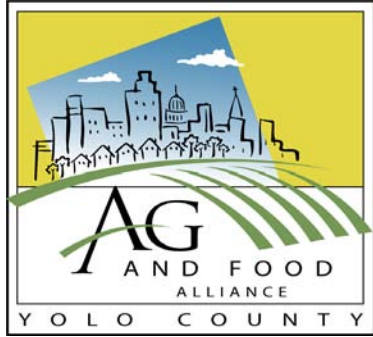




REGIONAL
FOOD
FORUM
REPORT
YOLO COUNTY





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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Forum Format/Process	2
Perspectives on Regional Food Systems	3
Emerging Topics and Discussion	6
1. Aggregation Centers, Distribution and Transportation	6
2. Processing and Storage	7
3. Accessing and Growing Regional Markets	8
4. Regulatory Issues	11
5. Education Needs	12
Final Outcomes and Next Steps	13
Conclusion	14
Appendices	15

Executive Summary

On July 22, 2010 the Yolo Ag and Food Alliance (formerly the Yolo Ag Futures Alliance) hosted a meeting with agriculture producers, food distributors, institutional food buyers and rural development advocates to address infrastructure needs in the Yolo and Solano county area to help develop a more regionally focused food system. Many farmers and ranchers in this area have a desire to sell their products more locally, but the lack of basic infrastructure is a major limitation. The purpose of the meeting was to identify the critical gaps in agricultural processing, storage and distribution infrastructure and begin a process to close some of the identified gaps through a discovery and prioritization process. We fully intend for this meeting to eventually result in a meaningful outcome rather than just a talking exercise.

More than 65 people participated, including 40 farmers/ranchers and 25 ag support representatives from Yolo and Solano Counties. Stakeholders including the Yolo Ag Commissioner, staff from UC Cooperative Extension and Economic Development, bankers, distributors, a farmers' market manager and the Health Department gathered to recommend specific actions towards enhancing the local economy and viability of regional agriculture.

Two recommendations were given to the Yolo Ag and Food Alliance (AFA) to work on initially, though other recommendations will be directly considered in the near future.

1. The Alliance will be working closely with Yolo County Economic Development Division to determine the specific needs of meat producers for slaughter, processing, storage and distribution. These needs will then be taken to Superior Farms, and potentially others, to collaborate on developing a plan for implementation. The Yolo AFA has already begun work on implementing this recommendation.
2. A position for a regulatory ombudsman for Yolo and Solano County will be pursued. This position will assist all producers in the region to navigate permits and comply with

regulations, as well as advocate for farmers when appropriate. The Yolo AFA has met with other stakeholders, collected best practices from other counties in the state, and is actively working on implementing this position(s).

Other recommendations include:

3. Work with Environmental Health and Planning toward supporting the viability of small-scale poultry harvesting;
4. Create a manual for navigating the regulatory process for regional producers;
5. Create a marketing department that advocates for all producers; this would be a new job;
6. Create a buyer's guide for accessing local producers. The Ag Commissioner's office is already committed to assisting with this;
7. Conduct a feasibility study of aggregation centers for processing/distribution and market outlets in the region;
8. Identify retail outlets and create display packets highlighting local farmers and produce at locations not previously served in this way.

As the market demand for regionally produced food continues to grow, there is great opportunity to increase

the economic viability of our local farms and ranches while improving the health and quality of life of all Yolo and Solano residents. The purpose of the Yolo Ag and Food Alliance (AFA) is to maintain and enhance agriculture and the environment in Yolo County in perpetuity. The Yolo AFA is committed to following through, with the support of many partner organizations, on many of the recommendations made at the Yolo County Regional Food Forum.

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Many farmers and ranchers in this area have a desire to sell their products more locally, but the lack of basic infrastructure is a major limitation.

Forum Format/Process

Yolo AFA members opened the meeting by sharing their purpose for hosting the forum:

The Alliance is committed to working on projects identified during the forum as part of our mission to protect agriculture in perpetuity.

The forum was designed to have full participation by attendees and to identify some key next steps by the end of the day. The agenda can be found in Appendix I.

Meeting Objectives

- Identify needs and interests in regional processing, distribution, and commercial outlets;
- Identify next steps in strengthening regional activities and collaboration.

Meeting Outcomes

- Create a report for participants and local agencies on needs and recommendations for creating robust regional food production and markets;
- Provide guidance for the Yolo AFA in supporting projects and activities in Yolo County

Participants created a map of challenges, needs and opportunities in the county to ensure the success of their operation. After the local activities, needs and asset assessment was completed, forum attendees heard three presentations designed to share economic, agricultural, and funding information from local presenters:

David Shabazian, *Sacramento Area Council of Governments – RUCS Project*;
Shermain Hardesty, *Ag Economics Specialist, University of California at Davis*;
Morgan Doran, *UC Cooperative Extension*

Presentations can be found on the Ag Innovations Network website at <http://aginnovations.org/alliances/yolo/action>.

