

[SDFOODVISION2030.ORG](https://sdfoodvision2030.org)

Objectives 1-4 address major, interrelated challenges that San Diego County farms, fisheries, food businesses, and workers face in bringing food from farm and ocean to plate.

OBJECTIVE 01

Decreasing land in agriculture, declining fisheries, climate change impacts, limited succession planning among aging producers, and disparities in farmland ownership all threaten the future of long-term food production in the region.

OBJECTIVE 02

Market concentration within every sector of the food system decreases opportunities for small and midsize farms, fishing operations, and food system businesses to be viable.

OBJECTIVE 03

Major increases in food imports—in combination with market concentration—makes it challenging for local food products to make their way to grocery stores, corner stores, and restaurants.

OBJECTIVE 04

Wage stagnation over the past 40 years and low wages for food system workers limit the ability of our most essential workers to lead healthy, comfortable lives, and pursue viable careers.

OBJECTIVE

02

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

STRATEGIES AT A GLANCE

- Support coordinated efforts and collaboration to increase the viability of local food businesses
 - Expand food system business support services
 - Encourage creative farm and fishery viability models
 - Increase community wealth building opportunities across the food system
 - Create peer-to-peer learning and networking opportunities
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Increase the Viability of Local Farms, Fisheries, Food Businesses, and Workers

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Introduction

Small and midsize farmers, fishermen, and food business owners—including food processors, food manufacturers, restaurants, and retailers—struggle to make a living and maintain viable businesses in a food system that does not uplift them. They compete against large corporations for access to markets, and manage operating and labor costs on thin margins. On top of working long hours, they also manage additional, essential tasks like business planning, securing capital, and navigating permits and regulations. Finally, they must pivot their businesses with changing conditions, such as those caused by climate change and COVID-19. Throughout Food Vision 2030 conversations and surveys, farmers, fishermen, restaurant owners, and independent retailers all cited "Achieving profitability/ making a living" as their top challenge.¹

At the root of many viability challenges is market concentration.² Multinational corporations dominate the food supply in every region of the United States, including San Diego County. They hold enormous power, resources, and scales of production to drive prices down and squeeze competition out at every phase of the food chain. With their outsize resources, corporations also have immense power to influence consumer preferences. In spite of the growing popularity of slogans like “vote with your fork,” consumer demand for convenience and affordability continues to rise, prompted by corporate retailers’ promises to deliver more, faster, and cheaper. This exacerbates viability challenges for small and midsize businesses, leading to closures and accelerating market concentration trends.³

Building a more resilient food supply and economy means we need to ensure that through small business ownership, diverse entrepreneurs are able to increase their income potential, achieve long-term financial stability, provide for their families, and continue enriching their communities. We need to create an integrated support system and invest in those in our community for whom traditional business

¹ We did not survey food processors/manufacturers, but interviews with these types of business owners revealed similar challenges.

² Hendrickson, Mary K., Philip H. Howard, Emily M. Miller, and Douglas H. Constance, 2020, *The Food System: Concentration and Its Impacts*, Family Farm Action Alliance. Howard, Philip H. and Mary Hendrickson, February 17, 2021, “Op-ed: Monopolies in the Food System Make Food More Expensive and Less Accessible,” *Civil Eats*.

³ Lorr, Benjamin, 2020, *The Secret Life of Groceries: The Dark Miracle of the American Supermarket*, New York: Avery.



development services are out of reach, with a focus on BIPOC, immigrants, women, and individuals with low income.

We also must recognize that currently, our systems define business viability narrowly, elevating financial profit above all while ignoring the many other ways businesses should be viable—and that many small and midsize businesses often already are: able to reflect the values of the community they serve, reinvest in their local economies, generate social capital, perform environmental services, regenerate the resources they depend on, and provide fair working conditions for their employees. Only by reimagining how we define and evaluate business viability can we create a food economy that works for all.

SAN DIEGO COUNTY'S FOOD SYSTEM BUSINESSES

- 01
- 02 Increase the Viability of Local Farms, Fisheries, Food Businesses, and Workers
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Most farms, fisheries, and food businesses in San Diego County are small to midsize. In fact, small businesses—those with fewer than 100 employees—represent 98% of all San Diego County businesses and 59% of all San Diego County jobs.⁴ The most recently available estimates for 2019 indicate that approximately 217,000 people were directly employed at more than 20,000 food system businesses in San Diego County (Figures 1, 2).

217,000

people directly employed at

20,000+

food system businesses

Small businesses in San Diego accounts for:

98%

of all businesses

59%

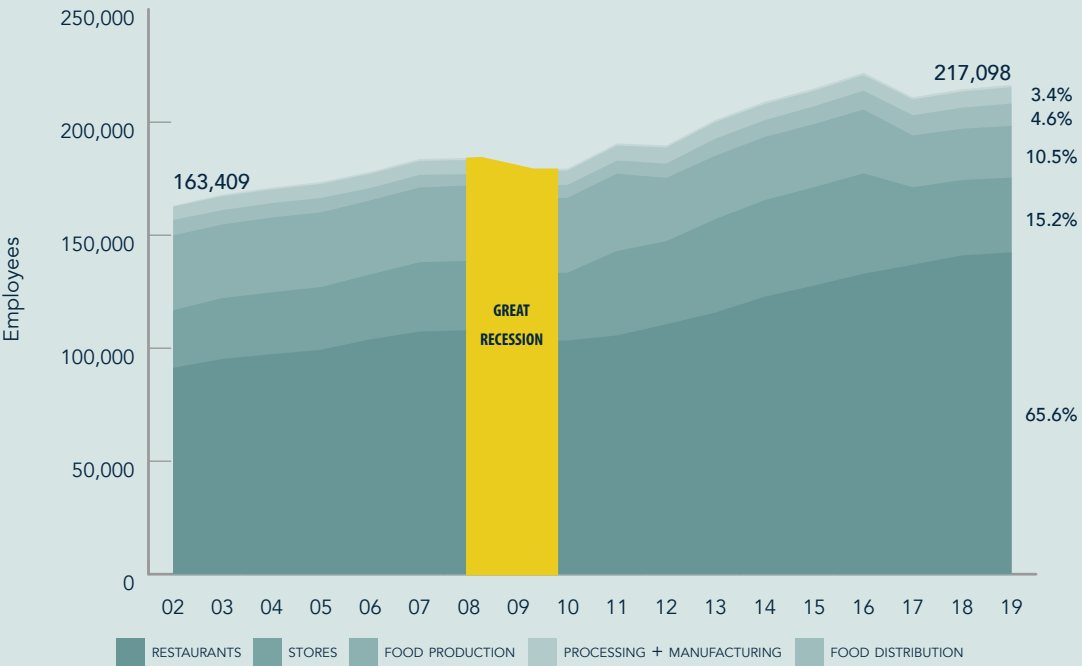
of all jobs

⁴ San Diego Regional Economic Development Corporation, January 2021, [Anchor Institutions: Leveraging Big Buyers for Small Business](#).

FIGURE 1

From 2002-2019, by Food System Category

San Diego County Food System Employment

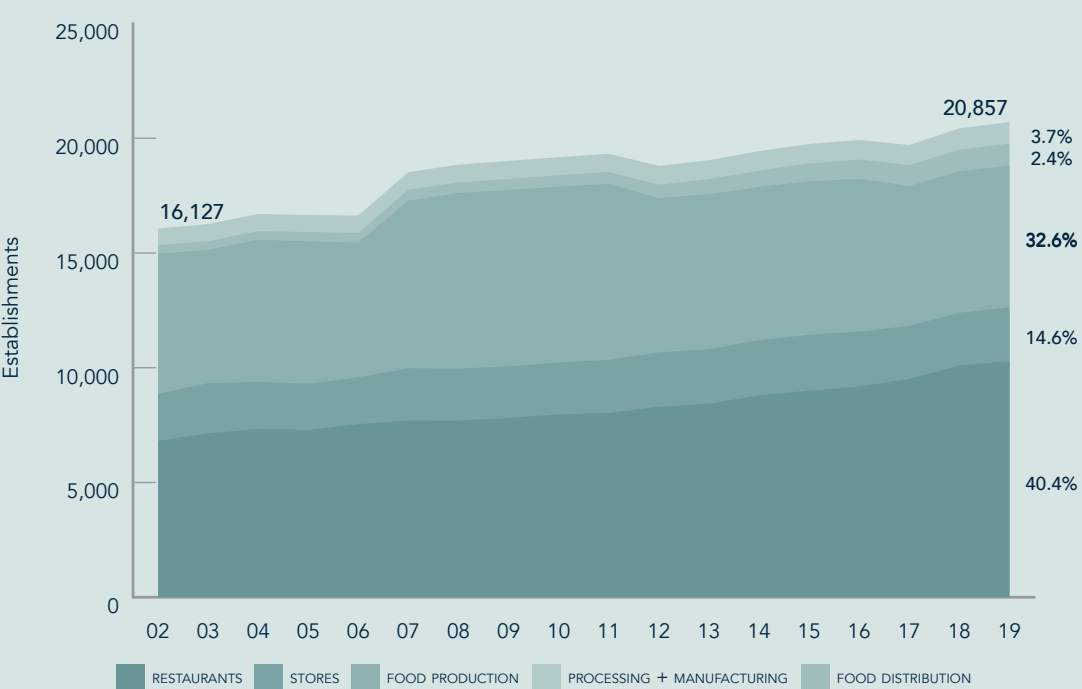


Sources: US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages; US Census Bureau, Nonemployer Statistics; USDA Census of Agriculture. Note: estimates for jobs at Warehouse Clubs and Supercenters were only available from 2011 to 2016, the dip from 2017 to 2019 reflects this missing value.

