



SACRAMENTO REGION

# Coordinated Rural Opportunities Plan

March 2024

## Yuba 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.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.valleyvision.org/wp-content/uploads/2021RegionalActionPlan.pdf>



# Background: Yuba County

Yuba County was founded in 1850 after the discovery of gold and was one of California’s original counties. The agricultural industry, among many other industries, emerged after gold mining operations ceased. Population growth in the county took off in the 1950s, and the county’s population has increased to over 82,600 people today.<sup>2 3</sup> Yuba County is home to a diverse landscape, including the Sierra Nevada foothills and mountains, the Yuba River Watershed, the valley floor, its two incorporated cities, Marysville and Wheatland, the unincorporated communities of Linda and Oliverhurst, and rural foothill communities. Beale Air Force Base (AFB), a military base established in 1942, is located on 23,000 acres of land between the flat agricultural lands of the Sacramento Valley and the foothills

of the western slope of the mountains.<sup>4</sup> Beale Air Force Base (AFB) lands have been used for grazing and crop production since the 1850s, prior to the acquisition of this land by the federal government. Today, Beale AFB lands are managed to permit multiple uses of natural resources, including grazing domestic livestock. The AFB is currently one of the largest industries in the county, along with agriculture.<sup>5</sup>

A majority of the county consists of agricultural croplands and pasture, totaling approximately 272,480 acres, or 66 percent of the total county area.<sup>6</sup> In an effort to concentrate urban infrastructure, as part of the 2011 General Plan update, the County established the Valley Growth Boundary that reduces pressure to develop in farm and grazing lands.



2 <https://cms7files.revize.com/yubaca/Yuba%20County/Agricultural%20Commission/Crop%20Reports/Yuba%20Co%20Annual%20Crop%20Report%202022%20Final.pdf>  
3 State of California, Department of Finance, E-1 Population Estimates for Cities, Counties and the State with Annual Percent Change — January 1, 2022 and 2023. Sacramento, California, May 2023.  
4 [https://www.beale.af.mil/Portals/110/BealeAFB%20INRMP%20DRAFT\\_appendices.pdf](https://www.beale.af.mil/Portals/110/BealeAFB%20INRMP%20DRAFT_appendices.pdf)  
5 [https://www.chooseyubasutter.com/files/ugd/8423a4\\_69d68b1b7bbc43e581a5448d35385fba.pdf](https://www.chooseyubasutter.com/files/ugd/8423a4_69d68b1b7bbc43e581a5448d35385fba.pdf)  
6 <https://cms7files.revize.com/yubaca/Yuba%20County/Agricultural%20Commission/Crop%20Reports/Yuba%20Co%20Annual%20Crop%20Report%202022%20Final.pdf>

## Yuba County's Top Five 2022 Commodities

- |                     |            |
|---------------------|------------|
| 1. Rice             | 4. Walnuts |
| 2. Prune/dried plum | 5. Kiwi    |
| 3. Livestock (all)  |            |

The top 5 commodities in Yuba County were valued at \$198,699,000 in 2022, down 13.6% from \$230,037,000 in 2021



Yuba County recognizes the importance of agriculture and how it supports the local and regional economy. For more than a century, agriculture has been a pillar of the county's economy and culture. The County's General Plan has several goals, objectives, policies, and implementation strategies to support agriculture's economic viability and preservation. Yuba County has over 760 producers - 94% of whom are family farms. The county's agricultural sector accounts for one out of every eleven jobs in the county.

While the gross value of agricultural production grew over the last ten years, it decreased by 9% from \$278,607,580 in 2021 to \$246,441,480 in 2022, due primarily to the significant drop in walnut prices. Rice remained Yuba County's top crop, generating \$113 million in gross value. At \$28 million, Prune/Dried Plum climbed to second in rank. Livestock took over third place at \$22 million. Walnuts dropped to number four at \$21 million amid historically low crop values, impacting all walnut producers in the region.

Other food system activities within the county's agricultural sector - such as processing, transporting and marketing - produced a strong multiplier effect, returning an additional 62.5% of economic output for Yuba County's economy and contributing to an estimated total gross value of \$400,467,405 from the county's agriculture sector. Despite this strong base, the fluctuation of commodity prices continues to pose challenges for farmers and landowners. Agriculture in Yuba County occurs on various scales with most of the production occurring 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 Yuba as a potential lead, while also highlighting the role of additional partners such as other local jurisdictions, regional agencies, special districts or conservation entities.

7 [https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Online\\_Resources/County\\_Profiles/California/cp06115.pdf](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Online_Resources/County_Profiles/California/cp06115.pdf)

8 [https://www.ag-impact.com/\\_files/ugd/341716\\_064132323ac34f02b0b33a6d62e9c1c5.pdf](https://www.ag-impact.com/_files/ugd/341716_064132323ac34f02b0b33a6d62e9c1c5.pdf)

9 <https://cms7files.revize.com/yubaca/Yuba%20County/Agricultural%20Commission/Crop%20Reports/Yuba%20Co%20Annual%20Crop%20Report%202022%20Final.pdf>



# Water Infrastructure

Yuba County's water source comes from the Yuba River Watershed, which accumulates rain and snowmelt from the Sierra Nevada mountain range. The Watershed consists of the Yuba River and its three tributaries: the North, Middle, and South Yuba rivers. The Yuba River drains into the Feather River, which is the largest tributary of the Sacramento River.