After a local lunch, participants identified 5 key areas for possible collaboration:

1. Aggregation centers, distribution, and transportation;
2. Processing and storage;
3. Accessing and growing regional markets;
4. Regulatory issues;
5. Education needs.

They then worked in break-out groups to recommend particular projects. Once project recommendations were made, all forum attendees prioritized the most crucial and important actions to be taken.

Perspectives on Regional Food Systems

The forum's 65 attendees represented a broad diversity of interests in local agriculture, food distribution, research and education, and economic development planning and policy. A list of participants can be found in Appendix II.

The activities described by participants in the opening session clearly illustrated a vibrant local food economy in which many farmers and ranchers are selling their products to local consumers through a variety of market outlets. These outlets consist of farm stands, farmers' markets, community supported agriculture (CSA) programs, restaurants and grocery stores. Access to some of these markets has been greatly enhanced by joining, or selling to, branded marketing programs (such as Niman Ranch), as well as substantial sweat equity invested in salesmanship. Another facet of the local food system commonly described by participants is the growing demand for local food, including meat and other animal products.

The upbeat scenario for the local food economy was buffered by many accounts describing a system that has reached its limits within the existing infrastructure, leaving additional demand largely unsatisfied by local producers. Although producers want to reach additional markets, they are not able to efficiently and affordably expand distribution without appropriate infrastructure that will economize the storage, sorting, processing and transportation of their products. Food distributors described their desire to source locally grown foods, but need conveniently located distribution centers for local foods, which do not exist. Institutional buyers expressed their desire to purchase local foods, but are limited because their food distributors cannot source local foods. The existing local food infrastructure, which primarily consists of individual and duplicative farm assets, allows local producers to sell through limited marketing outlets, but has inherent inefficiencies and constrained access to consumers. These limitations also work to restrict local food markets predominantly to

the small and very small producers, despite an expressed interest by large producers to participate in local and specialty markets.

Many opportunities and needs were provided by participants when asked what they would like to see in a regional food system. Participants acknowledged that consumers are becoming increasingly aware of how and where their food is produced which is driving excitement and demand for local food. Large institutional food providers are also driving this demand by creating food service policies that require some local sourcing of food to improve their sustainability profile. Demand for local food is also found in low income communities where food security is a daily concern, but access is often non-existent or extremely limited due to the lack of markets and high prices often charged for locally grown food. In addressing these issues,

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Participants primarily focused on the infrastructure necessary to efficiently produce, store, process and distribute local food, but also discussed education, regional planning, marketing, regulation, funding and risk management.
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participants primarily focused on infrastructure necessary to efficiently produce, store, process and distribute local food, but discussions also focused on the need for education for consumers and farmers, better regional planning that supports regional food systems, the integration of local communities into local food systems, new approaches to marketing local foods, funding and risk management assistance that encourages food system development and relief from a confusing multi-layered regulatory system that limits infrastructure development. The opportunities presented were often juxtaposed against challenges that limit farmers' ability to meet this growing demand. These challenges were the focus of the afternoon sessions. A complete list of opportunities, needs and challenges can be found in Appendices III and IV.

One popular idea for infrastructure development, was an aggregation center or hub that would provide several services to farms such as storage, sorting, consolidation and distribution. At sufficient scale, aggregation hubs could create efficiencies through smarter logistics that have been needed to expand local foods into larger marketing outlets. Another need repeated throughout the forum was a livestock slaughter and processing facility and the inclusion of meat products into local food

supply streams. Other infrastructure ideas included the need for commercial kitchens to make value-added products from locally grown foods, an entrepreneurial incubation center for start-up enterprises that contribute to a