FIGURE 2

From 2002-2019, by Food System Category

San Diego County Food System Establishments



Sources: US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages; US Census Bureau, Nonemployer Statistics; USDA Census of Agriculture. Note: data for Warehouse Clubs and Supercenters was missing for 2002, 2003, 2017, and 2018.

01

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

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To provide a more comprehensive assessment, the [San Diego County Regional Economic Development Corporation](#) (EDC) performed a baseline 2019 economic impact analysis of San Diego County’s food system. They found that food system activities generated over \$20 billion in direct output, which led to over \$15 billion in indirect and induced output (Table 1). Direct output refers to expenditures of food system businesses on salaries, materials, and operating expenses. Indirect output refers to food system spending at other types of businesses, while induced output refers to the household expenditures of food system workers. The EDC also found that direct employment in San Diego County’s food system led to an additional 70,000 indirect and induced jobs. In total, 290,000 jobs generated \$35 billion sales.

Food services and drinking places—restaurants, fast food, cafeterias, bars—account for the majority of jobs and sales, but food and beverage manufacturing and distribution have the biggest multiplier effects.



TABLE 1: ECONOMIC IMPACT OF SAN DIEGO COUNTY’S FOOD SYSTEM, 2019

| Category | Direct Output | Indirect Output | Induced Output | Total |
|--|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| CROP PRODUCTION | \$2,030,151,232 | \$693,258,410 | \$1,039,731,322 | \$3,763,140,964 |
| SUPPORT ACTIVITIES FOR CROP PRODUCTION | \$125,766,441 | \$15,607,762 | \$74,531,777 | \$215,905,981 |
| ANIMAL PRODUCTION | \$626,560,071 | \$254,358,550 | \$251,411,254 | \$1,132,329,875 |
| FISHERIES | \$7,447,845 | \$127,912 | \$1,294,205 | \$8,869,962 |
| FOOD MANUFACTURING | \$1,105,452,982 | \$352,580,153 | \$237,409,905 | \$1,695,443,041 |
| BEVERAGE MANUFACTURING | \$1,299,989,131 | \$301,941,167 | \$207,895,333 | \$1,809,825,632 |
| GROCERY WHOLESALERS | \$1,020,613,047 | \$479,314,993 | \$406,516,902 | \$1,906,444,943 |
| FARM PRODUCT WHOLESALERS | \$5,755,173 | \$2,324,038 | \$1,551,493 | \$9,630,704 |
| ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE WHOLESALERS | \$387,627,799 | \$156,530,826 | \$104,497,606 | \$648,656,231 |
| FOOD AND BEVERAGE STORES | \$2,734,762,104 | \$825,410,815 | \$1,127,675,915 | \$4,687,848,834 |
| WAREHOUSE CLUBS AND SUPERCENTERS | \$30,282,975 | \$8,989,041 | \$11,535,395 | \$50,807,411 |
| FOOD SERVICES AND DRINKING PLACES | \$11,244,040,967 | \$3,769,049,716 | \$4,079,825,146 | \$19,092,915,830 |
| Total | \$20,618,449,768 | \$6,859,493,386 | \$7,543,876,254 | \$35,021,819,409 |

Source: San Diego Regional Economic Development Corporation.

Core Challenges

Industries

- FARMS
- FISHERIES
- PROCESSORS AND MANUFACTURERS
- RESTAURANTS
- INDEPENDENT RETAILERS

The core challenges to increasing the viability of local farms, fisheries, food businesses, and workers in San Diego County are:

- Achieving profitability
- Expanding direct sales shifting to alternative models
- Accessing business support

Industries

FARMS



■ Achieving Profitability

In the age of “farm-to-table,” most farms struggle with profitability. The last three USDA Censuses of Agriculture revealed that 72-74% of San Diego County farms, nurseries, and greenhouses had sales of less than \$20,000 annually. For most of these farms, after factoring in costs like labor and water (San Diego County farmers pay the most for water among all farmers in California), this meant a net loss overall. In 2017, 70% of respondents indicated that they had incurred net losses on their farm, averaging \$29,000.⁵

If this makes you wonder how farmers actually make a living, 63% of principal producers in San Diego County responded to the 2017 Census of Agriculture listing “Other” as their primary occupation, while only 37% selected “Farming.” It’s common for small to midsize farms across the nation, and in our region, to be kept afloat by income earned through other means—or to operate as nonprofit models, surviving on grants and donations.

There are generally two major pathways in agriculture today: selling through large wholesale markets, such as packinghouses and distributors, and selling direct to consumers.⁶

In traditional wholesale markets, price points are often low because transactions happen at commodity scale, and the market is impacted by global imports. Farmers in this scenario have little agency in the pricing and distribution of their product, and, of the many parties that move the product along the supply chain, ultimately capture the smallest portion of its final retail value (Where Do Our Food Dollars Go?, page 17). To survive in traditional markets, farmers need to produce at high enough volumes to cover their expenses.

Selling products directly to consumers through direct sales, on the other hand, as well as to local, independent restaurants and retailers, can be a more viable option for smaller farms like those in San Diego County. Direct sales channels include farmers markets, farm stands, CSAs, U-pick operations, and online sales—all of which present the opportunity for farmers to earn

⁵ USDA, 2017 Census of Agriculture, [Table 4](#).
⁶ Kirschenmann, Fred, Steve Stevenson, Fred Buttel, Tom Lyson and Michael Duffy, 2004, “[Why Worry About the Agriculture of the Middle?](#),” Iowa State University, Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture.

Commentary

Moving Barricades to Keep Farmers Farming

WRITTEN BY CATT WHITE, SAN DIEGO MARKETS

As a lifelong farmers market fan turned operator, I like to say that my job is weird. My team and I run grocery stores in the street. We move barricades, tow cars, curate vendors, create marketing magic, and monitor and shape regulations. And that’s just the tip of the iceberg (although we prefer Red Leaf).

We see our role, as market operators, to keep farmers farming and maintain the security provided by the short chain of our local food system.

At the most basic level, farmers markets provide communities with better-tasting, nutrient-dense food, which increases the overall health of a community. Farmers markets bring small farmers and foodmakers face-to-face with consumers, maintaining the local food supply. Dollars spent at local markets stay in the community, providing employment and supporting other local businesses. Community members gain a deeper knowledge of their food systems, food preparation methods, and seasonality.

The returns that farmers, fishermen, and food makers experience on their labors can be four or five times as great when shoppers purchase directly from producers. Buy an avocado for a dollar at a farmers market and the farmer keeps somewhere between 92 cents and the full dollar (depending on market rent structure). Spend the same amount for that fruit at a big grocery store or from a distributor and the farmer may keep only 20 cents or less of wholesale income. Fishermen and foodmakers gain significant economic advantages from keeping the retail price of what they produce, enabling them to keep providing the community with fresh food while supporting their families. Unfortunately, what seems like a perfect model of passion-meets-profit—not to mention health and sustainability—is riddled with challenges.

Balancing equitable access to fresh food with financial sustainability for small farmers is an ongoing challenge. We strive to bring markets to the many communities that want them, keep fresh food affordable, and at the same time let farmers recoup the real cost of the healthy food they produce.

The costs of liability insurance for market organizers and participants, ever-increasing regulatory



requirements, and the cost of monitoring compliance can also seem overwhelming.

Finally, there’s a farm labor shortage. The field is shrinking, because many know that building equity and providing for a family on a farmers’ or farmworkers’ income is incredibly challenging.

Some solutions are well within reach: Insurance indemnity from local cities and counties for certified farmers’ markets would allow the expansion of farmers’ markets into more neighborhoods. On the policy side, zoning changes that would allow large farms to more easily be subdivided into smaller farms for new farmers—keeping strict agricultural use as a requirement—would avoid the current trend of retiring farmers’ land going to housing developers. A proactive local agricultural land trust would also provide preservation of land as working farms. Water policy that prioritizes agriculture over recreation would keep water affordable for farmers.

As eaters, greater awareness of and support for farmers markets as a primary source of groceries would increase sales, thus increasing growers’ income, which ultimately keeps farmers farming and allow others to go into the profession and stay viable.

Each week, I move those barricades in the street and sort through regulations because I want to ensure that my grandchildren and their grandchildren will continue to have access to fresh, unprocessed food. That’s what inspires me.

Everyone who makes the small investment of time to make their local farmers’ market a primary source of their weekly groceries will see an instant return in better tasting food, good health, and a stronger community. Each of us holds the power to make our region and our world better.

higher per-unit returns. They come with their own set of challenges, including higher labor costs and the reality that most consumers still purchase food at grocery stores and other corporate retailers. Direct sales make up a relatively small percentage of food sales in San Diego County (Figure 4), although interest seems to be growing.

Farmers face the choice of participating in traditional wholesale markets, where they have little agency, earn a small cut of the profits, but operate in a mainstream market—or engaging in direct sales, where they have more agency, can earn a fair share of their product’s value, but operate in a market that is relatively overlooked and still emerging. For small San Diego County farms, expanding direct sales is the clear opportunity, presenting a way to improve farm viability while creating a more resilient and regenerative food supply, and reaping the environmental benefits that come with investing locally in climate-smart agriculture (Objective 1, Strategy 3). Food hubs and producer collaboratives are also emerging as a strategy that can support farmers of all scales with direct access to markets and receiving a higher price point or share of the consumer dollar (Objective 3, Strategy 2).

