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# Build Resilience

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Increase integrated nutrition and food security and create an adaptive local food economy

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# Introduction

In the face of increasing natural disasters, public health crises, and growing inequalities, the highly concentrated industrial food system is exposing deep vulnerabilities and threatening the resiliency of people, cultures, livelihoods, local economies, and ecosystems.

## RESILIENCE AND OUR FOOD SYSTEM

In the food system, industrial agriculture, long supply chains, and consolidation of power have been common since the 1950s. Today, 20 percent of farms control nearly 70 percent of US farmland, four meatpackers slaughter 85 percent of beef, and four companies control 63 percent of the retail market. This consolidation of power has always compromised the health and sustainability of people and the planet.

The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified existing inequities and the lack of resilience in our food system. In 2020, what began as a local health crisis rapidly grew into a global health crisis. Like a set of dominoes, it fueled a global economic crisis, which amplified our country's existing food security crisis and disproportionately impacted BIPOC, low-income communities, and essential food system businesses and workers. The COVID-19 pandemic in the United States has fundamentally been a crisis of governance as federal officials around the country



<sup>1</sup> Frankel, Todd C., Brittney Martin, Andrew Van Dam, and Alyssa Flowers, November 25, 2020, "A Growing Number of Americans are Going Hungry," *The Washington Post*.

<sup>2</sup> San Diego Hunger Coalition, Nov 17, 2020, [2nd Annual State of Hunger](#).

<sup>3</sup> Gold, Jeremy A.W. et al., October 23, 2020, "Race, Ethnicity, and Age Trends in Persons Who Died from COVID-19 – United States, May–August, 2020," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*.

<sup>4</sup> Fielding-Miller, Rebecca K., Maria E. Sundaram, and Kimberly Brouwer, October 14, 2020, "Social Determinants of COVID-19 Mortality at the County Level," *PLOS One*.

<sup>5</sup> San Diego Hunger Coalition, Nov 17, 2020, [2nd Annual State of Hunger](#).

failed to act responsibly and reliably to address a complex problem worsened by long-standing health inequities for people of color and low income communities.

Across the country, produce rotted in fields, fish decayed at the docks, milk was dumped, and livestock were euthanized as restaurants, schools, shopping, and tourist locations were closed. At the same time, families were going hungry. As a result, more Americans are food insecure today—26 million people—than at any point since record-keeping began.<sup>1</sup> With such rapid spikes in unemployment and food insecurity, San Diego County's hunger relief organizations, social service agencies, schools, farms, fisheries, and local food businesses were stretched to capacity. The San Diego Hunger Coalition estimated that about 616,000 San Diegans were food insecure prior to the pandemic. That number nearly doubled, to 1,230,000 San Diegans in May 2020, and was down to a little more than 1 million in August 2020.<sup>2</sup>

While numerically, the majority of COVID-19 deaths across the country occurred among White Americans, Black and Hispanic/Latinx Americans have been disproportionately impacted: Black Americans make up 12.5% of the U.S. population but 18.7% of COVID-19 deaths, while Hispanic/Latinx communities make up 18.5% of the U.S. population but 24.2% of deaths to date.<sup>3</sup> San Diego County's Hispanic/Latinx communities suffered the greatest impacts (Figure 1). Research conducted by the UC San Diego Division of Infectious Disease and Global Public Health found that counties with a higher percentage of farmworkers, a higher percentage of people living in poverty, and a higher percentage of people over the age of 65 were significantly associated with a higher rate of death from COVID-19.<sup>4</sup>