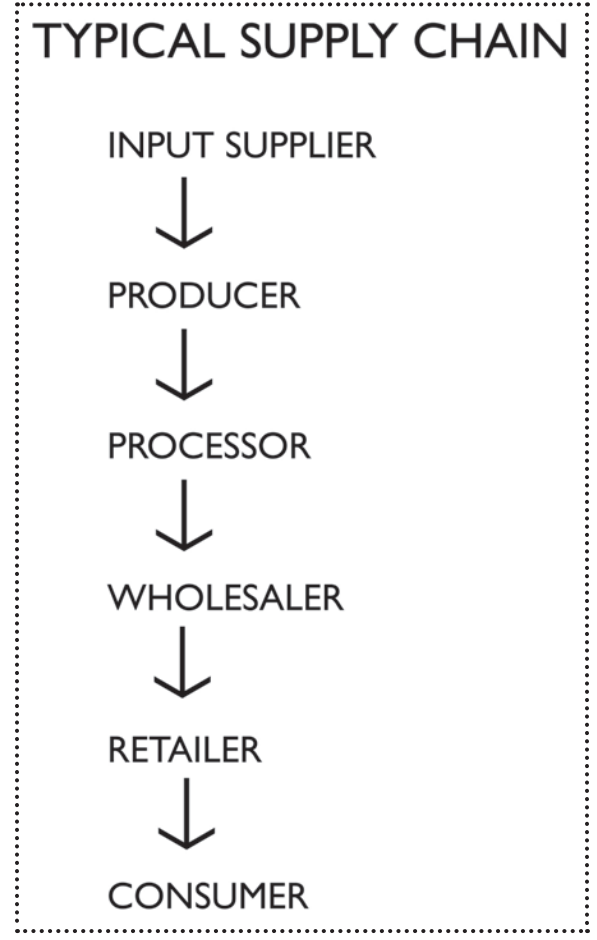
Managing risk was on the minds of many due to the large amount of perceived risk in developing and operating a local food system.

local/regional food system, and the creation of municipal ag zones within or on the edges of cities that offer land for small-scale agricultural operations and educational opportunities that engage the public in agricultural production and strengthen local food systems.

In addition to infrastructure components, there are several more critical elements, necessary to enable a sustainable food system, requiring government participation at the local, state and federal levels. Regional planning requires coordinated efforts among city and county governing bodies. In this region, the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG; <http://www.sacog.org/>) is an association of local governments in a six-county region that develops long-term transportation plans and studies regional issues. David Shabazian, a Senior Planner for SACOG, presented information on large-scale planning strategies to maintain agriculture and urban growth and to enhance a local food system. Their analyses of production and consumption trends in the region suggest an enormous potential for increasing the consumption of local foods if specific barriers are removed. SACOG is using demographic, economic and land use data to generate recommendations to improve local

food systems through appropriate land use decisions, regulatory changes, infrastructure development, educational opportunities and farm diversification. A draft of their Sacramento Region Local Market Assessment can be found on the internet by going to this web site (http://www.sacog.org/rucs/wiki/index.php/Main_Page) and clicking the link at the bottom of the page.

Managing risk was on the minds of many due to the large amount of perceived risk in developing and operating a local food system. Included in risk management is the securing of funds for infrastructure development and the creation of an operating structure that reduces the chance of failure. The general feeling was that there is very little money available for developing infrastructure for a local food system and that any investment bears substantial risk. Dr. Shermain Hardesty, an Ag Economist at UC Davis, presented on this topic and described our current system of commodity crop production as a risk-reduction system due to relatively



good short-term predictability in markets and prices. This contrasts with a local production and market system that is less predictable and increases the risk to farmers, processors and distributors. Dr. Hardesty suggested one mechanism useful for spreading the risk across the food system, including consumers, is a values-based supply chain. In a values-based supply chain every enterprise throughout the supply chain operates as a trusting partner rather than engaging in a relationship in which one entity's loss is another entity's gain. When one entity experiences a cost increase, the cost is passed up through the supply chain, ultimately to the consumer, rather than one entity in the supply chain absorbing all the additional costs and risk. In this system, the consumer must be a committed partner willing to pay more for the risk throughout the system.

Other mechanisms to reduce risk can be offered by government organizations. Many participants cited a complicated and burdensome regulatory system comprising local, state and federal regulations that are difficult to know and understand, and ultimately suppress innovation in the development of a local food system. Reducing the complexity of regulatory compliance will help reduce the risk associated with local food system enterprises. The federal government also has specific financial programs such as grants and guaranteed loans available through the USDA Rural Development office (<http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/CA/>). Many of these financial programs can also be found on the USDA's Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food web page at <http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/knowyourfarmer?navid=KNOWYOURFARMER>. Unfortunately, there are many eligibility restrictions that exclude some potentially useful program funds from desired uses in developing local food systems.

Based on the information provided by participants during the forum's morning session, five topics were chosen for further discussion in smaller groups during an afternoon session:

1. Aggregation centers, distribution, and transportation;
2. Processing and storage;
3. Accessing and growing regional markets;

4. Regulatory issues;
5. Education needs.

The purpose of the afternoon discussion session was to add more substance to the topics and develop specific action items that the Yolo AFA could pursue on those topics.

Emerging Topics and Discussion

I. Aggregation Centers, Distribution and Transportation

There is a mismatch between available large-scale national packing/distribution networks and the packing/distribution needs of our small farmers. The former is fully developed and ubiquitous, but is not available directly to small farms. The lack of cost-effective distribution networks for small farms is a key constraint to improving the direct connection between the farmer and the consumer.