The Yuba Water Agency, comprised of water and irrigation districts, was established in 1959 to manage flood risk as well as provide a sustainable water source for all users in the county. When gold mining operations ceased and opened up opportunities for farming and ranching, the overdraft of the aquifer south of Yuba River caused significant groundwater depletion. To improve flood control, water supply, and power generation, the Yuba Water Agency proposed the Yuba River Development Project.<sup>10</sup> As part of this project, in 1969 the United States' fifth tallest dam, the New Bullards Bar Dam and Reservoir, was constructed. Today, almost a million-acre feet of water from the North and Middle Yuba River and Oregon Creekwater are stored in the Reservoir, which provides surface water to the county's farming community and ensures a sustainable groundwater supply for Yuba County.<sup>11</sup> New Bullards Bar Dam is one of five dams on the Yuba River. The other dams are: Englebright, Our House, Log Cabin and Daguerre Point Dam.<sup>12</sup>

On New Year's Day in 1997, there was a devastating with floodwaters from a levee break on the Feather River near Marysville, causing significant damage. The flooding catalyzed several investments along the Yuba and Feather rivers by the Yuba Water Agency, including levee improvements and improved coordination of reservoir operations at New Bullards Bar and the Oroville Reservoir. This coordination, known as the [Yuba-Feather Forecast-Coordinated Operations Program](#), has since expanded and improved monitoring and information-sharing among federal, state and local agencies in the region.

To address various issues related to water management and ecosystem restoration in the Lower Yuba River, the Lower Yuba River Accord was created in 2008. Composed of a diverse set of stakeholders including environmental organizations, water agencies, and governmental entities, the accord represents a collaborative effort to balance the needs of water users with the protection of the river's ecosystem.<sup>13</sup> The Yuba Accord resolved decades of controversy around instream flow requirements for the lower Yuba River, and can be a model for settlement agreements for diverse groups that have water management, ecosystem restoration, flood control, recreation, and water quality goals.

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/waterrights/water\\_issues/programs/water\\_quality\\_cert/yubariver\\_ferc2246.html](https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/waterrights/water_issues/programs/water_quality_cert/yubariver_ferc2246.html)

<sup>11</sup> <https://norcalwater.org/efficient-water-management/efficient-water-management-regional-sustainability/water-maps/new-bullards-bar/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://norcalwater.org/efficient-water-management/efficient-water-management-regional-sustainability/water-maps/new-bullards-bar/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.yubawater.org/191/Lower-Yuba-River-Management-Team-RMT>



The Yuba Accord includes a Conjunctive Use Agreement that calls for the Yuba Water Agency and its members to implement an array of measures. For example, as part of this agreement Yuba Water Agency will compensate participating members during times of drought for costs associated with groundwater pumping that is determined necessary to irrigate crops and avoid irrigation deficiencies.<sup>14</sup> This adaptation measure ensures adequate river levels in the Yuba River during dry years, and in wetter winters, the Conjunctive Use Agreement allows the groundwater basins to be recharged. The Conjunctive Use Agreement is an example of how the Yuba Water Agency is a leader in water management in the region; beyond striving for the long-term reliability, quality, and affordability in water supplies for the member units, it also plays a role in flood protection, fisheries enhancement, development and sale of hydroelectric power, and recreation.

Continued sustainability of local water supplies and other future benefits of groundwater substitution depend upon the recharge of the underlying aquifer with surface water from the Yuba River. Together, using the Lower River Yuba Accord, Yuba County and the cities work to manage regional groundwater conditions, including with private farmers and ranchers who maintain groundwater wells and surface water turnouts.

Access to groundwater remains a challenge for many farmers, but especially small-scale farmers. Small-scale farmers are disproportionately impacted by water restrictions because they do not have reliable access to groundwater storage, and securing funding for water infrastructure can be a challenge. In the Sierra foothills, which has a cluster of small-scale producers around Oregon House, some residents can reach shallow groundwater storage, but reliable water is not a guarantee. On the valley floor, many large agricultural companies have the financial means to access groundwater through the drilling of deeper groundwater wells, whereas small farms do not.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.yubawater.org/DocumentCenter/View/86/Conjunctive-Use-Agreement-PDF>

<sup>15</sup> <https://sentientmedia.org/california-water-wars-threaten-local-food-systems/>



Improved groundwater monitoring is needed to better balance groundwater conditions and farm irrigation. Because of extensive groundwater extraction, primarily for agricultural irrigation, the main groundwater discharge is now through well withdrawals. This has altered the direction of groundwater movement near Beale AFB, in particular.<sup>16</sup> Yuba Water Agency recently received \$4.3 million from the Department of Water Resources to help fund groundwater recharge projects, including refining the Yuba Groundwater Model, identifying data gaps, increased well monitoring, and a groundwater sustainability plan evaluation and tool refinement. The funding will also support a recharge suitability index to identify areas for direct recharge.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to groundwater management, improved efficiencies in existing purveyance systems can help with water reliability. There are cracks and seepage in the conveyor lines from Yuba Water Agency and its members' distribution and drainage systems.<sup>18</sup> This seepage causes an increase in the water and energy demand associated with providing water to Yuba Water Agency members. Additionally, when water seeps through the soil or leaks from canals, reservoirs, or pipelines, it reduces water availability and presents a barrier to water conservation and reduction.

Yuba Water Agency's Measurement Improvement Plan (MIP) identifies measurement improvements for a combination of inflow, outflow, and internal existing or new measurement sites.<sup>19</sup> The objectives of the MIP are to provide improved monitoring of distribution and drainage system flows, and canal spills to support spill reduction. Through the MIP, Yuba Water Agency will develop historical datasets of these flows to support future spill and tailwater recovery projects and to improve understanding of the water budget in the northside and southside service areas.<sup>20</sup> As well, Yuba Water Agency is currently planning and designing real-time measurement and monitoring of key boundary flow sites.