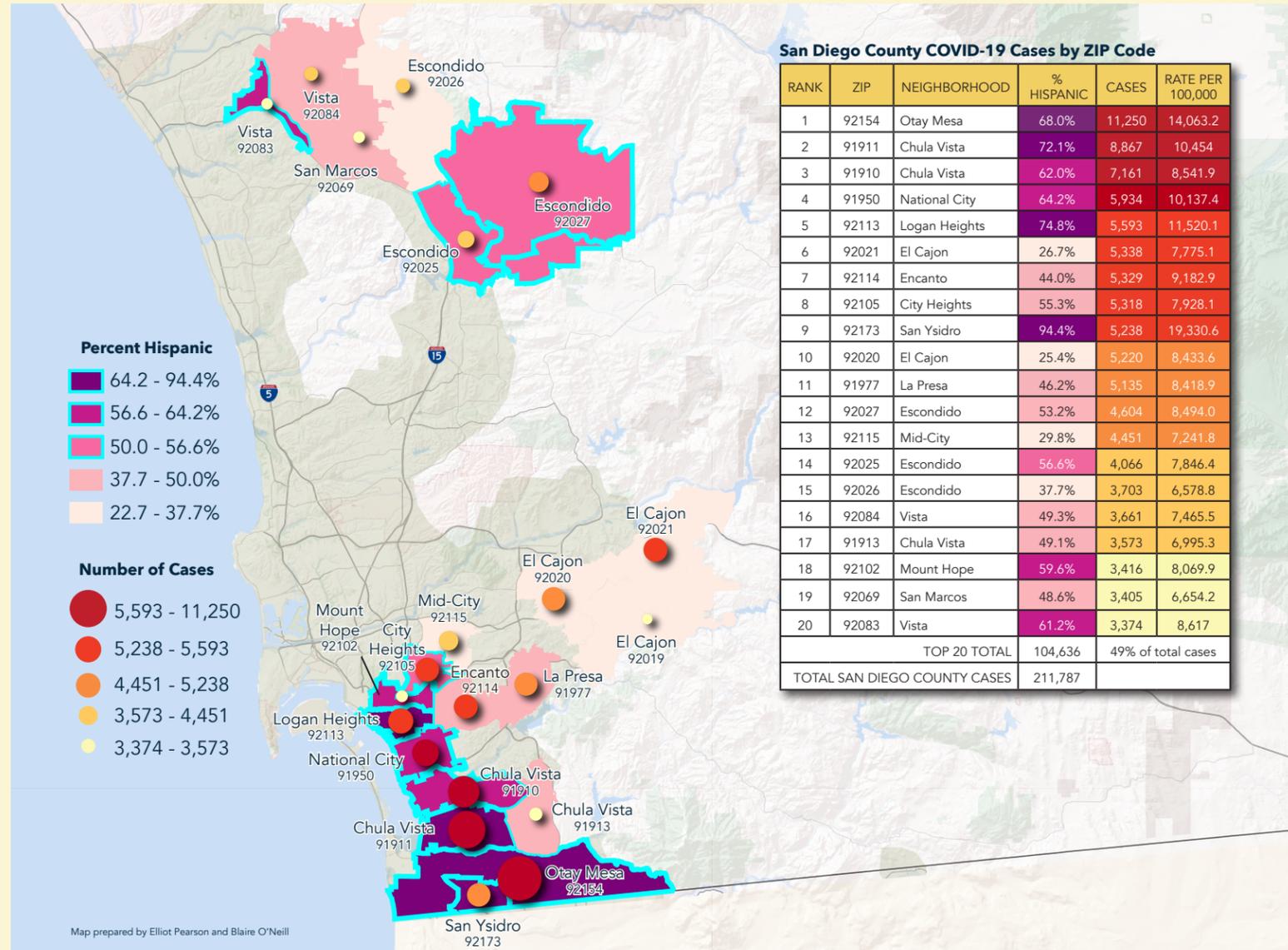
For many of us, our earliest experiences with the pandemic included the shock of empty food shelves and toilet paper hoarding. Essential food workers, who are primarily women and people of color, experienced some of the most immediate health and economic impacts.

In the aftermath of California's statewide stay-at-home order in March 2020, more than 50,000 restaurant and bar employees lost their jobs in San Diego County, the largest source of job losses in the county. Employment numbers have slowly crawled up since April 2020, but more than 22,000 restaurant and bar employees are still unemployed as of March 2021 (Figure 3).<sup>5</sup> Many businesses pivoted by ramping up take out and delivery options and modifying menus, but it still remains unclear how many will survive moving forward.