An aggregation center or hub was repeatedly mentioned as a significant opportunity to save

logistics costs for small farmers. Most farmers individually wholesale their products and some have a roadside stand and/or sell at farmers markets. Many, however, are reluctant to expand into direct-to-consumer marketing because of the need to individually develop

packing, sales, distribution and the complex record keeping required to track so many customers. Some have successfully made the leap, but for many it requires too much risk capital. Appropriately scaled aggregation centers could spread the risk among many farms, thus making the investment more plausible.

The potential service components of an aggregation hub are many, and the components actually created at any hub should depend on the needs of user farmers. A hub could include a mix of one or more of the following components:

- Product storage, including cold storage*
- Warehousing of supplies*
- Sorting and packing (e.g. CSA boxes)
- Consolidation from multiple farms
- Distribution/trucking services

- Management and office support
- Technical assistance for growing, marketing, and business management
- Sales/brokering services
- Food processing*
- Commercial kitchen
- Demonstration kitchen
- Farmers' market and/or retail store
- Gleaning and food bank services
- Training/classroom space
- Public education
- Inspection/grading and/or lab services
- Farm-to-school/institution programs
- Other services

At sufficient scale, well-planned, properly managed aggregation hubs could create efficiencies for small direct market farms through smarter logistics. These efficiencies would make local foods more cost competitive and help expand access into larger marketing outlets, thus strengthening local food systems. These efficiencies would also enhance educational opportunities, and would increase citizen awareness of where food comes from and the farms surrounding our cities.

Several successful aggregation hubs exist throughout the country, which can be studied. In Yolo and Solano Counties, factors to consider include:

- Identifying end buyers;
- Scale and components of facilities;
- Farmer commitments to use the center;
- Business plan including startup financing and sustaining ongoing operations;
- Legal structure.

Farmer need is not necessarily homogenous, so it might make sense over time to develop a series of "centers" in different locations with different components that serve different commodities.

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* See the processing section of this report for more detail on the processing component of aggregation centers.

2. Processing and Storage

Mid and large-scale processing and storage facilities are well developed in the region, and are tailored to accommodate the output from larger farms. Most foods from large farms, including processing tomatoes, rice, and walnuts, are processed, stored and distributed by national chains, and also benefit by well established national/international distribution channels. As such, new investment is made by large processors who can typically afford the financing for construction and operation, and who use national/international distribution channels.

Our smaller farms often grow and sell much of their product directly to large processors, but as the grow-local, buy-local movement expands, they are also increasing direct sales to the customer at farmers’ markets, on the farm, through small retailers, and in CSA boxes. To operate efficiently in expanding markets, our smaller farms also need access to processing and distribution networks, but these are not as well established. Processing at smaller scales is more expensive per unit processed, and also requires significant capital investment, which the smaller farmer or processor cannot typically afford. In addition, regulatory costs can also be disproportionately higher. Smaller-scale investment in processing and distribution tends to be through cooperatives, joint ventures and private-public partnerships so the investment risk can be spread out. Sometimes a mid-scale or large processor also makes their equipment available to others on a fee basis. The need for small processing and storage occurs in the following areas:

- *Meats*, including beef, lamb, goat and pig – slaughter, aging, cut & wrap, distribution and cold storage warehousing, brokering;
- *Grains*, including Sonora wheat and custom grains – cleaning, milling, cold storage, trucking, brokering;
- *Fresh market/row crops* – packing, cold storage, packing facilities for CSA boxes, distribution;
- *Wine grapes* – custom crush, fermentation, barrel storage, bottling, cool storage and

brokering;

- *Olives* – custom milling, storage, bottling, cool storage, and brokering.

Development in all areas needs to occur. The forum’s participants agreed on two actions:

1. Ask Superior Farms, the West’s largest lamb slaughterer and packer, located in Dixon, if they are willing to make some of their excess capacity available to small meat producers. That meeting occurred on September 9, 2011. Superior is considering this opportunity;
2. Create an ad hoc team to discuss the regulatory issues of small scale poultry processing. Interested persons have been identified, and the Economic Development Commission is conducting interviews.

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 To operate efficiently in expanding markets, smaller farms need access to processing and distribution networks.