■ Expanding Direct Sales

Interest in direct sales is increasing in San Diego County, but consumer awareness of local products is limited and selling direct to local restaurants, processors, and retailers comes with challenges.

CHALLENGES WITH EXPANDING DIRECT SALES

Consumer awareness of local farmers and their products is limited

In the farmers’ survey conducted for Food Vision 2030, 63% of survey respondents cited “limited consumer awareness of local farmers, products, and values” as their top marketing challenge. Likewise, in [UC Cooperative Extension San Diego County’s Grower Needs Assessment](#), respondents cited “sales prices,” “market niches,” “market development,” “trade and foreign competition,” and “lack of profitable market outlets” as their biggest marketing challenges.

Data from the last Census of Agriculture estimated that of San Diego County’s total agricultural sales, a mere 1.9% (\$16.7 million) was classified as direct sales. That’s less than 0.1% of San Diego County’s total retail food sales, which totaled \$17.5 billion (Figure 5). About 1.6% of total agricultural sales (\$14.2 million) was classified as processed or value-added products made on the farm (squeezing oranges into juice, making strawberries into jam, etc.), another type of

product farmers can sell directly to consumers or retailers to capture a larger share of the consumer dollar. Both of these estimates are likely undercounts, but they underscore opportunities for continuing market development locally.

In the early months of COVID-19, many farms and fisheries across San Diego County pivoted to start or expand their direct sales operations, meeting a spike in demand as consumers sought an alternative to empty store shelves and crowded grocery aisles. While this period of increased direct sales was heartening, it is unclear whether support will persist post-pandemic.

Data from the last Census of Agriculture revealed that direct to retail sales constituted 5.8% (\$50.5 million) of total agricultural sales in the County. While some chefs and retailers are actively sourcing local products, many expressed that challenges related to availability, quantity, cost, distribution, and logistics persist.

Restaurants, processors, and retailers find it challenging to source from local producers

WHERE DO OUR FOOD DOLLARS GO?

The USDA Food Dollar Series is one tool for understanding where the money we spend on food at stores and eating places goes. The bulk of each food dollar spent by Americans goes to food services like restaurants and other eating places, and this value has increased over time as more Americans dine out. Processing and manufacturing receives the next largest share, followed by retail trade (i.e., grocery stores), distributors, and producers. The trend over time has been for a diminished share of food dollars to go to farmers.

The Economic Census provides another lens for understanding how people spend money on food in San Diego County. In the last available year of data, 2017, San Diegans spent over \$17.5 billion at stores, restaurants, caterers, food trucks, and direct sales. Direct sales accounted for 0.1% of all spending.

FIGURE 4

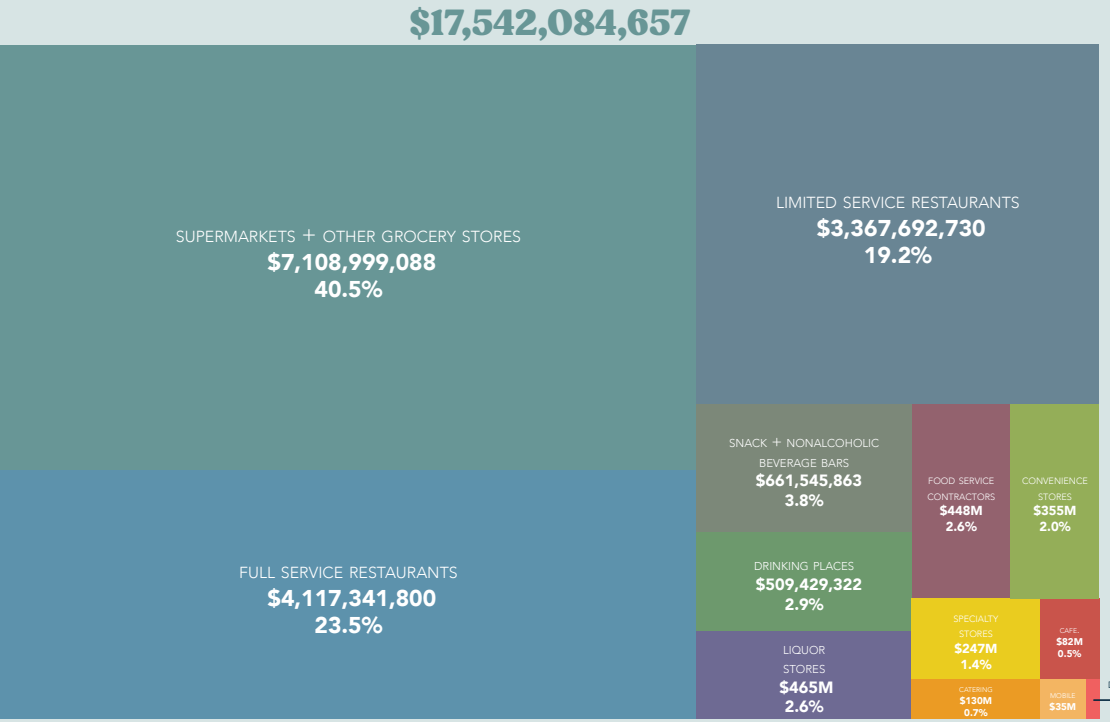
USDA Food Dollar Series, 2018



Source: USDA Economic Research Services, 2018, Food Dollar Series, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-dollar-series.aspx>.

FIGURE 5

San Diego County Retail Food Sales, 2017



Sources: US Census Bureau, 2017 Economic Census, www.census.gov/programs-surveys/economic-census/data/tables.html; USDA 2017 Census of Agriculture, www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Full_Report/Volume_1_Chapter_2_County_Level/California/st06_2_0002_0002.pdf. Adjusted for inflation to 2019 dollars.

■ Accessing Business Support Services

San Diego County has a small existing network of service providers who advise our region’s farmers on topics like crop development; water and pest management; conservation practices; and basic business practices, estate planning, and market development. However, given the size and diversity of our region’s food system, the important role local farms play, budding demand for locally produced food, and farmers’ unique business needs, there is a strong need and opportunity to expand the support system. Areas that would be most helpful include support with navigating regulations, accessing capital, selling to local markets, and one-on-one or customized business planning. Additionally, in spite of being among the most

What Farmers are Saying

What are the top challenges for your farm?

- Achieving profitability and/or making a living
- Limited consumer awareness of local farmers, products, and values
- Accessing sufficient and affordable water
- Navigating permitting/regulatory issues

Top production challenges for your farm?

- Managing pests
- Adapting to climate change

Top marketing challenges for your farm?

- Limited consumer awareness of local farmers, products, and values
- Accessing profitable direct markets (e.g., farmers markets, farm stands, CSAs, online, etc.)

Top quality of life challenges for your farm?

- Maintaining a good work/life balance
- Working long days

Which of these resources would you most likely use?

- Matchmaking program that connects farm with markets
- Regulatory and legal assistance (farmbudsman)
- Farmer-to-farmer technical assistance network

What type of business/technical assistance do you prefer?

- Digital/online workshops/webinars
- Peer to peer network of farmers
- One-on-one assistance

Insights gathered through the San Diego County Food Vision 2030 Farmers Survey

diverse agricultural counties in California, farming challenges are amplified for producers who are BIPOC or part of other marginalized groups. The four key areas where these producers face challenges, as identified by the [California Department of Food and Agriculture](#), are land tenure, language, engagement with agricultural industry and boards/commissions, and access to available resources and programs.

Industries

FISHERIES

■ Achieving Profitability

Throughout Food Vision 2030 conversations and surveys, and in previous research conducted by [California Sea Grant](#) at [Scripps Institution of Oceanography](#), San Diego County fishermen expressed that their top challenge was achieving profitability and/or making a living. Specific barriers cited include permitting and regulatory challenges associated with fishing and/or marketing, and limited consumer awareness of local fishermen and their products.

In the 1960s, shrinking fish populations on the West Coast, along with the staggering rate of dolphin bycatch with tuna fishing, spurred the implementation of the [Marine Mammal Protection Act](#) and one of the world’s most aggressive [fishery management programs](#).⁷ New regulations took a science-driven approach that today includes controlled permits, limited season lengths, catch limits, and no-fishing zones. Of seventeen global regions with ocean fishery management programs examined in a [2021 study](#), the West Coast of North America—including the San Diego region—employed the strictest regulations.⁸

Sixty years later, the program seems to have been a success: many overfished populations have rebounded, and major tuna canners have made public commitments to purchase only dolphin-safe tuna.⁹ Responsible management has become highly regarded as a critical component of sustaining a balanced ecosystem, productive seafood supply, and prosperous fishing industry for the long term. At the time of the transition, however, the fishing industry was inadequately prepared for the massive economic impacts that would occur as a result



⁷ Schoell, Mark, 1999, “[The Marine Mammal Protection Act and Its Role in the Decline of San Diego’s Fishing Industry](#),” *The Journal of San Diego History*, 45(1).

⁸ Melnychuk, M.C. et al., January 11, 2021, “[Identifying Management Actions that Promote Sustainable Fisheries](#),” *Nature Sustainability*, 4.

⁹ Wisckol, Martin, January 28, 2021, “[California’s fish population rebounds thanks to strict fishing rules](#),” *The Mercury News*.

| OBJECTIVE | | | | INTRODUCTION | | | | CORE CHALLENGES | | | | STRATEGIES | | | |
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Increase the Viability of Local Farms, Fisheries, Food Businesses, and Workers

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Tuna Harbor Dockside Market

WRITTEN BY JORDYN KASTLUNGER, FISHER

As a twenty-four year old, third-generation fisher, I have watched the ebb and flow of the commercial fishing industry evolve with the countless changes we continue to endure.

