Network but also other transportation projects.</li> </ul>
<b>Cell Phone Coverage</b>	<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

Sutter County's food and agriculture industries are an important part of the Greater Sacramento region's food and agriculture cluster. The region's Prosperity Strategy emphasizes an integrated approach to the full food system as the strategy to optimize the most value out of the region's agricultural economy and build the competitive advantage of the cluster.<sup>38</sup> While the county is predominantly agricultural, more small and mid-level agricultural processing facilities are needed. Processing was once a major employer in Sutter County, but the area has lost processing facilities over time as food and agriculture supply chains have become global. Cheaper land, labor, and fewer environmental requirements in other countries threaten the presence of large processors and distributors in the county. The regionalization of processing facilities has satisfied the need for growers in Sutter County in the interim, but more recently there are further pressures on the remaining food system jobs in the county. For example, Sunsweet, the largest prune packer in the world, is located in Sutter County and employs over 600 people. Increased business costs relative to other parts of the globe could threaten future operations.

An agricultural processing facility is needed in the southern part of the County near West Riego Road and Highway 99, but cost is a major barrier. Given that nearly 70% of the county's land mass is located in FEMA flood zones, any development permit would require submission and review to ensure certain conditions are met.<sup>39 40</sup> Any processing facility on a flood plain would have to be elevated, further increasing costs.

Consistent with other areas, Sutter County agriculture faces other challenges as well. The farmer population is aging, with the average of growers over 56 years of age. In Sutter County, only 8% of producers are under the age of 35 years old.<sup>41</sup> It is increasingly difficult to get young people interested in farming. There is 4H programming at school and after programs, Future Farmers of America (FFA) programs in all schools, and school gardens, but the impact of those programs is hard to track, especially regarding students' interests in college programs that support agriculture.

38 <https://www.valleyvision.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Prosperity-Strategy-Our-Path-Forward.pdf>

39 <https://www.suttercounty.org/government/county-departments/development-services/public-works/water-resources/floodplain-management-and-flood-information/floodplain-development-permit>

40 <https://www.suttercounty.org/home/showpublisheddocument/5932/638023990424900000>

41 [https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Online\\_Resources/County\\_Profiles/California/cp06101.pdf](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Online_Resources/County_Profiles/California/cp06101.pdf)

Achieving certification for certified organic or regenerative certified organic is a challenging, time-consuming, and expensive endeavor. Even if a farmer has been farming in a regenerative fashion for many years, it is difficult to be certified. In 2022, Sutter County's [Park Farming Organics](#) received Regenerative Certification from two certifying agencies - [A Greener World](#) and [Regenerative Organic Certification](#). For both agencies, Park Farming Organics was the first diversified, large row crop farm to qualify in California. Now companies that buy from Park Farming Organics, such as La Tourangelle (sunflower oil) and Pacific Foods (tomato soup), can display Regenerative Certified Organic icons on their products.



## Food System and Governance Infrastructure Recommendations

CATEGORY	RECOMMENDATION
<b>Value-Added Processing Facilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Southwest Yuba City has a designated area with industrial operations. Yuba City should conduct a feasibility study to see if this area would be an appropriate location for food processing and other ag-related facilities to capture more value-added activities.</li> </ul>
<b>Institutional Procurement Strategy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sutter County should partner with local anchor institutions such as schools and hospitals to encourage local sourcing. This will create new market opportunities for local growers and food producers. Yuba-Sutter Economic Development Corporation can also support the development of food system projects, along with collaborating on <a href="#">California Jobs First</a> implementation.</li> </ul>





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Pictures are courtesy of Sutter County Department of Agriculture.

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