In addition to Yuba Water Agency's spill and tailwater reduction and recovery efforts, the members implement tailwater and spillage recovery and reuse within their service areas both north and south of the Yuba River. According to Yuba Water Agency Agricultural Water Management Plan, spillage and tailwater that enter the distribution and drainage system is actively reused to meet irrigation demands.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, through a combination of gravity and pump flow, Yuba Water Agency members who are downstream actively utilize tailwater and spillage from upstream members to offset diversion demands.

16 [https://www.beale.af.mil/Portals/110/BealeAFB%20INRMP%20DRAFT\\_appendices.pdf](https://www.beale.af.mil/Portals/110/BealeAFB%20INRMP%20DRAFT_appendices.pdf)

17 [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)

18 <https://www.yubawater.org/DocumentCenter/View/4949/2020-Agriculture-Water-Management-Plan>

19 [https://files.ceqanet.opr.ca.gov/278447-1/attachment/UREUJzCNhNTBI5sUJ\\_NMW4FW2x7EhNNvQNoxZy8luoEITqEjitiW4QkfHEouX0Jv8mL1A6Or80-pecV0](https://files.ceqanet.opr.ca.gov/278447-1/attachment/UREUJzCNhNTBI5sUJ_NMW4FW2x7EhNNvQNoxZy8luoEITqEjitiW4QkfHEouX0Jv8mL1A6Or80-pecV0)

20 <https://www.yubawater.org/DocumentCenter/View/4949/2020-Agriculture-Water-Management-Plan>

21 <https://www.yubawater.org/DocumentCenter/View/4949/2020-Agriculture-Water-Management-Plan>

Yuba Water Agency has been proactive in requesting funding for the Atmospheric River Control (ARC) Spillway, Forecast-Informed Reservoir Operations (FIRO), and water control manual updates at the New Bullards Bar Dam. Implementing Forecast-Informed Reservoir Operations (FIRO) on the New Bullards Bar Dam makes the linkage between forecasted weather events and reservoir operations together. The goal of FIRO is to increase coordination, communication, and to substantially reduce flood risk for the Yuba-Feather watersheds. In addition to implementing the FIRO program, Yuba Water Agency is working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to update the water control manual for New Bullards Bar. The current manual and operating procedures are based on unreliable forecasts that were used during the dam construction in the 1960s.<sup>22</sup> The update will incorporate current and future advances in science and forecast skills, including operational enhancements informed by the Yuba-Feather FIRO program.

The proposed ARC Spillway will reduce flood risk and enhance dam safety at New Bullards Bar Dam. The spillway will be 31.5 feet lower than the existing spillway gates and will allow Yuba Water Agency to release water before large storms are expected. The higher spillway that exists restricts when the Yuba Water Agency can release water, and oftentimes the water levels reach the spillway during large storm events when the Yuba River and levees are already strained. During high flow events, the increased flexibility in reservoir storage and improved releases in the proposed ARC Spillway will better control water levels for the levee system. This will reduce flood risk for agriculture and for communities along the Yuba and Feather rivers, such as Marysville and Yuba City, and will lower the chances of flood stages and the levees overtopping.<sup>23</sup>



<sup>22</sup> <https://www.yubawater.org/282/Forecast-Informed-Reservoir-Operations>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.yubawater.org/252/ARC-Spillway-at-New-Bullards-Bar-Dam>

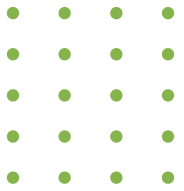


## Water Infrastructure Recommendations

Yuba Water Agency has been proactive in identifying infrastructure needed to support agriculture. For specific recommendations, check out Yuba Water Agency's [Agricultural Management Plan](#) which lists individual infrastructure projects that meet the needs of both agriculture and the larger water network. Below are overall water system recommendations arising from CROP stakeholder coordination.

CATEGORY	RECOMMENDATION
<p><b>Bullards Bar new Atmospheric Control (ARC) River Spillway</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yuba Water Agency committed \$11 million in 2018 to begin detailed design and planning on the project, but the anticipated cost of the ARC Spillway is approximately \$240 million. The Yuba Water Agency is currently exploring additional funding partners for this critical project.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Increased Water Management Coordination</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yuba Water Agency should combine groundwater and surface water planning into a single water management plan. There are several water management plans for Yuba County that are not currently coordinated with one another. The complexities of implementing multiple plans with varying timelines can jeopardize collaborative grant development, cause planning inefficiencies, and lead to duplicative efforts. The County has the Yuba County Integrated Regional Water Management Plan, Yuba Water Agency Agricultural Water Management Plan, the Measurement Improvement Plan, the Yuba Subbasins Groundwater Sustainability Plan, and the three agreements that are part of the Lower Yuba River Accord. In addition to providing greater efficiency in planning efforts, a single, comprehensive plan would increase the effectiveness of water management planning in Yuba County, and could help coordinate large projects, such as the ARC Spillway.</li> </ul>





## Land Use and Housing

As noted above, Yuba County is dedicated to preserving its agricultural heritage and is very supportive of the food industry as part of its overall economic strategy. Approximately 25% of the county's population resides in its two cities - Marysville and Wheatland, while the balance of the population resides in the county's many small communities and rural areas. Population growth in Marysville is limited by the natural boundaries created by the Yuba and Feather rivers. The city of Wheatland is an area identified as a focal point for future commercial and business development, including for the establishment of a prospective research center in a partnership with the Yuba Water Agency and University of California (CITRIS and the Banatao Institute) to develop sustainable energy technologies, especially sensors to monitor critical infrastructure such as levees and roads.