On any given Saturday, 52 weeks out of the year, you can find a variety of San Diego's fishers and their families hard at work at the [Tuna Harbor Dockside Market](#) (THDM). THDM was established in 2015 to provide a direct line for the consumers to their local fishermen.

The market has allowed the public access to an assortment of locally caught species year-round. In the last six years, Tuna Harbor Dockside Market has bridged the gap between consumers and fishermen, allowing consumers to get to know their fishermen, and simultaneously allowing them to try new species. The market rotates through over 70 species of fish and shellfish that are caught seasonally in San Diego waters. We enjoy being able to talk to people about our favorite ways to clean and cook our catch.

At THDM, the fishermen pride themselves in being able to continuously provide the freshest and best quality catch to the public. We are different than a grocery store, and on some occasions, our supplies may sometimes fall short of the demand, but we work long, hard days during the week to make sure we are bringing what we can to the market.

By shopping at the market on a Saturday, you are directly supporting local fishing families. There are many factors that affect a day of fishing, including weather, fishing conditions, seasons, quotas, and more. It is important to remember that fishing doesn't always mean catching. Sometimes the fishermen do not return to port with the level of anticipated catch. Regardless, they do their best to bring what they can directly to the consumer, all while following the strict regulations that keep our U.S fisheries sustainable.



I work hard throughout the week to keep the public updated on our social media with species that are in season, which species will be available each Saturday (both online and in person), and with footage of our days on the water. We also like to share our own favorite recipes, and the recipes that our customers share with us.

For the past year, a Saturday at the market has looked and operated differently due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As early as 6:30 AM, San Diegans start to line up for the market standing six feet apart. We know that lines are long, wait times can often exceed patience, and sometimes your favorite species can sell out. In accordance with current city guidelines, we can allow 50 shoppers on the pier at a time, all customers must wear a mask, and the fishermen must handle the fish until it has been purchased. We have also implemented a curbside pickup and preorder system where customers can order ahead on our website. For details on our ordering system, please visit our website.

We work with organizations such as Slow Fish, to create events for the public to engage with local chefs and fishermen. On Slow Fish 'Seafood Saturdays' we host cooking demos and tastings, and coming up in 2021, virtual cooking classes with these chefs will be available. Since the middle of 2020, we have also been part of the Fish to Families program that works to buy fish from San Diego's fishermen and creates meals that are distributed to people in need throughout San Diego.

The fishermen at Tuna Harbor Dockside Market are grateful for the continued support of the public as we do our best to continue bringing our catch to your plates.

This story originally appeared on the [Fishful Future](#) blog and has been republished here with permission from the author.

Restaurant purchasing of local seafood is limited

In 2018, a small study on a selection of seafood restaurants in the City of San Diego revealed a snapshot of local seafood purchasing in the city's seafood restaurants. Evidently, only a handful of chefs seek out and regularly carry local seafood products: 14.5% indicated that they consistently carry San Diego-landed seafood, 17.7% said they carry it occasionally, 53% indicated that they never serve San Diego-landed seafood, and the remaining were unsure.²²

Infrastructure for fisheries is limited

Shared waterfront infrastructure, including storage and processing equipment, was expressed by local fishermen as a critical need.

■ Accessing Business Support Services

“I think fishermen must understand that success in what they do requires success in developing relationships. Even the most "loner" of fishermen needs markets, port facilities, mechanics, etc.”

The 2014 San Diego Seafood Marketing Study found that “all fishermen agreed that the main barrier to directly marketing their products was the lack of producer-based groups committed to establishing a reliable and diverse seafood supply for sales, and to coordinating catch and sales to reduce competition, costs, and effort associated with marketing.”

Since the time of the study, [Tuna Harbor Dockside Market](#) has emerged as a remarkable example of a networked effort to increase direct sales for San Diego County's local commercial fishermen. The market has gained significant attention, especially during COVID-19,²³ and has improved consumer awareness and increased the viability of the commercial fishermen who participate. Still, Tuna Harbor Dockside Market, run exclusively by working fishermen and their families, needs business support services itself.

It may be worth noting that San Diego's two main commercial seafood landing sites, Tuna Harbor and Driscoll's Wharf, are under the jurisdiction of the Port of San Diego, the entity that holds the land along the bayfront on behalf of the public.²⁴ In 2016, the Port authorized the drafting of a [\\$2.5 billion plan](#) to completely redo San Diego's Central Embarcadero. The plan's developer has publicly expressed an interest in maintaining and revitalizing Tuna Harbor and Driscoll's Wharf, but it is currently unclear what will happen.

²² Soto, Melissa, June 2018, [Have We Achieved "Ocean to Plate?" Determining the Availability of San Diego-Sourced Seafood in the City's Seafood Restaurants](#), Scripps Institute of Oceanography.

²³ Armao, Mark, July 2, 2020, ["A San Diego Pier-to-Plate Seafood Market Is a Lifeline for Fishermen,"](#) Civil Eats.

²⁴ Van Grove, Jennifer, February 5, 2021, ["San Diego's Bayfront is Controlled by a Little-Known Agency With Power That Will Be Tested in New Year,"](#) The San Diego Union-Tribune.

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

What Fishermen are Saying

What are the top challenges for your business?

- Ability to make a living (profitability) and maintain a good quality of life (having time to do all that needs doing plus time for family and self)
- Permitting and regulatory challenges associated with fishing and/or marketing

Which resources associated with infrastructure, equipment, and/or venues would you most likely use?

- Access to direct marketing venues (e.g., fishermen's markets, farmer's markets)
- Shared storage and processing infrastructure and equipment
- Access to alternative marketing arrangements, such as Community Supported Fishery programs (CSF), Fish Auctions, etc.

Which types of connections, networks and/or communications would you most likely use?

- Fishing industry association (could be by county, port and/or gear type)
- Website or other online resources that feature information about local fishermen, their catch and/or where to find it to be used to raise public awareness and access
- Matchmaking program that connects fishermen with appropriate and profitable markets

Which of these support programs would you most likely use?

- Regulatory and legal advice or assistance
- Business advice or assistance
- Fishing-relevant technical advice or assistance

Which education or training programs would you like to see?

- Apprenticeship program for new/young crewmember training
- Workshops to learn new skills or stay updated on the latest information (any topic of interest, e.g., marketing, technology, etc)

What type of business/technical assistance do you prefer?

- One on one assistance
- Digital/online workshops/videos/webinars
- Informal gatherings & events

Insights gathered through the San Diego County Food Vision 2030 Fishermen Survey

Industries

PROCESSORS AND MANUFACTURERS

Achieving Profitability

Food businesses whose products require any amount of processing—baked goods, energy bars, hummus, kimchi, salsa, animal products—must undergo several steps to bring their product to market. Testing, ingredient sourcing, recipe scaling, pre-portioning, packaging, labeling, nutritional analysis, storage, and inspection are all part of processing and manufacturing, in addition to the actual slicing, dicing, baking, butchering, and fermenting of the food. There's a cost to each of these steps, making it challenging for small to midsize processors and manufacturers to achieve profitability. Like farms, fisheries, restaurants, retailers, and distributors, many of these businesses operate on thin margins.

The majority of infrastructure that exists today for processing and manufacturing food is large-scale and owned by national and global corporations—inaccessible and impractical for growing food businesses. In San Diego County, investing in more shared infrastructure to incubate and scale up food businesses that rely on processing and manufacturing is essential for building a robust local food economy.

CHALLENGES WITH EXPANDING DIRECT SALES

Local food processing and manufacturing infrastructure is limited

Processing and manufacturing infrastructure for all products—but particularly fruit, vegetable, livestock, and seafood processing—is limited in San Diego County. For example, the closest slaughter facility for livestock producers is in Pico Rivera (L.A. County). Food and beverage processing and manufacturing makes up a small percentage of total manufacturing in San Diego County (12.6% of total manufacturing establishments, but 3.3% of total annual manufacturing salaries).



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Volume of raw ingredients is limited

Many food processors and manufacturers that start in San Diego County find that scaling up and becoming profitable requires moving to another region. Bumble Bee, Chicken of the Sea, and Kashi famously had their origins in San Diego County before eventually being purchased by multinational food companies.

Some Food Vision 2030 interviewees expressed interest in sourcing raw ingredients locally; however, they found the volume of locally produced ingredients required for processing or manufacturing at scale to be limited in San Diego County. Connecting local processors and manufacturers with local producers is a clear opportunity.

Navigating the regulatory environment for food facilities is challenging

Some Food Vision 2030 interviewees expressed interest in sourcing raw ingredients locally; however, they found the volume of locally produced ingredients required for processing or manufacturing at scale to be limited in San Diego County. Connecting local processors and manufacturers with local producers is a clear opportunity.

Access to capital for startup or expansion is limited

There are limited sources for financing processing and manufacturing in the region.

BAKED AND BREWED IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY

In San Diego County, baking and brewing make up the majority of food and beverage processing and manufacturing jobs (Figure 6) and payrolls (Figure 7). A major percentage of bakery employment is at [Bimbo Bakeries](#) in Escondido, the American arm of Grupo Bimbo, the largest bakery company in the world. Bimbo Bakeries owns familiar brands like Thomas’ English Muffins, Sara Lee, Oroweat, Tia Rosa, and Nature’s Harvest.