FIGURE 1

01 COVID-19 Cases in San Diego County as of January 16, 2021

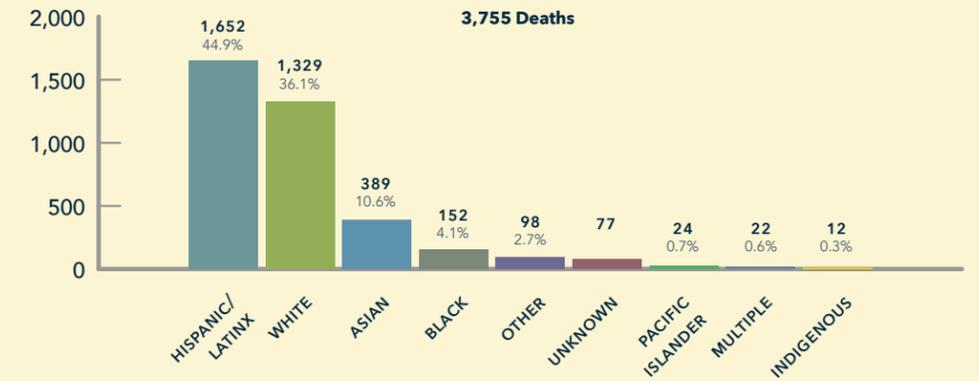
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Source: County of San Diego, January 16, 2021, [Summary of County of San Diego COVID-19 Cases by Zip Code](#).

FIGURE 2

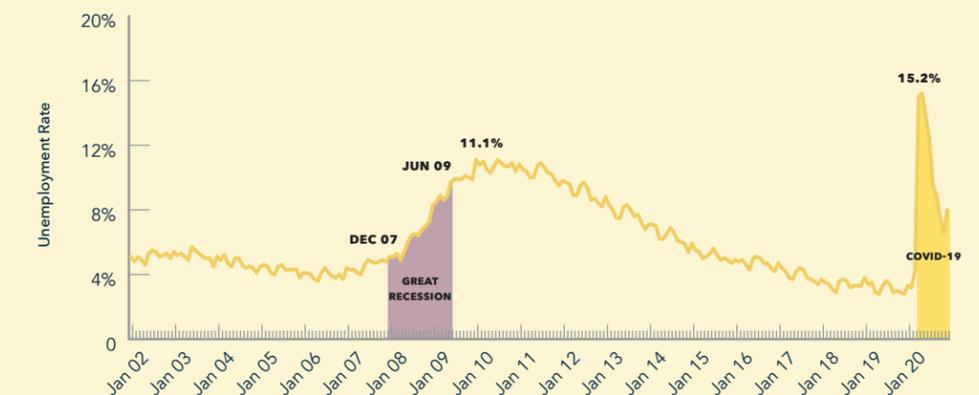
San Diego County COVID-19 Deaths by Race/Ethnicity as of May 25, 2021



Source: County of San Diego, May 25 2021. [Link](#)

FIGURE 3

San Diego County Unemployment Rate as of January 16, 2021



Source: California Employment Development Department, Labor Market Information Division. [Link](#)

## Shocks to the System

The year 2020 saw a grim convergence of entrenched racial and ethnic injustice and violence, compounding climate catastrophes that wreaked havoc across the planet, and a public health crisis that killed over 3.5 million people, including over 600,000 Americans and over 3,700 San Diegans. In February 2021, a continent-wide winter storm—likely influenced by changes to the jet stream due to Arctic warming<sup>6</sup>—provided a glimpse of a future of failures in governance, critical infrastructure like roads, railways, drinking-water systems, power plants, electrical grids, industrial waste sites, health care delivery, and even the livability of our homes.<sup>7</sup>

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## Resilience is How We Respond, Recover, and Rebuild

There is a growing recognition that the severe and widespread impacts of continuous injustices, threats, and crises are compromising community resilience and our collective survival. Resilience is our collective ability to respond and recover from adverse conditions, including natural disasters, public health crises, acts of violence, economic hardship, consolidation of power, and cultural loss—all of which raise levels of insecurity, complexity, and vulnerability in our lives. It also reflects the capacity of people and communities to heal and rebuild the systems that create and perpetuate vulnerabilities in the first place. There is no returning to the way things were. Today, people across the country are working to dismantle the longstanding, but brittle structures of our society, and are building the foundation for a more just, sustainable, and resilient world.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Francis, Jennifer, and Natasa Skific, July 13, 2015, "Evidence Linking Rapid Arctic Warming to Mid-Latitude Weather Patterns," *Philosophical Transactions A*, 373(2045).