Agricultural land in the county serves a multitude of purposes - jobs, abundant natural resources, open space and scenic benefits that support agritourism and essential wildlife habitat. Habitat preservation within and near agricultural land is promoted by implementing buffers, which preserve existing wildlife habitat and the county's natural resources. Allowed land uses within buffer areas include drainage swales, trails, roads, community gardens, native landscaping, and other facilities and infrastructure that are compatible with ongoing agricultural operations.<sup>24</sup>

In response to substantial development on agricultural lands in the valley floor during the 1990s and 2000s, Yuba County employed a renewed focus on agriculture preservation through the 2030 General Plan. The Plan re-designates 5,000 acres of farm and grazing land, providing protection from urban development. The County also calls for new development to fall within the Valley Growth Boundary and Rural Community Boundary as a strategy to protect natural resources and prime farmland from urban growth pressures.<sup>25</sup> The passage of the Valley Growth Boundary in 2011 has effectively managed growth pressures on the valley floor.

Yuba County's natural resources land use designation does not have a specific density limit for agricultural employee housing; approval of housing is dependent on environmental site conditions, health and safety regulations, and availability of water, sewer, and other utilities. Encouraging on-site employee housing can help reduce the need for residential development elsewhere in the county, and can support multi-generational farming. Also, many agricultural workers are seasonal or migrant workers who need temporary housing during planting and harvesting seasons. A flexible approach to housing allows workers to have on-site living conditions while they work on the farm, which means they don't

<sup>24</sup> [https://www.yubalafco.org/files/7616ad99a/2030\\_general\\_plan\\_final\\_-\\_complete\\_doc+%281%29.pdf](https://www.yubalafco.org/files/7616ad99a/2030_general_plan_final_-_complete_doc+%281%29.pdf)  
<sup>25</sup> [https://www.yubalafco.org/files/7616ad99a/2030\\_general\\_plan\\_final\\_-\\_complete\\_doc+%281%29.pdf](https://www.yubalafco.org/files/7616ad99a/2030_general_plan_final_-_complete_doc+%281%29.pdf)

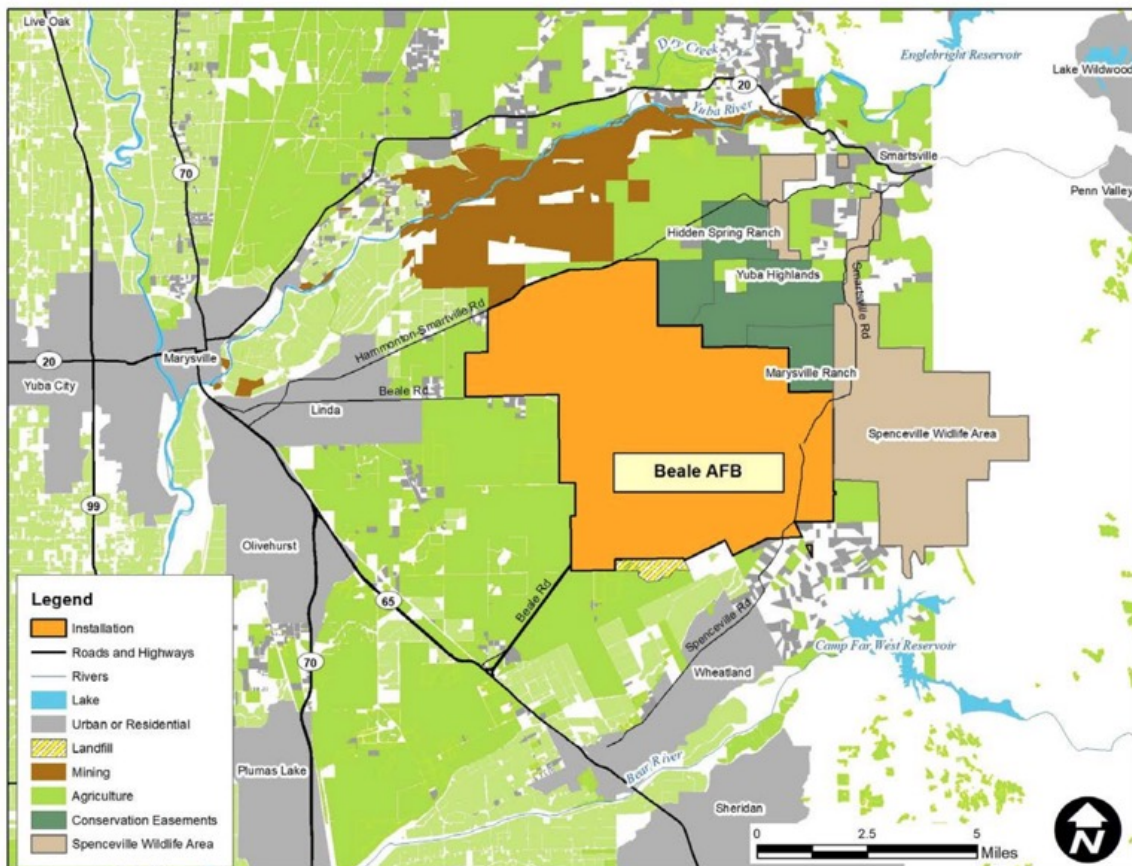
need to travel outside of the area to find housing. Contrary to other counties in the region, Yuba County has a policy in its General Plan that requires residential dwellings developed in cropland areas to be secondary to, and supportive of, ongoing agricultural operations.<sup>26</sup> When residential dwellings are developed on agricultural land in other parts of the region, oftentimes production on the land ceases.

With direction from the 2030 Plan, Yuba County coordinates with the Yuba Conservation District to seek funding for projects in existing agricultural areas that improve natural habitat, including: planting native vegetation around the edges of farms, around structures, and along roads and driveways; and maintaining or improving irrigation and drainage canals.