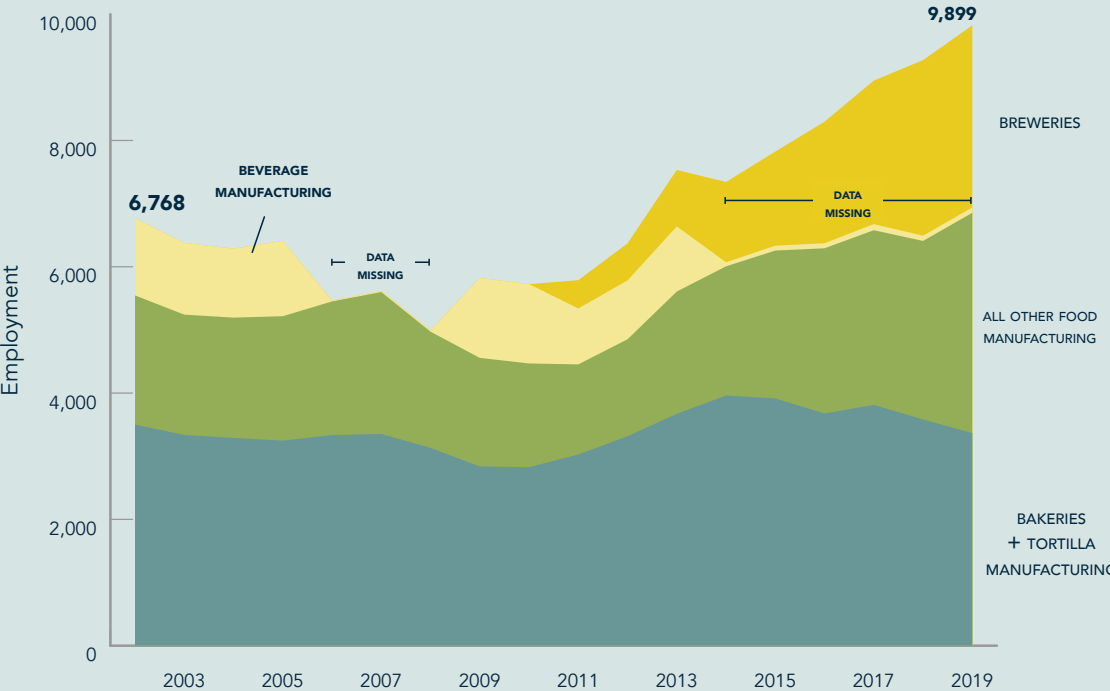
The region also boasts a large and profitable brewing/alcoholic beverage industry. With 156 craft breweries (17.2% of state total), San Diego County is the top county in the United States for craft brewing. The [San Diego Regional Economic Development Corporation](#) calculated that San Diego County’s craft brewers have an economic impact of \$1.8 billion. Along [Route 78](#), now known as “Hops Highway,” these researchers calculated an economic impact of over \$382 million.

Expanding opportunities for the baking and brewing industries to thrive, while increasing support for other small and midsize processors and manufacturers, is a clear need and opportunity in San Diego County.



FIGURE 6

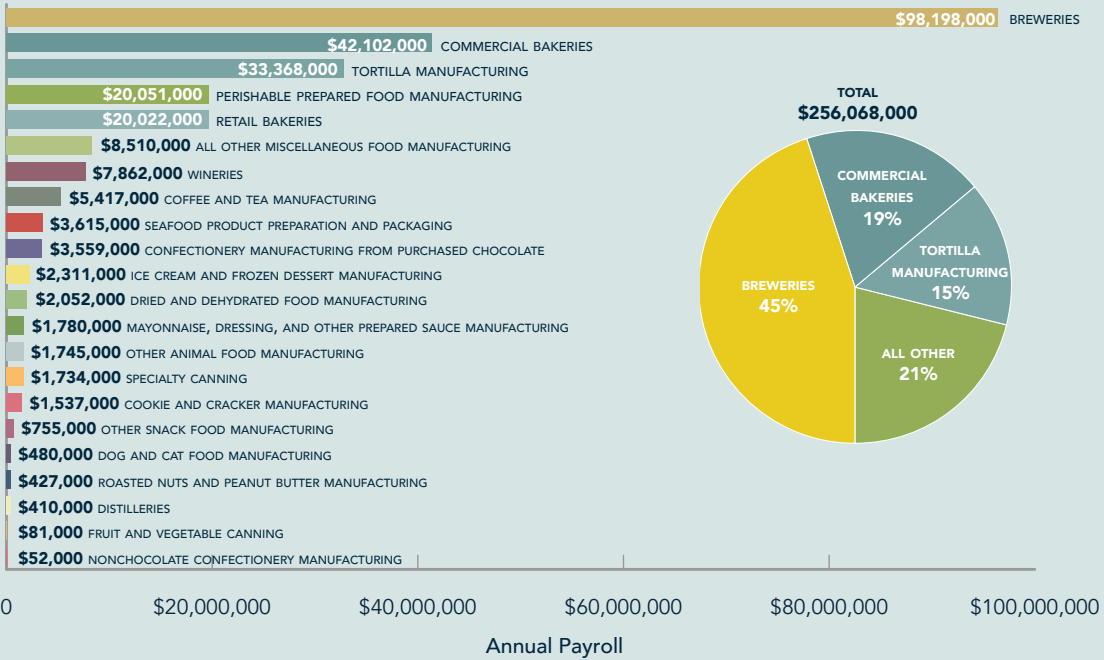
San Diego County Food and Beverage Manufacturing Employment



Sources: US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages; US Census Bureau, Nonemployer Statistics.

FIGURE 7

Annual Payroll of San Diego County Food and Beverage Processors and Manufacturers



Source: U.S. Census Bureau County Business Patterns, www.census.gov/programs-surveys/cbp/data.html. Adjusted for inflation to 2019 dollars.

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Accessing Business Support Services

Support for processors and manufacturers in the region is limited. Access to capital, business support services, and assistance with navigating regulations were all commonly expressed needs. With the exception of the [San Diego Brewers Guild](#), San Diego County is missing the industry associations and nonprofit organizations that are essential for advocating for food processors and manufacturers and creating a supportive business environment. [Naturally San Diego](#) recently emerged as a network to nurture the region’s natural products industry, and could serve as an important platform for knowledge sharing and collaboration.

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What Processors and Manufacturers Are Saying

Desired Support Service

- Business planning assistance
 - Food business accelerator
 - Food entrepreneurship training/certificate/degree program
 - Grant and loan program for developing processing and manufacturing infrastructure
- Specialty food association to support processors/manufacturers
 - Support for permitting, licensing for processing/manufacturing facilities

Desired Formats

- One-on-one assistance
- Peer-to-peer assistance

Insights gathered through the San Diego County Food Vision 2030 interviews

Industries

RESTAURANTS

■

Achieving Profitability

Even when the economy is booming, a profitable business model for small, independently owned restaurants is elusive.²⁵ Research from before the pandemic shows that Americans, including San Diegans, clearly love to dine out: More than half of the nearly \$1.8 trillion Americans spend on food is for consumption away from home. San Diego County itself had more than \$17.5 billion in retail food sales in 2017, the last year of available data, and dining out accounted for 53% of sales (Where Do Our Food Dollars Go?, page 17).

In spite of this demand, earning a secure living as a restaurant owner or worker has never been easy. On average, profit margins for restaurants usually fall between 3-5%.²⁶ A 2016 study from JPMorgan Chase revealed that restaurants also report some of the lowest average cash reserves among small businesses, with only enough on hand to cover 16 days.²⁷ Any disruption to a restaurant’s revenue—which can be caused by seasonality, staffing changes, ingredient shortage, equipment damage, new competition, gentrification, pressure to be on third-party delivery and review apps, or even a global pandemic—can suddenly push restaurants into closure territory.

In April 2020 alone, a few weeks after the first Safer at Home order was issued, 59,000 people who worked at restaurants, fast food places, and bars in San Diego County lost their jobs, the largest COVID-19-related employment losses of any occupational category. In December 2020, a nationwide survey of the National Restaurant Association’s membership estimated that 17% of restaurants in the U.S.—more than 110,000 establishments—had permanently closed. The majority of restaurants that closed were not new businesses, the Association found. On average, they’d been in business for 16 years.²⁸

Predictions for the future of the restaurant industry include increased consolidation, indicating that independently owned restaurants will become increasingly rare.²⁹

Slowing the shift toward further consolidation and the continued loss of jobs, businesses, and diversity in our restaurant industry requires confronting a number of structural challenges.



²⁵ Farrell, Diana and Chris Wheat, September 2016, [Cash is King: Flows, Balances, and Buffers Days: Evidence from 600,000 Small Businesses](#), JP Morgan Chase & Co. Institute.

²⁶ On the Line, [Complete Guide to Restaurant Profit Margins](#).

²⁷ Farrell, Diana and Chris Wheat, September 2016.

²⁸ National Restaurant Association, December 7, 2020, [Letter to Congress](#).

²⁹ Henkes, David, 2020, [The Post-Pandemic Playbook](#), Technomic.

The fundamental problem remains that “the business model of restaurants is built on the assumption of cheap food and cheap labor.” Restaurants are forced to absorb much of the true costs of food that consumers won’t accept, leading to cash-strapped operations and the impossibility of reconciling rising ingredient and labor costs with stagnant profits.