3. Accessing and Growing Regional Markets

Marketing is an important and necessary part of bringing local foods to local customers. The discussions about marketing that took place at the forum can be framed in terms of the traditional 4 P's of marketing: *product, place, price, and promotion*. Large food processors and distributors have developed cost-efficient ways to get foods to market based on high volume. Small farmers must find their own ways through the 4 P's in order to expand access to local products:

- *Product* involves growing the right amounts of the right commodities to meet customer demand. This means that farmers and their agents must reach out and identify their existing and future customers, talk to them, and learn about their desired product specifications. Market segment opportunities include:

- > *Farmers' markets, roadside stands, and local produce stands.* Farmers traditionally sell most of their direct-to-consumer goods through these channels, including fresh fruits and vegetables, jams and jellies, sauces, honey, olives and olive oils, lavender, baked goods, and other minimally processed food and

fiber products. Meats, poultry and prepared foods are less often sold this way because of their higher risk of food-borne contamination. Often sold in small quantities (small truckload and less), they are sold as-grown by the farmer. The consumer handles any subsequent processing. Farmers' markets are also a natural location for distribution and marketing hubs. Long waiting lists for farmer spaces and high patronage are indicators that more farmers markets are warranted.

Farmers' markets are the most common way to directly interface with

customers, but customer interface is increasingly going beyond farmers markets and into new and emerging markets;

- > *Individual restaurants.* As varied as the UCD Cafe, a local hamburger stand, or Mulvaney's, these food service establishments routinely source the freshest, best quality ingredients for their customers. Such ingredients are often purchased seasonally in smaller quantities (boxes or cases rather than pallets or truckloads). Promoting local quality adds value at the restaurant and for the producer, and excitement for the customer;
- > *Schools, hospitals, chain restaurants and other institutions* with interest in increasing the use of fresh high-quality ingredients for students and patients or all income levels. Suppliers in these market segments must often meet specifications similar to mass marketed foods because of the need to process in bulk using specialized machinery. They must also make sure the supply is large enough, regular and consistent in quality. The smallest farmers will have difficulty meeting such requirements as individuals, but may be able to as part of a collaborative. The USDA has a strong farm-to-school grant funding program which could help improve access;
- > *Grocery stores* include small independent neighborhood markets in low income neighborhoods to chains such as Nugget and Raley's. Supermarkets and local markets often have their own buyers or belong to groups such as the IGA (Independent Grocers Association). Local farmers can tap into the small amount of local sourcing these stores do, or can try to compete in the larger wholesale environment. Since farmers often already sell much of their crop outright to wholesalers for processing and aggregation through existing channels, they must think twice about

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 The marketing discussion can be framed in terms of the traditional four P's of marketing: product, place, price, and promotion.

competing directly. Competing often means setting up one's own processing, distribution, and sales function, which may be inefficient and costly for the medium sized farmer and prohibitive for the small farmer;

- *The price* the farmer can realize depends on who buys their product. The farmer can earn a reasonably consistent income strictly as a grower selling wholesale, and does not therefore need training for direct selling, nor does he/she incur added costs of distribution or marketing. But the small farmer can keep all the value added when developing the capacity to sell direct to the final consumer. Given the high excitement and increasing demand at farmers' markets and other local food outlets, such as the Davis Coop and Ferry Building, consumer prices for high quality and organic commodities do support the extra cost of small scale growing, harvesting, distributing and marketing. But as more locally grown high quality foods become available, pressure to reduce prices will increase, and profits will be squeezed. The efficient small growers who have developed cost-effective approaches will survive, and inefficient growers will fade back to strictly wholesaling.
- *Place* includes the farm location(s), the market location(s), and all the labor inputs, processing and distribution in between. Access to healthy foods by low income families is an important place consideration and is of great interest to public health officials. Enthusiasm is also strong for establishing more farm storefronts and/or an agricultural entertainment center along I-80 with its 130,000 vehicles per day. As competition increases over time, those with easy market access will gain a competitive advantage, an important consideration with a growing clientele composed of small buyers spread throughout the region. Processing and distribution are more fully discussed in sections 1 and 2 of this report.
- *Promotion* includes how the product is promoted and sold. Forum participants offered a plethora of ideas. Cooperative promotion is an obvious low-cost marketing tactic. Discussions about the possible

branding region-wide of Yolo and Solano County products should be expanded. Promotions such as price discounts for UC Davis students or food stamp recipients can also be considered. Farm visits are an excellent promotional tool. Customer service – the personal touch – is an important part of the buying experience, as is identifying the provenance of the food and fiber.