Since 2011, Beale AFB has partnered with several agencies and non-profits to contribute funds to the purchase of conservation easements on three properties deemed appropriate by the Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI)

Program. Restricting development on these properties protects the security needs of the base. In addition, the designation of these lands as conservation easements preserves natural habitats and contiguous open space around Beale AFB. Beale AFB's Natural Resource Management plan notes the AFB will coordinate future conservation easements with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to determine who should operate the property. CDFW will be given the right of first refusal before working through a land trust. Beale AFB is focused on the western boundaries of the base and requested over \$20 million in REPI and partner grants in 2018 for new easements located there. Beale AFB does not manage the easements but retains status as a grantee with the right to enforce and monitor them if needed.

Beale AFB authorizes the use of agricultural revenue from leases, licenses, and permits to support program expenses and installation of natural resources management. Past AFB



Source: Beale Air Force Base Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan

26 [https://www.yubalafco.org/files/7616ad99a/2030\\_general\\_plan\\_final\\_-\\_complete\\_doc+%281%29.pdf](https://www.yubalafco.org/files/7616ad99a/2030_general_plan_final_-_complete_doc+%281%29.pdf)

support includes grazing infrastructure, vegetation monitoring, wildlife surveys, weed control activities, and supplies. Future projects planned by Beale AFB include the installation of solar wells, improved water distribution, and expansion of the grazing program.<sup>27</sup>

There is a clear need for a younger generation of farmers to step in to continue the viability of the agricultural economy. The need is particularly acute in Yuba County, which has a disproportionately older farm workforce. According to data from the 2017 Census of Agriculture County Profile, only five percent of producers in Yuba County were under the age of 35 years old and 40% were 65 years and older. Approximately 54% were between the ages of 35 - 64 years old. The high price of farmland is a challenge for all farmers, but is a significant barrier to entry for new and younger farmers wanting to farm. Some farmers have to buy residentially-zoned land and go through the conditional use permit process in order to gain access to land for farming. Unreliable and inaccessible water supplies are also a problem. In the meantime, many farmers who are aging out are selling off their farms.

Many small, young, and newer farmers, including BIPOC farmers, struggle to make ends meet. In 2020, the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts (CARCD) awarded recipients four Specialty Crop Technical Assistance Hubs grants to help specialty crop growers strengthen the resiliency of their farms to cope with crises, including climate crisis. Yuba and Sutter Counties were awarded \$35,000 for the Yuba-Sutter Specialty Crop Technical Assistance Hub, managed by Sutter Resource Conservation District, Yuba County Resource Conservation District, and a consulting partner to provide demonstrations and assistance with water-efficient practices, compost application, and cover crop plantings among others practices, focusing on specialty crops. The grant program ended in 2022.<sup>28</sup> This specialty crop technical assistance hub could be a model for Yuba County to replicate and scale up as a strategy to address the barriers that small, new, and younger farmers face in entering farming. The program could provide education on the multiple benefits of specialty crops and climate-smart agriculture, as well as provide assistance and stipends to small, new and younger farmers.

## Land Use and Housing Infrastructure Recommendations

CATEGORY	RECOMMENDATION
<p><b>Small-Scale Farming</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A The General Plan (Policy NR3.8 ) states the County will support small-scale farming on Valley Neighborhood properties, where such operations are compatible with surrounding uses. The County should engage with farmers, especially those from underrepresented groups, the University of California Cooperative Extension, and local agricultural organizations to ensure small and beginning farmers take full advantage of the opportunities and support offered by this policy.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Specialty Crop Technical Assistance Hub</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yuba County should work with local agencies, universities, and the agricultural community in designing and implementing a Specialty Crops Technical Assistance Hub Program that shares know-how and incentivizes small, new and younger farmers to grow specialty crops. Specialty crops can require relatively low acreage because they are high-value.</li> </ul>

<sup>27</sup> [https://www.beale.af.mil/Portals/110/BealeAFB%20INRMP%20DRAFT\\_appendices.pdf](https://www.beale.af.mil/Portals/110/BealeAFB%20INRMP%20DRAFT_appendices.pdf)  
<sup>28</sup>



# Transportation & Broadband Infrastructure

Yuba County's rural roads are in need of major maintenance, yet many state/federal transportation funding programs are limited to major facilities. The Pavement Condition Index (or PCI) measures conditions on regional roadways on a scale of 0 to 100. Based on PCI data by county from the 2021 California Statewide Local Streets and Roads Needs Assessment, Yuba County local roads and pavement conditions have improved since 2010. Even with this improvement, Yuba County's pavement conditions are still "at risk." The county's PCI score of 67 in 2021 is up only 1 point from 2018.<sup>29</sup> Trucks heavily utilize rural roads to transport crops, livestock, and products, and these roads are deteriorating. Traffic congestion and safety concerns related to high levels of truck traffic are a major issue, including on Highway 65 and Highway 70 which have major bottlenecks that are especially challenging during harvest season.

The growing efficiencies of gas-powered cars and the transition to cleaner-fuel vehicles puts pressure on county gas tax revenues used to fund local road repair and projects, with some counties already experiencing a decrease in gas tax revenues. Only 26% (172 miles) of Yuba County's

more than 650 miles of roads can receive federal or state funds based on qualifications around facility type and use. Urban and local rural roads that do not qualify for these state/federal funds are funded by county gas taxes, which account for the remaining 480 miles of roads in Yuba County. Jurisdictions will have to address the funding gap stemming from a drop in local gas tax revenue due to more fuel-efficient and alternative fuel vehicles. This is a regional and statewide issue, but especially apparent in rural counties with a high share of road miles.