As one interviewee for Food Vision 2030 described, consumer preferences for “10-cent wing night,” bolstered by a subsidized fast food industry and the sensationalist slant of popular food media, highlights pressure in the restaurant industry to charge cut-rate prices for their food. It disregards the actual cost of producing, preparing, and serving the food, resulting in the exploitation of workers both upstream and downstream. The specific bias toward BIPOC-owned—and particularly immigrant-owned—restaurants that assumes their food should be “cheap,” was seeded by historic and present-day expectations that the labor of immigrants is cheap, and is doubly harmful.³⁰

RECONCILING FAIR WAGES WITH THIN MARGINS

Historically, conversations about food system business viability have focused on the challenges and opportunities of owners, and the needs of owners and workers have been pitted against each other in a zero-sum game. After all, labor is frequently the top expense of business owners. If the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us nothing else, it is that we are all in this together. Market concentration and wage stagnation are two sides of the same coin. A relatively small number of multinational corporations own major percentages of all categories of food system businesses. These corporations are driven to increase profits by cutting labor costs, investing in capital-intensive technologies, and pursuing acquisitions.

One result is that “Rising wage inequality and slow and uneven hourly wage growth for the vast majority of workers have been defining features of the U.S. labor market for the last four decades.” In fact, the earnings of the bottom 90% of U.S. wage earners grew by only 24% over the past 40 years, while the top 1% of wage earners saw a 158% increase and the top 0.1% of wage earners experienced a 341% increase (i.e., wages for the top 0.1% grew 15 times faster than the wages of the majority of wage earners).³¹

In America, corporate profits have soared (even during a traumatic period like the COVID-19 pandemic) while marginal tax rates, regulation, and corporate governance oversight have diminished. Wages have stagnated for the majority of working Americans, and food system workers—particularly food preparation and service workers—typically earn some of the lowest wages in the country, including in San Diego County. Union membership has seriously declined, including in food system industries (and food system workers face the highest amount of labor law violations of any other industry³²).

As San Diego State University professor Pascale Joassart-Marcelli explains, policies and practices that “ignore or remove hard-fought labor protections, incarcerate massive numbers of people, prioritize shareholders over workers, reject universal healthcare, and fail to pass immigration reform have all contributed to the production of a very precarious workforce for whom informal work may be the only option to make ends meet. Such policies are based on the false notion that economies thrive on low-cost labor.” (See Informality and Food Work by Pascale Joassart-Marcelli in Objective 4).

Entirely different arrangements are possible if we were to elevate the wellbeing of workers and their communities. A \$15 minimum wage (which leads to greater purchasing power), community wealth building structures like co-ops, employee ownership, and High Road Kitchens, and workforce assistance programs could all be helpful. For example, the Mondragón region of Spain has 96 cooperatives that collectively employ over 70,000 people. While the COVID-19

pandemic spiked unemployment and food insecurity around the world—and Wall Street earnings and shareholder dividends simultaneously soared—the Mondragón cooperatives were able to protect workers precisely because they were engineered “to preserve paychecks.”³³ (See Objective 4, Increase Wages, Improve Working Conditions, and Advance Career Opportunities for a more detailed analysis of food system labor issues).

Industries

FISHERIES

Shifting to Alternative Models

As with farmers and fishermen, restaurant owners and workers are looking to alternative models that value their labor and ensure they build equity. Restaurants are exploring options like worker-owned cooperatives, community kitchens, and greater access to capital for immigrant-owned businesses. In the wake of COVID-19, they are also looking to diversify their revenue streams—shifting from just dine-in to also encompass takeout, delivery, retail, and ecommerce—to try to achieve a more secure position.

CHALLENGES OF SHIFTING TO ALTERNATIVE MODELS

Local food processing and manufacturing infrastructure is limited

Because alternative viability models for all food businesses—particularly restaurants—are still comparatively rare, a lack of supporting regulations, combined with organizational, cultural, financial, and other barriers is holding up its wider uptake. Unique business services and financing programs to incubate alternative models is necessary for bringing these possibilities to market.

Members of [Business For Good San Diego](#), a local business owners group, are advocating for the [High Road Kitchens](#) concept, a restaurant model devised by One Fair Wage in an effort to ensure guaranteed sales for restaurants and livable wages for workers. As an example, explains Mikey Knab, General Manager of San Diego’s Ponce’s Restaurant and Board Chair of Business for Good, “Municipalities pay money to feed people every day (prisoners, etc.). They issue contracts on low cost bids, usually to a multinational. But if they tapped a network of local restaurants to do that work, and provided access to government resources, the money would circulate locally. It’s a very uncertain landscape right now, but if restaurant owners had another secure revenue stream in addition to regular customers, we’d be more likely to be able to continue serving our community.”

³⁰ Martin, Michel, February 18, 2017, ["How 'Cheap Eats' Affect the People Who Make and Serve the Food,"](#) NPR.

³¹ Gould, Elise, February 20, 2020, ["State of Working America Wages 2019,"](#) Economic Policy Institute.

³² U.S. Department of Labor, FY 2020, Low Wage, [High Violation Industries.](#)

³³ Peter S. Goodman, December 29, 2020, ["Co-ops in Spain's Basque Region Soften Capitalism's Rough Edges,"](#) *The New York Times*.

■

Accessing Business Support Services

Support for restaurant owners—especially BIPOC entrepreneurs—is limited. Across the board, there are few programs or initiatives supporting restaurants with business services and financing. Throughout Food Vision 2030 conversations and surveys, restaurant owners often expressed that reconciling fair wages with thin margins is challenging.

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What Restaurant Owners and Managers are Saying

What are the top challenges or needs for your business?

- Achieving profitability/ making a living
- Finding affordable and skilled labor
- Providing affordable health care for self and/ or for employees

Which of these resources would you most likely use?

- Network for restaurant owners/managers
- Workforce assistance (e.g., support for recruiting and managing labor, human resource issues, etc.)
- Website and event guide helping tourists find authentic food and farm experiences in San Diego County

Desired formats

- Peer-to-peer assistance

Insights gathered from San Diego County Food Vision 2030 Restaurants Survey

SPOTLIGHT

Super Cocina

WRITTEN BY JUAN PABLO SANCHEZ, OWNER/MANAGER

My family immigrated to San Diego from Xalapa, Mexico, in 1987. In 1989, my parents founded Super Cocina, a small restaurant, in the building where the Barrio Logan Farmers Market was once held. This iconic building, which resembled a Mexican market with its many shops, is still there—but it has been converted into a Walmart. We eventually relocated Super Cocina to City Heights over 25 years ago, and have been here ever since.

From the beginning, my parents knew they wanted to serve the traditional food eaten in homes in Xalapa, known as guisados, or stews. We catered to the local clientele, who consisted heavily of blue collar immigrant workers, often far from their homes and families. The guisados, to them, were nostalgic and comforting reminders of their homeland. Today, we rotate over two hundred guisados at the restaurant throughout the year. Although these are central to Mexican cuisine, you will have trouble finding them outside someone's home.

In the United States, diversity is purportedly celebrated, but is the way we treat diverse businesses reflective of that? Small, immigrant-owned businesses in City Heights like ours face substantial barriers to growth. Business resources—whether it be permits, grants, loans, or any bureaucracy—are more difficult to navigate when language and cultural barriers are at play. Then you have the effects of redlining, continual gentrification of our neighborhood, and the lingering perception that businesses like ours serve food and communities that are not “American.” And finally, there’s the lack of capital, a challenge shared by small businesses everywhere.

Like many small restaurants around us, we are supported almost exclusively by clientele within our immediate neighborhood, and furthermore, by people who share our country of origin. But small businesses should be more widely celebrated. I’d like to see intentional promotion of our immigrant-owned businesses by organizations outside of our own. Public agencies, the media, and groups that feature things to do in San Diego County can all help us by highlighting small, little-known shops and restaurants like those in City Heights. Marketing agencies could help lead a concerted effort to help these businesses reach new clientele. Programs could be started to offer business owners technical support or assistance with using social media. We can work together to remind customers of the countless alternatives they have to the same few corporate franchises and chains—and that their support of small businesses truly matters.

What has led to these challenges? I think misunderstandings between business owners and policymakers have yielded unsustainable policies for years. The needs of both sides have never truly been hashed out, and many “small business” associations in the government do not speak for me or my values.

I joined Business For Good San Diego because I was tired of being seen as the opposing side on progressive ordinances such as increasing the minimum wage. Working together with others in a coalition has made a big difference in being able to come to the table with a powerful argument against policies that don’t work for small business owners.

The truth is, I want to take a stand on social justice and environment-related issues, while also ensuring that the impacts on San Diego’s true small businesses are considered. Both can be done. Workers and small business owners both need to be involved in the lawmaking process.

Lessons learned over 30 years of business

Three decades after our doors first opened, I can say I’ve learned a few lessons about business ownership. Keeping growth slow and deliberate is probably the most important one. Many shops take their initial success as a sign that they must expand their brand by opening more locations or by increasing services. It is also tempting to change your product or the way you serve with outside forces such as gentrification. Unfortunately, this has been the undoing of many businesses.

Our style of food is artisanal and hard to replicate, so we decided to center our efforts on one storefront, focusing on consistency, value, and sticking to our traditional concept. We do make adjustments here and there, but we try to stay true to our core business and increase our customer base by trusting this practice. We have been able to weather many economic, social, and health-related storms this way.

Vision for the future of Super Cocina

My vision is to continue providing our style of food—comforting, nostalgic, and artisanal cooking from the Mexican heartland. Many of our recipes remain unchanged since pre-Hispanic times, and we hope to keep these time-tested dishes alive by sharing them with clients for generations. Super Cocina’s food is one of the clearest reflections of my past, my heritage, and my culture. It is a way of teaching my community about our people.