- > *The Internet* is the most promising fast-growing promotion and direct sales tool. Many wineries and those who provide CSA boxes and other products have individual web sites, as do cooperatives such as Capay Valley Grown
 The small farmer can keep all the value added when developing the capacity to sell direct to the final consumer:
- and several Suisun Valley farm groups. Setting up a website, offering on-line purchasing, and monitoring and maintaining the site are time consuming for an individual farmer, so cooperative approaches seem prudent. Publishing cooperative catalogs and creating joint web sites are cost-effective ways to market on the Internet, on Facebook and Twitter. Both counties should consider participating in such efforts;
- > *A farm and winery map* is one suggested follow-up item. Re-creating the farm tour map previously published by the Yolo County Visitors Bureau, perhaps as a bi-county map, would be a relatively inexpensive and effective cooperative advertisement. Similar handy slip-in-the-purse (or pocket) maps fly out of booths and kiosks at hotels and the California State fair, and are desirable as handouts at farmers markets, schools and other venues;
- > Another suggestion from the forum was creating a *marketing coordinator position* like the Placer Grown program, or a consultant-driven effort like the successful Ann Evans/Georgiana Brennan collaborative that created the Taste of Yolo campaign. Budget problems

have eliminated both county-funded programs, but perhaps there is a way to more securely create and/or fund the capacity, if not the positions;

- > *Education* about what is being eaten is perhaps the best way to promote healthy foods and local farms. The concept of *know your farmer, know your food* is catching on. Consumer information is provided through newsletters and recipes in CSA boxes, the Taste of Capay website, and other popular avenues. *Ag Alert*, *California Farmer* and other farmer-oriented publications educate farmers rather than the consumer, but farmer education is equally important. Education is discussed in section 5 of this report.

4. Regulatory Issues

One of the largest most recognized problems identified in every sector of our food system is the regulatory mine field that must be navigated in order to connect farmers to consumers. These regulatory issues often impede business expansion, development, and economic opportunities, and even prevent business entities from entering the marketplace.

During the morning session, fourteen stakeholders identified regulations as a barrier to their enterprise. Participants specifically felt that government regulations were scaled for medium to large businesses, were inappropriate for small and micro-operations and created an unfriendly environment for small businesses. Some commented that unique business ideas were given the most restrictive regulatory category because regulatory staff were unfamiliar with the business. Inquiries and communication to regulators by agriculture businesses were felt to be further restricted due to a general fear that questions would trigger an inspection or audit. In general, the regulatory process was perceived as not being transparent and taking too long. Forum participants made the following proposals:

- Create a central clearinghouse of regulatory information and an individual to guide people through the process;
- Shorten the time frame from planning to construction of agricultural building projects;
- Compile the stories of business owners who have been told, “NO you can’t do that!” time and time again;
- Establish a permit fee payment plan and defer some fees until the project is operational;
- Conduct no-cost pre planning meetings with all regulators in order to check projects.

Some efforts in recent years at the county level have been made to alleviate the regulatory burdens of agriculture projects. Yolo County has developed an Agricultural Permit Manual (see the Yolo County Department of Agriculture website), although it was not well recognized

by the group. The manual can be found on the The 2030 County wide General Plan for Yolo County lists numerous actions that support the facilitation of agricultural processing. Specific action items listed in the general plan that are directly related to this topic include:

- *Action AG-A17* – Prepare and implement a farm marketing ordinance to streamline permit requirement for agricultural retail operations to the extent possible...
- *Action AG-A20* – Create an Agricultural Permit Coordinator position “Farmbudsman” to assist farmers and ranchers with the permitting process, to facilitate and expedite promising value-added agricultural projects.
- *Action AG-A22 and A23* – Collaborate with farming interest in the development and implementation of a program for Agricultural Districts.

In Solano County a regulatory ombudsman position was created and filled, but the person holding this position is transitioning into retirement. Budget difficulties will likely make it difficult to re-fill this position.

The top priority identified during the discussion on regulatory issues was the establishment of a bi-county position between Yolo and Solano Counties for a Farm Ombudsman. This position would facilitate and shepherd projects from concept to turn key operation and create a regulatory permit manual that explains the regulatory process for different types of ag-related enterprises.

The Yolo AFA will work with local agricultural organizations and counties to develop the ombudsman position. Future steps for this item should include working with Yolo County leadership to implement 2030 General Plan Action items AG-A17, A20, A22 and A23, as well as working with the Yolo and Solano County economic development managers to shift each county to a more business friendly climate.

5. Education Needs

Eight stakeholders met to discuss education needs. They began by identifying several types of education, including new farmer training and public education on food, agriculture and natural resources. The goal of new farmer incubation programs is to ensure future farming generations. Public education aims to raise awareness about local farms and their products, and to teach about nutrition, agriculture, and land stewardship.