Portions of Yuba County's transportation infrastructure are not well-equipped for evacuation related to extreme weather events such as wildfires and floods. According to Cal FIRE's 2023 California Fire Hazard Severity Zone Map, more than 161,000 acres of land in the county are identified as a "Very High" or "High" fire hazard severity zone.<sup>30</sup> In the foothills and mountain areas county in particular, fire hazards and risks are higher than other areas, yet transportation improvements to these areas often have to be covered out of the county gas tax, as many smaller roads are not eligible for federal aid.

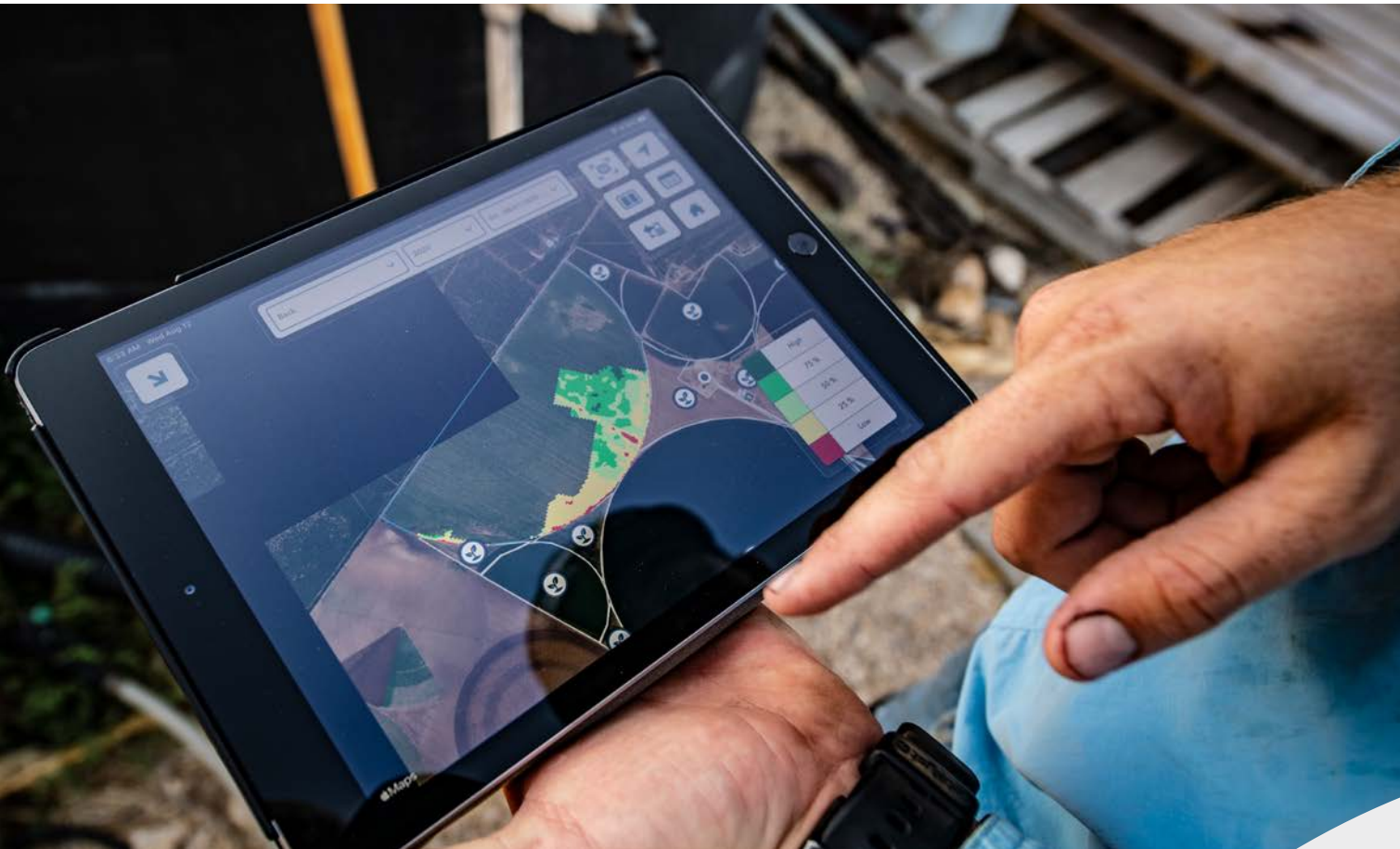
29 California Statewide Local Streets and Roads Needs Assessment, August 2021.

30 <https://osfm.fire.ca.gov/what-we-do/community-wildfire-preparedness-and-mitigation/fire-hazard-severity-zones/fire-hazard-severity-zones-maps-2022>

The County was successful in accelerating SB 1 funding to get ahead of the maintenance cycle. Yuba County worked with the Yuba Water Agency and state lawmakers to borrow against future Road Maintenance and Rehabilitation Account apportionments, allowed by SB 848, to fix 70 miles of roads in one summer. This advanced funding for future gas tax revenue is a prime example of how local governments can work with local agencies and state lawmakers to secure transportation funding for road maintenance.<sup>31</sup> This strategy worked for Yuba County because the County and the Yuba Water Agency were able to accomplish four years' worth of road repairs in one summer through a project bundling contract, among other cost-savings.

In addition to the county's road system, rail plays an important role in goods movement in the county. Union-Pacific connects the Yuba-Sutter area to the national railway system, which is used primarily to transport agricultural goods and other goods produced in the region.<sup>32</sup>

Access to broadband infrastructure and technology is vital for precision agriculture and management of resources such as water and energy, and is an essential need for agricultural business operations and public safety. The 2017 Census of Agriculture showed 18% of farms in Yuba County lack internet access, which is the second highest percentage in the region, behind Sutter County.<sup>33</sup> Reliable and adequate broadband access is an ongoing challenge, especially in the county's rural areas, where fire and flood risk also significantly higher than in urban areas. Broadband wireless deployment is difficult in the county due to the topography, especially in the foothills, that affect "line of sight." In addition, as noted above, much of Yuba County is identified as "Very High" or "High" fire hazard severity zones. These zones have high winds and are near or in areas where there are high fire risks.