<sup>7</sup> Flavelle, Christopher, Brad Plumer, and Hiroko Tabuchi, February 20, 2021, "Texas Blackouts Point to Coast-to-Coast Crises Waiting to Happen," *The New York Times*.

<sup>8</sup> Mishan, Ligaya, February 19, 2021, "The Activists Working to Remake the Food System," *The New York Times Style Magazine*.



# A Local and Resilient Food System Must Serve All People

WRITTEN BY KRISTIN KVERNLAND – FOUNDED FARMER, [FOODSHED](#)

The COVID-19 pandemic illustrated the many ways in which the United States lacks the critical infrastructure to feed its own people, independent from the globalized food production and distribution system it relies on. Small food producers throughout the country experienced an overwhelming surge in demand especially during the first 3-6 weeks of the shut down. Suppliers that once struggled to attract enough customers, scrambled to sell what they had available while increasing their production. For many of us producers, COVID brought the demand for local that we always dreamed of, tugging on the sentiments that inspired many of us to pursue this calling in the first place. Yet, it also evoked this feeling of unease and enormous pressure.

Small producers also learned the ways in which we are dependent on a larger system that slowed and, in some cases, completely shut down. Inputs like seeds, soil amendments, animal feed, packaging, and season extension supplies were in limited stock, threatening many farmers' day-to-day operations as well as the speed at which we were able to respond to demand. The panic that set in and drove this demand for local food also dictated who had access to

this more secure food source. Those with the resources and knowledge of where and how to access local farms were served first, leaving lower income customers without this habit, but arguably greater need, behind. This discrepancy highlighted an already very well documented trend in which higher income customers have greater participation and access to the local food movement. If we are to build a local and resilient food system that can serve all people in our region and sustain itself, we must find ways to overcome this challenge of accessibility.

One way many farms in San Diego County were able to do this was through public and private sector support that emerged to cover the costs and/or subsidize the price and delivery for lower income residents. These types of solutions help to stimulate the local farm economy ensuring we will be here all the time, and especially when you need us most. What many of us have learned is we have a tremendous capacity to feed our community with healthy, nutritious food, and great interest for new producers to enter into this field of work. We need your support now more than ever to build out the crucial infrastructure needed to be able to supply a larger portion of San Diego County's current and future food needs.



# Opportunities for Transformation

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**"This is our opportunity to focus on what we have in common, to build the resilience of our farms and our practices, which allows us as a society to face any challenges that may arise."**

**BEA ALVAREZ**

*Foodshed*

Through Food Vision 2030, we have an opportunity to both increase integrated nutrition and food security and create an adaptive local food economy in San Diego County.

The unprecedented experience of the COVID-19 pandemic has generated a range of emotions and actions, from resignation and opposition to mask wearing, to a renaissance of home bread baking and gardening. The "Great Pivot" in food systems saw many producers increasing direct to consumer sales and more retailers offering take out and delivery services. This spirit of adaptability, coordination, and inclusivity was heartening to hear from interviewees and residents.

To build resilience, we need to heal relationships with the earth and one another, and realize that food deeply intersects with resilience. We can pursue opportunities to better prepare for and adapt to shocks in our food system. We can cultivate diverse local and regional economies and build shorter, fairer, and cleaner food supply chains. We can build stronger safety nets. We can create a diverse and resilient food system that is capable of nourishing us today and for generations to come.



