

Santa Clara County Food System Alliance
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County of Santa Clara
Consumer and Environmental Protection Agency
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Saving Small Farms in Santa Clara County

Small Farms Are Viable, Worth Preserving, and Critical to Combat Climate Change

SANTA CLARA COUNTY, CALIF. – The Santa Clara County Food System Alliance, a collaboration of the Santa Clara County Agricultural Commissioner and several local nonprofit leaders, released its 2020 report highlighting the viability of small-scale agriculture in the county where 52% of farmland parcels are 10 acres or less. The [Report](#) dispels the myth that small farms cannot be viable in the county and builds upon the recommendations of the Santa Clara Valley Agricultural Plan that was approved by the County of Santa Clara Board of Supervisors. Funding for the report came from the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority.

The report showcases small farms succeeding in a challenging environment, but additional efforts are needed to protect their future, including:

- Facilitate access to and permanently preserve farmland
- Make farmland affordable to small farmers
- Invest in land conservation and climate smart practices
- Increase sales and consumption of locally produced food
- Streamline burdensome regulations that disproportionately affect small farms

The public benefits from small farms because they can create a resilient urban food supply, drive a local food economy, be a local force in climate change mitigation — including minimizing impacts of flooding and reducing fire hazards — and provide valuable ecological services estimated up to \$3.9 billion annually.

"We need to preserve our agricultural lands where we grow food and we need to protect our clean water," said County of Santa Clara Board of Supervisors President Cindy Chavez.

"Our County is committed to preserving farmland and open space to benefit the public for generations to come," said County of Santa Clara Supervisor Mike Wasserman. "With the Santa Clara Valley Agricultural Plan and Food System Alliance, we are encouraging a self-sustaining food plan for the future."

As the current generation of farmers retires, helping new farmers get started will be critical going forward.

The County of Santa Clara has lost more farmland than any other Bay Area county in the last 30 years, more than 15,000 acres. Small farms, especially those on the urban edge, are the most vulnerable to future land loss.

"Agriculture plays a vital role in climate change mitigation and farmland generates 70 times less greenhouse gas emissions than developed land," said Julie Hutcheson, Director of Impact for Green Foothills. "In addition to carbon sequestration, the ecological benefits of preserving farmland include flood control, groundwater recharge, fire hazard mitigation, and pollinator habitat."

This report falls on the second anniversary of the County Board of Supervisors passing the award-winning Santa Clara Valley Agricultural Plan. This report, which compliments the Ag Plan, was a two-year effort to identify problems facing small farms and prospective solutions to keep farming strong and vital in the county.

"Maintaining our current agriculture areas is critical from an economic standpoint and a sustainable feeding position where our locally grown produce is used in our local restaurants," said County of Santa Clara Agricultural Commissioner Joe Deviney.

Small farms will only be successful in benefiting the community and the environment with a collaborative effort between farmers, policy makers, residents, and farmland owners.

ABOUT FOOD SYSTEM ALLIANCE

The Santa Clara County Food System Alliance (Alliance) is a collaborative of stakeholders concerned with issues of healthy food access, agricultural production and food distribution in Santa Clara County. The Alliance collaborates with stakeholders in our neighboring counties that share concerns about the same issues.

The Alliance is one of a growing network of county Alliances and Food Councils that allow for consensus actions and policy recommendations from food and agriculture stakeholders and was formed in 2009 with the support of the Health Trust as part of its program to promote a healthier Santa Clara County

The Alliance works to increase community understanding of the food supply chain that serves Santa Clara County. Together members are responding to concerns about the lack of access to healthy food, the loss of agricultural land in the southern part of the county, and to promote a sustainable food system in the South Bay.

ABOUT THE COUNTY OF SANTA CLARA, CALIFORNIA

The County of Santa Clara government serves a diverse, multi-cultural population of 1.9 million residents in Santa Clara County, the sixth largest county in California. With a \$8.17 billion budget, more than 70 agencies/departments and nearly 22,000 employees, the County of Santa Clara plans for the needs of a dynamic community, offers quality services, and promotes a healthy, safe and prosperous community for all. The County provides essential services, including public health and environmental protection; behavioral health and medical services through the County of Santa Clara Health System including Santa Clara Valley Medical Center (Hospital and Clinics), O'Connor Hospital

and Saint Louise Regional Hospital; child and adult protection services; homelessness prevention and solutions; roads, parks and libraries; emergency response to disasters; protection of minority communities and those under threat; access to a fair criminal justice system, and scores of other services, particularly for those members of our community in the greatest need.

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