31 [https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/ipd/project\\_profiles/ca\\_yuba\\_county\\_rd\\_repairs\\_project.aspx](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/ipd/project_profiles/ca_yuba_county_rd_repairs_project.aspx)

32 [https://www.yubalafco.org/files/7616ad99a/2030\\_general\\_plan\\_final\\_-\\_complete\\_doc+%281%29.pdf](https://www.yubalafco.org/files/7616ad99a/2030_general_plan_final_-_complete_doc+%281%29.pdf)

33 [https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Online\\_Resources/County\\_Profiles/California/cp06115.pdf](https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Online_Resources/County_Profiles/California/cp06115.pdf)

Broadband fiber deployment is very costly in low-density rural areas, with soil composition another consideration in Yuba County. The soils in the foothills and rural areas of the county are considered highly erosive, which can damage roads, bridges, buildings, and other built features and structures. This makes it challenging for dig-once/dig-smart projects that could deploy fiber in combination with transportation projects.

The County has been very proactive in addressing its broadband infrastructure gaps, including adopting a County Broadband Master Plan in 2021 and designating a broadband program manager to guide the County’s project readiness. The Plan identified a high number of households considered unserved or underserved. Identified priority areas for investment include Dobbins, Brownsville, Linda, Olivehurst, Smartsville, Oregon House and the Yuba foothills.

New state and federal broadband funding under California’s Broadband for All initiative is providing for historic levels of investment in broadband infrastructure. In the most recent state funding opportunity, the Federal Funding Account program managed by the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) has designated almost \$40 million in funding eligibility for the County. Applications submitted by Internet Service Providers and the Golden State Connect Authority in the fall of 2023 totaled approximately \$120 million (this includes some joint projects with contiguous counties). Additional opportunities will open up in late 2024/2025 through federal funding that will flow through the State through the Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment (BEAD) program.

## Transportation Infrastructure Recommendations

CATEGORY	RECOMMENDATION
<b>Local Road Maintenance/ Repairs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Replicate the accelerated model of road maintenance and repair on farm to market routes. While more costly upfront, bringing facilities to a state of good repair will greatly reduce rehabilitation needs through time and can help activate the emerging agritourism sector.</li> </ul>

## Broadband Infrastructure Recommendations

CATEGORY	RECOMMENDATION
<b>Project Readiness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yuba County is proactive and will continue to work with interested Internet Service Providers (ISPs), RCRC and agricultural stakeholders to identify specific broadband gaps in the rural and unincorporated areas of the County and priority projects that can be opportunities for BEAD applications and other funding sources.</li> <li>• The County should coordinate with Caltrans on the projected buildout of the state’s Middle-Mile Open-Access Network that will expand opportunities for last-mile projects. While some of the planned buildout will be on leased infrastructure there will still be some new construction. The County should also coordinate with SACOG on potential joint-use dig-once/dig-smart project opportunities on non-state roads.</li> </ul>



# Food System and Governance

One of the challenges facing the county's agricultural industry is the loss of processing facilities over time. This loss means that agriculture and livestock products must be moved long distances to facilities, putting a strain on existing transportation infrastructure and incurring higher costs for farmers and ranchers. As an example, an estimated 95% of Yuba County's livestock leaves the county for processing. Foothill livestock farmers and ranchers must travel far distances to process their livestock, which raises their operating costs and affects the quality of their meat.<sup>34</sup> The remainder goes to niche operations, including a custom butchery shop in Marysville and a facility in Browns Valley that specializes in jerky products. A larger, USDA-inspected meat processing facility in West Linda produces cuts of beef, pork, chicken, and lamb, as well as marinated, smoked, and cured meats, but more is needed.

In addition, medium and heavy-duty diesel trucks transporting crops and livestock long distances to processing facilities contribute harmful pollutants and emissions, negatively impacting rural and farming communities' health and air quality. Several county stakeholders felt that the long distance between farms and ranches and processing facilities is a more pressing issue than road quality.

A Needs Assessment report sponsored by Yuba County shows a need for a food system that can support the aggregation and distribution of local produce in the Yuba County foothills communities, including Oregon House, Dobbins, Browns Valley, Brownsville, and Loma Rica. Some of the needed infrastructure facilities, such as a light processing facility or a food hub facility, could be a Rural Center under the County's 2030 General Plan. Agricultural-related centers could also be developed through Rural Community Plans, which are community-specific plans allowable under the 2030 General Plan. The Rural Community Plans are intended to diversify the local land use mix to meet more resident needs within each community, increase energy efficiency, shorten trips, and encourage non-vehicular travel, as feasible, to increase greenhouse gas efficiency.<sup>35</sup>



<sup>34</sup> <https://agendasuite.org/jip/yuba/file/getfile/29202>  
<sup>35</sup> [https://www.yubalafco.org/files/7616ad99a/2030\\_general\\_plan\\_final\\_-\\_complete\\_doc+%281%29.pdf](https://www.yubalafco.org/files/7616ad99a/2030_general_plan_final_-_complete_doc+%281%29.pdf)





A local food hub system that is a part of a larger network of food hubs in the region would address many of the issues and challenges faced by Yuba County and the agricultural industry. A food hub system facility would provide assistance and resources to help small farmers and producers reach new local markets such as school districts and hospital systems. This would ensure access to a larger and more stable consumer, which also would keep food, products, and more profits local. The General Plan states the County should coordinate with school districts and other local agencies to incorporate local agricultural products into food programs.