I believe that what has always been mislabeled as City Heights’ weakness—the presence of people hailing from all over the world—is actually our greatest strength. As I continue serving my customers, I will also keep advocating for my community and fellow business owners, to receive the support we need to keep our businesses, our family legacies, and our stories alive.



Industries

INDEPENDENT RETAILERS

Achieving Profitability

As with other sectors of the food system, market concentration is prevalent in retail. The 20 largest food retailers accounted for 66.6% of U.S. grocery store sales in 2016 (the last year of data available), and the top four chains alone—Walmart, Kroger, Albertsons, and Ahold Delhaize—accounted for nearly 45% of grocery sales.³⁴ In 2018, grocery stores, warehouse clubs (like Costco), and supercenters accounted for 80% of food sales for consumption at home in the United States (Figure 8).

In San Diego County, dozens of neighborhood markets and independent retailers, one co-op ([Ocean Beach People's Organic Food Market](#)), and a homegrown organic grocery chain, [Jimbo's](#), operate within this system. Unsurprisingly, the independent retailers' survey conducted for Food Vision 2030 revealed that the top workplace challenge for these businesses is *achieving profitability/making a living*.

Each year, enabled by subsidies, a smaller number of corporate retailers exerts greater control over which foods reach communities. Today, corporate retailers are accelerating consolidation of the food supply and economy, spending hundreds of millions of dollars to acquire entire technology platforms and build massive, automated fulfillment centers.³⁵ Independent retailers face increasing challenges to compete.

Not only do they contribute to the local economy, independent retailers also generally stock culturally appropriate foods and make decisions based on lived experiences and relationships with their communities. Increasing their viability is critical for creating a connected local food economy and preserving diversity in our food supply.

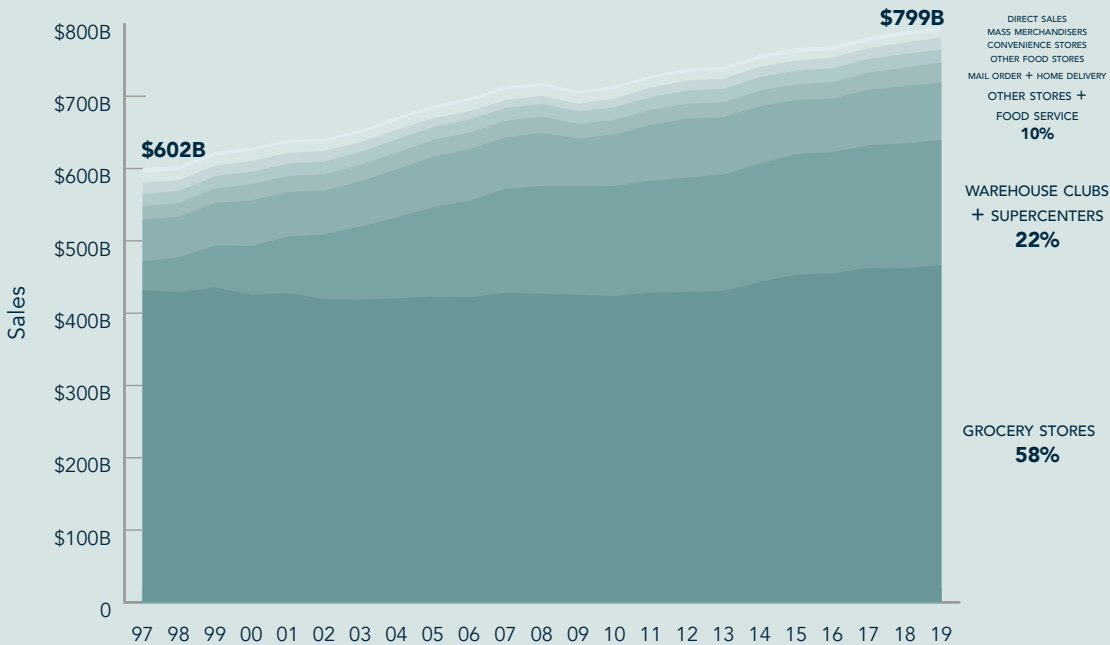
Accessing Business Support Services

Support for independent food retail business owners—especially BIPOC entrepreneurs—is limited. Across the board, there are few programs or initiatives supporting these small business owners with business services and financing.



FIGURE 8

US Food Sales for Consumption at Home



Source: USDA Economic Research Service. See the Technical Bulletin by Abigail M. Okrent, Howard Elitzak, Tim Park and Sarah Rehkamp, August 2018, *Measuring the Value of the U.S. Food System: Revisions to the Food Expenditure Series*, www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-expenditure-series. Adjusted for inflation to 2019 dollars.

³⁴ USDA Economic Research Service, [Retail Trends](#).

³⁵ Hensel, Anna, January, 28, 2002, "[As Online Grocery Rises, Independent Grocery Chains Struggle](#)," *Modern Retail*.

Many survey respondents specified that they serve prepared foods, and emphasized the need for support services to help navigate permitting, regulatory, food safety, licensing, and legal issues related to retail food services, which are overseen by the [County of San Diego Department of Environmental Health and Quality](#).

What Independent Retailers Are Saying

What are the top challenges for your business?

- Achieving profitability/ making a living
- Finding support for permitting/regulatory issues
- Finding support for retail business/legal issues
- Finding affordable and skilled labor

Which of these resources would you most likely use?

- Website and event guide helping tourists find authentic food and farm experiences in San Diego County
- Network for small community retailers
- Bulk purchasing opportunity with other community retailers
- Support for market improvements

Insights gathered through the San Diego County Food Vision 2030 Independent Retailers Survey

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

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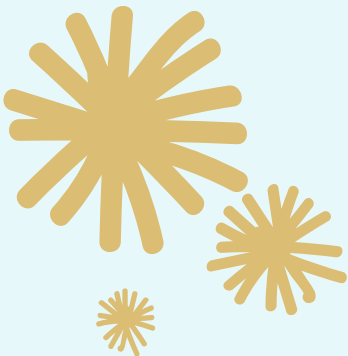
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The Opportunity



Strategies

- 01
- EXPAND FOOD SYSTEM BUSINESS SUPPORT SERVICES
- 02
- CREATE PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING AND NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES
- 03
- ENCOURAGE CREATIVE STRATEGIES THAT FARMERS AND FISHERMEN CAN IMPLEMENT TO INCREASE PROFITABILITY
- 04
- INCREASE COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES ACROSS THE FOOD SYSTEM

Throughout Food Vision 2030 conversations and surveys, farmers, fishermen, food business owners, and food workers shared what they wanted San Diegans to know about their experiences working in the food system. Across the board, they articulated the dignity of hard work, the challenges of making a living, and the joy of producing and serving food to their communities.

Farmers, fishermen, food business owners, and food workers have all been squeezed by market consolidation, wage stagnation, regulatory burdens, and more. Even with these everyday challenges, the arrival of COVID-19, they stepped up, working harder, longer, and more creatively throughout the pandemic, both to survive and to continue nourishing San Diegans.

Enhanced business services, technical assistance, and funding will not solve all viability challenges. However, the benefits of solidifying a more coordinated, collaborative, and communicative support system for farmers, fishermen, and food businesses are clear.

Strategies

01

EXPAND FOOD SYSTEM BUSINESS SUPPORT SERVICES



Provide Wraparound Business Services and Financing

Wraparound business services—or taking a holistic approach to providing business services—are essential. Farms, fisheries, and food businesses often need support in several areas at the same time, including business planning, marketing, legal and regulatory advising, and accessing land, infrastructure, and capital.

Business services include business planning; enterprise analysis; access to land, infrastructure, and capital; financial record-keeping and management; marketing and sales; human resources management; management coaching; and retirement/ownership succession planning.

Technical assistance includes assistance with the production of food (e.g., growing crops, catching fish, and raising livestock), regulations and permitting, technology, infrastructure, food safety, food science (e.g., recipe development, product research, packaging).

Financing programs include access to resources across the capital continuum like loans, equity financing, royalty financing, grants, program-related investments, and crowdsourced funds.

Organizations providing support services must ensure services are available for farms, fisheries and food businesses of all types and scales, including those owned by socially disadvantaged and BIPOC entrepreneurs. One-on-one, peer-to-peer, online, and other formats of assistance based on the specific needs of each business and its workers is also essential.