Current educational activities include:

- Beginning farmer training program and incubator - *Center for Land-Based Learning*;
- Urban (small plot intensive) agricultural training and incubator; peri-urban and small farm focus - *Fresh Spin Farms*;
- Educational farm visits - *Davis Farm to School* and *Waldorf schools* from Sonoma to Grass Valley;
- Facilitation of farm-to-school and farm-to-institution programs in Yolo County. Grants

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 Education aims to ensure future farming generations as well as raise awareness about nutrition, agriculture, and land stewardship.

will be coming soon, including the food systems and agricultural systems sustainability grant - *UC SAREP*;

- Buy Fresh, Buy Local market and education program;

would like more participation – *Community Alliance with Family Farmers*;

- Public education via agricultural reporting - *Davis Enterprise*;
- Public education of agricultural and natural resources issues in Yolo County; support for natural resource conservation activities on agricultural land - *Yolo County Resource Conservation District*.

Suggested venues for additional education include:

- Classes at all school levels, including a mandatory general education class at UC Davis;
- Broadening farm-based education to include farm dinners, classes, school field trips, and

camps;

- A viral video concept;
- Working with the Catholic Diocese, which is already interested in social justice;
- Accessing the Latino community (barriers need to be identified);
- Other non-traditional outlets.

Next steps include:

1. Identify one or two outlets in Yolo County for educational displays about local agriculture and health issues;
2. Find a sponsoring committee to take on this activity.

Final Outcomes and Next Steps

Top priority projects recommended by participants:

1. Work closely with Yolo County Economic Development Division to determine the specific needs of meat producers for slaughter, processing, storage and distribution. These needs will then be taken to Superior Farms, and potentially others, to collaborate on developing a plan for implementation;
2. Establish a position for a regulatory ombudsman for Yolo and Solano Counties. This position will assist all producers in the region in navigating permits and compliance with regulations, as well as advocating for farmers when appropriate.

Other priority projects recommended by participants:

3. Work with Environmental Health and Planning toward supporting viability of small-scale poultry harvesting;
4. Create a manual for navigating the regulatory process for regional producers;
5. Create a marketing department that advocates for all producers; this would be a new job;
6. Create a buyers-guide for accessing local producers. The Ag Commissioner's office is already committed to assisting with this;
7. Conduct a feasibility study of aggregation centers for processing/distribution and market outlets in the region;
8. Identify retail outlets and create display packets highlighting local farmers and produce at locations not previously served in this way.

Conclusion

Preserving and strengthening Yolo and Solano Counties' vibrant local food and agriculture economy will support the economic and physical health of all of our citizens. The more food grown, processed and sold by local business to local consumers, the more benefit we receive from each dollar spent. Estimates of the beneficial impact on the economy of local products staying local are three to four times that of products leaving the region.

Expanded regional markets lead to higher

and more stable farm income and improved access by our citizens to fresh produce.

Farmers with access to local markets tend to diversify, increasing their sustainability. Markets for locally produced food are rapidly expanding beyond direct marketing and farmer's markets and

connecting growers to more markets can improve our urban and rural economies.

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Preserving and strengthening Yolo and Solano Counties' vibrant local food and agriculture economy will support the economic and physical health of all of our citizens.
.....

During the Yolo County Regional Food Forum, participants identified opportunities for building successful businesses, a robust local food economy, and health for our region's residents. The Yolo Ag and Food Alliance is committed to following these recommendations. Many of the suggestions given by forum participants echoed items in the Yolo County General Plan Goals. For example, AG-A18 states a need to, "Create an Agricultural Permit Coordinator position ("farmbudsman") to assist farmers and ranchers with the permitting process, including assistance with agricultural permitting and standards..." The Yolo AFA welcomes continued partnerships and input from organizations and individuals in the community.

Appendices

- I. Yolo County Regional Food Forum Agenda
- II. List of Forum Participants
- III. Local Food System Opportunities
- IV. Local Food System Challenges and Barriers



Yolo County Regional Food Forum

Yolo Ag Futures Alliance

AGENDA

July 22nd, 2010 - 8:30 A.M. to 3:30 A.M.

Yolo Housing Authority, 147 W. Main St., Woodland

Meeting Objectives

- Identify needs and interests in regional processing, distribution, commercial outlets
- Identify next steps in strengthening regional activities and collaboration

Outcomes

- Report for participants and local agencies on needs and recommendations for creating robust regional food production and markets
- Provide guidance for the YAFA in supporting projects and activities in Yolo County

8:30 Welcome, Forum Purpose and Agenda Review

Morgan Doran, UCCE and Yolo Ag Futures Alliance
Randii McNear, Farmer's Market Manager and Yolo Ag Futures Alliance
John Young, Yolo County Ag Commissioner and Yolo Ag Futures Alliance
Miriam Volat, facilitator, AgInnovations Network

9:00 Current Activities and Opportunities

for Regional Processing, Storage, Distribution and Outlets

All participants
We will create a map showing Needs, Opportunities and Challenges toward assessing activities that will support successful collaboration and enterprises