[Farms Together](#), a program developed by the California Association of Food Banks, Fresh Approach, and the Community Alliance with Family Farmers, coordinates collaboratives of small and mid-scale family and BIPOC farmers to provide healthy, fresh, and local food to California families in need. The program just launched in Yuba/Sutter and will be managed by Yubakami, who will work with a dozen small and BIPOC producers to provide Yuba-Sutter Food Bank recipients with fresh produce from farms that are organically certified, or better. As part of the program, Yubakami is providing financial security for the growers by guaranteeing the purchase of their produce - no matter the quantity - and at a price that is profitable for the grower. The \$200,000

grant that Yubakami received will support six months of operation and has the potential to transform the area's small farms if expanded.

Yuba and Sutter school districts are partnering on a joint proposal to California Department of Food and Agriculture's Farm to School grant program. The proposal includes a coordinator who would support staff capacity for school nutrition directors to purchase local food from small farms. The Coordinator would also support grantwriting and district-wide purchase coordination.

Given its proximity to the metropolitan Sacramento area, there is an opportunity for county farmers and food producers to participate in the regional farm-to-fork movement and leverage emerging agritourism assets. The agricultural industry produces a wide variety of foods and has significant local ownership, making it favorable for the potential development of farmers' markets and direct-to-grocery and restaurant sales. An effort focused on farm-to-fork food production and distribution, including working with local institutions to increase local food procurement, could provide new market opportunities and support the county's Blue Zone Initiative being led by Adventist Health to promote healthy living and improved health outcomes. An additional benefit would be increased resiliency of the food supply chain and more investment in the local economy.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>36</sup> [https://www.chooseyubasutter.com/files/ugd/8423a4\\_69d68b1b7bbc43e581a5448d35385fba.pdf](https://www.chooseyubasutter.com/files/ugd/8423a4_69d68b1b7bbc43e581a5448d35385fba.pdf)

## Food System and Governance Recommendations

CATEGORY	RECOMMENDATION
<p><b>Food Hub and Processing Facilities</b></p>	<p>Yuba County is supportive of developing a food hub facility as part of a regional food hub network.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Given the processing of raw agricultural products outside the county, the County should pursue projects that support local aggregation, processing and packaging.<sup>37</sup></li> <li>• A food hub facility would support small farmers and growers in getting high-value crops and products to markets while reducing some of the long-distance transport of agricultural products. Being part of the regional food hub network would strengthen connections between small, BIPOC and younger farmers and various markets, and strengthen local resiliency.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Agritourism Strategy</b></p>	<p>Support farm-to-fork and farmers’ market initiatives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support the Yuba-Sutter Farm Bureau (YSFB) in working with farmers to gain support, using best practice examples.</li> <li>• Support the establishment of a task force and development of a marketing strategy involving farmers, wineries, food producers, regional restaurants, grocers, the casino, and existing agritourism destinations, such as the Oregon House/Foothills area, Bishop’s Pumpkin Farm, and UC ANR Agritourism.</li> <li>• Collaborate with the Yuba-Sutter Chamber of Commerce to develop an agritourism strategy.</li> <li>• Activate the Highway 99 Farm-to-Fork Corridor.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Institutional Procurement</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify opportunities for increased institutional procurement of locally grown food products by schools, hospitals, county facilities, the casino and others.</li> <li>• Assess needs for the development of central kitchen facilities for school districts.</li> <li>• Collaborate with the county’s Blue Zone Initiative being led by Adventist Health to promote more plant-based locally sourced foods, farmers markets, and healthy eating.</li> </ul>

<sup>37</sup> <https://agendasuite.org/iip/yuba/file/getfile/29202>

<sup>38</sup> [https://www.yubalafco.org/files/7616ad99a/2030\\_general\\_plan\\_final\\_-\\_complete\\_doc+%281%29.pdf](https://www.yubalafco.org/files/7616ad99a/2030_general_plan_final_-_complete_doc+%281%29.pdf)

<sup>39</sup> [https://www.chooseyubasutter.com/files/ugd/8423a4\\_69d68b1b7bbc43e581a5448d35385fba.pdf](https://www.chooseyubasutter.com/files/ugd/8423a4_69d68b1b7bbc43e581a5448d35385fba.pdf)

## Food System and Governance Recommendations Continued

CATEGORY	RECOMMENDATION
<p><b>Collaborative Roundtables</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yuba County should consider convening a farmers’ working group/roundtable where farmers, landowners, planners, Tribal communities, habitat conservancies/trusts, and environmentalists can regularly meet to identify barriers to the implementation of new and upcoming regulatory requirements. The 2030 General Plan states the County will partner with local agricultural groups, such as the Yuba-Sutter Farm Bureau, UC Davis Extension representatives, local organic farming groups, and other public and private groups representing farmers to create voluntary and incentive-based programs to help farmers reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>38</sup> These two efforts could be combined. The Yuba-Sutter EDC, the Yuba-Sutter Chamber, the YSFB, the SBDC and the County could help support growers and food producers by collaborating to host workshops with federal, state and local funding agencies that assist businesses.</li> </ul>
<p><b>University Research Center</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support the Yuba Water Agency in efforts to establish a University Research Center in partnership with Beale AFB, Wheatland and the University of California. Technologies developed by the center could help with the management of critical infrastructure affecting the viability of agriculture, including levees and roadways, especially in emergency preparedness.<sup>39</sup></li> </ul>



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Pictures are courtesy of Yuba County Department of Agriculture and Yubakami.

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