# Food Vision 2030 Objectives and Strategies for Building Resilience in San Diego County

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OBJECTIVE 1

**Preserve Agricultural Land and Soils, and Invest in Long-Term Food Production**

Land in agriculture in San Diego County has dramatically decreased over the years. If we want to secure long-term food production in the region we need to stop that trend. Objective 1 uplifts strategies that scale up land and soil conservation efforts.

OBJECTIVE 2

**Increase the Viability of Local Farms, Fisheries, Food Businesses, and Workers**

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 dramatically impacted food system businesses and workers. Objective 2 uplifts strategies that expand and link business planning and technical assistance services for food businesses, promote community wealth building opportunities (like employee ownership), and encourage creative farm viability models.

OBJECTIVE 3

**Scale Up Local, Sustainable, and Equitable Food Value Chains**

The COVID-19 pandemic and climate change reveal significant vulnerabilities in food supply chains. Objective 3 uplifts strategies that explore building more local food infrastructure for aggregation, processing, storage, and distribution.

OBJECTIVE 4

**Elevate Wages and Working Conditions, and Improve Career Opportunities**

The COVID-19 pandemic and climate change has disrupted the way we work and provided new career opportunities throughout the food system. Objective 4 uplifts strategies that provide meaningful career opportunities for food system workers while advocating for better wages and working conditions, access to health care, and other frequently cited needs.

OBJECTIVE 5

**Expand Integrated Nutrition and Food Security**

COVID-19 rapidly spiked unemployment and food insecurity. In addition, climate change presents a wide range of threats to public health and food security. Objective 5 uplifts strategies that include supporting coordinated efforts and collaboration to expand an integrated nutrition and food security system.

OBJECTIVE 6

**Improve Community Food Environments**

COVID-19 disproportionately impacted low income, Hispanic communities in San Diego County—communities that already had challenges with healthy food access. Objective 6 uplifts strategies that improve access to healthy food across these communities, whether at retail markets, direct to consumer markets, community gardens, urban agriculture, community kitchens, or place-based educational centers.

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OBJECTIVE 7

**Scale Up Food Waste Prevention, Recovery, and Recycling Initiatives**

With increased unemployment, COVID-19 exerted serious stress on the charitable food system. Objective 7 uplifts strategies, like scaling up food waste recovery logistics, that bring together the considerable expertise in San Diego County to creatively bring food where it is needed most.

OBJECTIVE 8

**Increase BIPOC Leadership Across the Food System**

BIPOC San Diegans are on the frontlines of jobs, including food system jobs, that heightens their exposure to COVID-19 and other risks.<sup>9</sup> Objective 8 uplifts strategies that engage and defer to BIPOC communities in food system planning, elevate voices of BIPOC people, places, and programs, and invest in the next generation of leaders, like promotores (community health workers),<sup>10</sup> to build resilience.

OBJECTIVE 9

**Build a Movement that Uplifts a Local, Sustainable, and Equitable Food System**

Objective 9 uplifts strategies that cover the need most frequently cited by interviewees, namely, more education around food system issues, including education on strategies for building resilience.

OBJECTIVE 10

**Plan for a Resilient Food System**

There are many examples of communities planning for a more climate resilient future. For example, the City and County of San Diego both developed Climate Action Plans, California’s Climate Investments initiative put billions on the table for mitigation and adaptation, and tribes across the nation have responded with ambitious plans.<sup>11</sup> Now it’s our turn to plan for a more resilient food system. Objective 10 uplifts strategies that harness energy to “reset the table” to avoid the worst consequences of climate change from taking place.

<sup>9</sup> Calo, William A., et al., June 25, 2020, [“Reaching the Hispanic Community About COVID-19 Through Existing Chronic Disease Prevention Programs,”](#) Preventing Chronic Disease.

<sup>10</sup> Lopez-Villafañá, Andrea, September 8, 2020, [“Promotores’ Work to Reach Most Vulnerable to COVID-19 Among San Diego’s Latino, Minority Communities,”](#) The San Diego Union-Tribune.

<sup>11</sup> Morrison, Jim, November 24, 2020, [“An Ancient People With a Modern Climate Plan,”](#) The Washington Post.

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[sdfoodvision2030.org](http://sdfoodvision2030.org)