11:10 Presentations and Resources

David Shabazian – SACOG – RUCS Project
Shermain Hardesty – Ag Economics Specialist, UCD
Funding opportunities - Morgan Doran - UCCE

12:15 Lunch – Fresh local food prepared by Yolo Ag Futures Alliance

1:00 Develop Strategies for Next Steps – large group

Identify areas of potential collaboration

1:30 Develop Strategies for Next Steps – break-out groups

Work on recommendations for particular projects

2:30 Closing Dialogue – Most valuable next steps and recommendations

3:30 Adjourn



Yolo Regional Food Forum, July 22, 2010

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Appendix III. Opportunities participants see in local food systems.

INFRA- STRUCTURE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wine infrastructure – processing and storage, distribution, sales• Local meat locker for consumers• Consolidation and distribution center• Local food distribution such as a growers’ collaborative – next generation foods• Smarter, more efficient logistics in aggregation• Distribution of local produce to foodservice operations in Sac Valley• Commercial kitchen to create value added products• Large potential to process wine grapes locally (99% of Yolo wine grapes are exported from county)• Build regional beef slaughter and processing facility• Value added processing for wine, cheese, fruits and nuts
DEMAND AND INTEREST IN LOCAL FOODS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• An increasingly aware and interested public• Lots of excitement by consumers for local food• UC Davis staff and students is a large potential market• There is great interest in local foods in Davis area• Growing demand for local foods and food products (wine, cheese) brings local wealth and jobs• Greater food security• More local products entering larger food distribution system
EDUCATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Integrating youth programs on farms• Ag parks create community farming systems and education on natural resource stewardship• Young farmer training• Agritourism can increase income and educate public
MARKETING	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• UCD employee snack CSA• Use farmers markets as a hub for CSA sorting and distribution• Use “catalog” approach to selling local foods with the internet• Using social networking web sites for marketing local foods
PLANNING	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Brand Yolo/Solano as premier center for local food production• Include regional ag infrastructure in regional planning efforts working with metro planning organizations• Include many partners to make things happen
COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND RISK	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community involvement in supporting local farms• Building a critical mass of investment money• Include small farms/gardens in new development plans• Use prime farmland near cities to grow food for families within biking or walking distance
OTHER OPPORTUNITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Variance for minor processing facilities that add value to farm products• Orchard acreage increasing• Olive production increasing• Produce Express – use existing enterprises to expand distribution

Appendix IV. Challenges and barriers to local food systems as presented by participants and divided into common categories.

REGULATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding regulations (city, county, state, federal) • Too much regulation • Understanding regulations, especially concerning food safety and processed foods • Fear that approaching local regulators for advice/information will trigger inspection • Need approved winery wastewater treatments, other than sewer treatment
EDUCATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform public on value of farms and local food • Farmer education on agritourism • Teach aspiring farmers how to farm • Consumer education on eating whole animals • Consumer education on value of local foods, how to find and eat local food, seasonality of local food and how their food choices can affect the local economy • Farmer education on value of processing and selling locally
RISK MANAGEMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk in starting new enterprises • Capital investment for improvements • Investment for commercial kitchen is too large for single farm • High level of capital investment for processing facilities • Lack of funding for creating infrastructure – high risk investment limits funding and activity
MEAT PROCESSING AND DISTRIBUTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to add protein to farmers markets • Distribution center should include meat products • USDA inspected meat harvest and processing facility.
FOOD SECURITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to local foods in low-income communities • Pricing product low enough to be accessible, but high enough to be sustainable • Keeping price low enough so local food is not a privilege
SMALL-SCALE PROCESSING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of commercial kitchen • Creating a model for small-scale and on-farm processing and storage that is economically feasible
OTHER CHALLENGES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farm succession and raising new farmers • Exclusion of large operations from local food systems • Limited space for new farmers in some farmers markets • Liability exposure from buying local foods • Poor roads increase expense for local distribution • Little or no connection farmers have beyond the initial buyer of their product



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Yolo County is blessed with ideal conditions to provide healthy food in perpetuity if we are able to balance the needs of farms and ranches to be economically viable, ecologically sound, and socially just. The Yolo Ag and Food Alliance (AFA) is an association of individuals from agriculture, environmental groups, and the community who have come together to find a way to create this balance in Yolo County. We try to reduce political conflict by working through issues with our group's broad perspective in order to come up with solutions that can bring the community to a strong consensus. Ag Innovations Network is the convener/facilitator of the Yolo AFA, and its mission is to promote the long-term health of the food system and in particular, of agricultural production, by facilitating critical dialogues within the food system and between food system stakeholders and the wider public.

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