



PRESS RELEASE

COUNTY OF SONOMA

575 Administration Drive · Santa Rosa, CA 95403
Phone (707) 565-2431 · Fax (707) 565-3778

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: August 9, 2011

Contact: Jim Leddy · (707) 565-2190
jleddy@sonoma-county.org

Board Praises Community For Food Forum Report

Next Steps from the Groundbreaking February Event Outlined

Santa Rosa, CA – On August 9, 2011, the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors received the completed report on the County's first ever Food Forum which was held February 24th, 2011. The event which had over 300 people from across the community in attendance represented a wide variety of stakeholders in the healthy food and farming systems. The Report proposes 11 areas for action to improve the access to healthy local foods and support the agricultural economy of Sonoma County and was published by the Food Systems Alliance an outgrowth of the County's Health Action Program.

Chair of the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors Efren Carrillo commented, "The Food Forum was an unprecedented community effort bringing together diverse, passionate people. Everyone who participated clearly wants to support and enhance local agriculture and improve residents' access to healthy, local foods. We must move forward with the areas identified in the Report and strengthen our commitment to our local food system."

Supervisor Valerie Brown, who co-chaired the Board Ad Hoc committee with Chairman Carrillo which launched the idea for the Food Forum stated, "Improving people's access to healthy food is a no-brainer. Healthier people make healthier communities and supporting local agriculture makes a healthier economy. This effort will literally reap what it sows. I am so thankful for all of the work that has gotten us here and looking forward to the next steps."

Over the course of a highly interactive day, the group exchanged ideas about our continuing ability to farm in the county and have access to great tasting, healthy local products. Joe Pozzi, fourth generation Sonoma County sheep producer and Food Forum panelist commented, "To guarantee a local, secure food source in Sonoma County we need to set policy which protects and enhances the economic viability of our family farms and ranches."

The forum was hosted by the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors, University of California Cooperative Extension, Sonoma County Department of Health Services, and Sonoma County Food System Alliance. The forum was the first ever expression of a shared aspiration by

farmers, consumers, environmentalists, and hunger advocates for a better food system to serve Sonoma County. While the challenges local farmers and at-risk communities face are not small, neither are local aspirations and ideas to improve farm livelihoods and food access.

The report identifies key areas for action for local government, businesses, and the community and the members of the Sonoma County Food System Alliance.

Rita Scardaci, Director of the Sonoma County Department of Health Services stated, “The forum participants came together to find common ground based on their individual experiences. This is reflected in the report, and the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors, the Sonoma County Food System Alliance, and other leaders will find this information useful in their continuing work on a healthy food system.”

Eleven major themes, or recommended areas for action, that were suggested during the Food Forum include:

1. Increase opportunities for in-county aggregation and processing of agricultural products
2. Strengthen community education about food and our food system
3. Alleviate hunger and increase the affordability and availability of fresh, healthful, and local food
4. Build neighborhood food security
5. Increase the production of food on public lands
6. Support, education, and develop new farmers through internships and mentoring
7. Improve regulatory and permit processes for farmers
8. Expand engagement with agriculture by increasing agritourism
9. Address needs for farm worker housing and transportation
10. Focus on water as a key environmental issue and balance interests of stakeholder in water resources
11. Establish a county staff position or positions to help further a healthy, local food system

University of California Cooperative extension Director Stephanie Larson commented, “These recommendations are just a down payment on the attendees’ willingness to roll-up their sleeves and help resolve long-standing challenges in the food system. The Food System Alliance is committed to working on these issues with the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors and the community, and will report on its programming and policy priorities.”

To view a copy of the report, go online to the Sonoma County Food System Alliance website: <http://aginnovations.org/alliances/sonoma/>

###

The County of Sonoma is comprised of 26 departments and agencies that provide a full range of services to the community. It encompasses over 1,600 square miles and is home to more than 483,000 residents. Sonoma County government has a history of providing excellent and responsive public service while operating under sound fiscal principles. Sonoma County is located less than one hour north of San Francisco and combines in one location the beautiful Pacific coastline, award-winning wineries, majestic redwoods, historic towns, fine dining, and a wide variety of entertainment and cultural activities.