NATIONAL EXAMPLES OF ORGANIZATIONS PROVIDING WRAPAROUND SERVICES FOR FARMS, FISHERIES, AND FOOD BUSINESSES

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

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| SEA GRANT | Nationwide | Most Sea Grant programs assist their states’ seafood and fishing workforce with guidance in areas such as the direct marketing of seafood, starting and operating a food business, achieving certifications, processing seafood, and/or developing new products through workshops, classes, webinars, publications, and more. As the state with the nation’s largest fishing industry, Alaska Sea Grant hosts the Alaska Seafood School with trainings on direct marketing, processing and/or leadership aimed at advancing seafood business employees into leadership positions. California Sea Grant hosts a Market Your Catch website and associated workshops, and offers a seafood business and marketing short course as part of its commercial fishing apprenticeship program. |
| CALIFORNIA FARMLINK | California | California Farmlink supports the success of beginning, limited-resource, immigrant, and other underserved farmers. Their services include helping farmers with accessing capital through their loan program and other lenders, finding land, developing sound lease agreements, partnering with landowners to purchase or transition farms, and accessing training and technical assistance. |
| COMMONWEALTH KITCHEN | Dorchester, MA | CommonWealth Kitchen offers shared kitchens along with integrated business assistance. Their programs help aspiring entrepreneurs get started with recipe development, permits, packaging, food safety regulations, and manufacturing. They also help established businesses grow by providing large volume production equipment, business assistance, marketing, and access to capital. |
| INTERVALE CENTER | Burlington, VT | California Farmlink supports the success of beginning, limited-resource, immigrant, and other underserved farmers. Their services include helping farmers with accessing capital through their loan program and other lenders, finding land, developing sound lease agreements, partnering with landowners to purchase or transition farms, and accessing training and technical assistance. |
| JULIA SHANKS FOOD CONSULTING | Cambridge, MA | California Farmlink supports the success of beginning, limited-resource, immigrant, and other underserved farmers. Their services include helping farmers with accessing capital through their loan program and other lenders, finding land, developing sound lease agreements, partnering with landowners to purchase or transition farms, and accessing training and technical assistance. |

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| KITCHEN TABLE ADVISORS | San Francisco, CA | Kitchen Table Advisors provides sustainable farms and ranches with one-on-one, personalized, bilingual business advising through a three-year program. An emergent strand of work, ecosystem building, also draws on the wisdom and needs of farmers and ranchers to create a more powerful shift toward ecological responsibility and justice in land, markets, and financial capital. |
| LA COCINA | San Francisco, CA | La Cocina leads a food business incubator program offering affordable commercial kitchen space and hands-on technical assistance to low- and very low-income entrepreneurs—many of whom are immigrant women—launching, growing and formalizing their food businesses. |
| MANDELA PARTNERS | Oakland, CA | Mandela Partners leads several place-based business development programs that weave together business incubation, access to community capital, and tailored support for launching and growing local food enterprises. |
| MONTEREY BAY FISHERIES TRUST | California | Monterey Bay Fisheries Trust provides technical support to fishermen transitioning to direct-to-consumer markets. They also partner with California Farmlink to develop technical assistance and loan resources for small fishing businesses. |
| VENTURES | Seattle, WA | Ventures operates a micro-business incubator with bilingual, hands-on courses on business basics, marketing, operations, sales, financial management, and packaged food. They also host a monthly legal clinic and a variety of workshops, offer coaching, facilitate opportunities to increase market access, and provide access to capital through loans and savings programs. |

This table contains only a selection of examples. It is not intended to be a comprehensive list.

For farms specifically, addressing regulatory and labor issues is particularly critical. The [farmbudsman](#) program in Solano and Yolo counties provides an example of how local governments can help improve the viability of farmers in their regions by providing guidance on various permitting processes. [Snake River Farms Association](#) and [North Carolina Growers Association](#) are two unique examples of organizations helping their member farms navigate the H-2A visa process.

NATIONAL EXAMPLES OF ORGANIZATIONS PROVIDING WRAPAROUND SERVICES FOR FARMS, FISHERIES, AND FOOD BUSINESSES

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| AKIPTAN | Eagle Butte, SD | Akiptan is a Native American Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) that provides loans and technical assistance to those in Indian Agriculture. They finance youth, startups, operating costs, and ownership. In addition to the financing itself, Akiptan also provides their clients with technical support and financial literacy training to help create knowledgeable borrowers. |
| BLACK FARMER FUND (BFF) | New York | Black Farmer Fund is an emerging community investment fund for investing in black food systems entrepreneurs in New York State, including farmers, food distributors, caterers, restaurant owners, composters, vendors, and more. Black Farmer Fund is in the process of identifying blended sources of capital, its investment strategy, and governance structure. |
| CALIFORNIA FISHERIES FUND (CFF), MANAGED BY COMMUNITY VISION | California | The California Fisheries Fund (CFF) is a loan fund for the California fishing industry. CFF has worked with borrowers including small-scale fisherman, fishing enterprises, ports, and nonprofits to finance vessel purchase or improvement, permit or quota purchase, gear purchase or modification, working capital, dockside infrastructure, and fish processing and distribution. CFF is managed by Community Vision, a locally invested funding organization confronting economic and racial inequity through lending and consulting. |
| COMMON FUTURE | Oakland, CA | Common Future is a network uniting wealth-holders across the United States and Canada to advance a more equitable economy. Common Future serves as a national intermediary: they aggregate capital, identify emerging needs, and direct the capital where it can be best put to work. |
| FOUNDATION FOR BUSINESS EQUITY (FBE) | Boston, MA | The Foundation for Business Equity incubated the Business Equity Fund at the Boston Foundation to provide growth capital to Black and Hispanic/Latinx business owners. They also partner with other sources of capital to deploy loans through Mills Cities Community Investments, a CDFI. FBE also facilitates relationship-building for entrepreneurs with strategic advisors and direct service specialists, and provides peer-to-peer support and guidance for setting up Advisory Boards. |
| MICHIGAN GOOD FOOD FUND | Michigan | Michigan Good Food Fund is a \$30 million public-private partnership loan fund that provides financing to businesses that grow, process, distribute, and sell healthy food that reaches low-income and underserved communities in Michigan. The Fund provides flexible, patient capital to food enterprises often overlooked by traditional banks. Lending is bolstered by business assistance to help entrepreneurs grow their ventures and prepare for financing. |

01

02

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

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| NATIVE AMERICAN AGRICULTURE FUND | Fayetteville, AR | The Native American Agriculture Fund (NAAF) is a private, charitable trust serving Native farmers and ranchers through strategic grantmaking in the areas of business assistance, agricultural education, technical support and advocacy services. NAAF was created from the historic Keepseagle v. Vilsack litigation settlement. |
| VERMONT WORKING LANDS ENTERPRISE INITIATIVE | Vermont | The Working Lands Enterprise Initiative supports innovative entrepreneurs at the forefront of Vermont’s Working Lands economy through business planning, technical assistance, business grants, loan opportunities, and service provider grants to help growing businesses thrive. The program is made possible through the support of the state legislature, multiple state organizations and public/private donors. |

This table contains only a selection of examples. It is not intended to be a comprehensive list.



Form Networks of Food Business Support Advisors

To ensure a continuum of food business support services is available to farms, fisheries, and food businesses, advisors themselves must work together. By forming networks, advisors can strategize how best to support the local farm, fish, and food business community and share best practices with one another.

NATIONAL EXAMPLES OF FARM, FISHERY, AND FOOD BUSINESS SUPPORT ADVISOR NETWORKS

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| AGRICULTURAL VIABILITY ALLIANCE (based on <i>The Blueprint</i> by the Carrot Project) | Boston, MA | The Agricultural Viability Alliance brings together farm and food business service providers and organizations from across New England and New York’s Hudson Valley to address shared challenges, facilitate uniform high-quality coverage, and share and expand limited resources. The Alliance supports business technical assistance providers, who ultimately support the long-term viability of farms and food enterprises in the region. |
| VERMONT FARM & FOREST VIABILITY PROGRAM—NETWORK OF ADVISORS | Vermont | The Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program provides business services for Vermont farms and forestry businesses, carried out by a diverse Network of Advisors—many of whom are staff members of the Program’s organizational partners. The Farm & Forest Viability Program sets common guidelines, establishes quality of work standards, and forms a platform for advisors to learn from one another and collaborate on grants and services. |

This table contains only a selection of examples. It is not intended to be a comprehensive list.

Strategies

02

CREATE PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING AND NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES

Through surveys and interviews, peer-to-peer networking opportunities were consistently highlighted by farmers, fishermen, and food business owners as the preferred method for information sharing and learning. Although San Diego County has a few forums for peer-to-peer learning, including [Business For Good San Diego](#) and opportunities for specific demographics, such as the [Asian Business Association of San Diego](#), there are very few organizations that are consistently providing opportunities for farmers, fishermen, and food business owners to learn and connect with others in their field. There are even fewer opportunities for socially disadvantaged, immigrant, and BIPOC entrepreneurs.

NATIONAL EXAMPLES OF ORGANIZATIONS SUPPORTING PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING AND NETWORKING AMONG FARMERS, FISHERMEN, AND FOOD BUSINESS OWNERS

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| BLACK URBAN GROWERS (BUGS)–BLACK FARMERS & URBAN GARDENERS CONFERENCE | Northeast | Black Urban Growers convenes the Black Farmers & Urban Gardeners Conference, a national conference bringing together Black farmers, food justice advocates, educators, chefs, and members of Black communities from across the country to share best practices and build a network of Black leadership in the movement for land justice and food sovereignty. |
| FISHING PARTNERSHIP SUPPORT SERVICES | Burlington, MA | Fishing Partnership Support Services leads programs that help commercial fishermen, shoreline workers, and their families access health insurance and other health services, financial planning workshops, Safety at Sea training, and more. |
| MICHIGAN GOOD FOOD FUND–PEER-TO-PEER SESSIONS | Michigan | The Michigan Good Food Fund organizes virtual, recorded peer-to-peer sessions that focus on serving different sectors of Michigan’s food system—natural, health product makers; restaurants, caterers, and other food service businesses; and small farm businesses. Each session features a special industry guest and is co-hosted by another individual working in that space. They also host workshops aimed at growing the business acumen of good food enterprises. |

Strategies

02

SAN DIEGO COUNTY FOOD VISION 2030

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| MINNESOTA INDIGENOUS BUSINESS ALLIANCE (MIBA)–BUSINESS DIRECTORY | Minnesota | The Minnesota Indigenous Business Alliance has developed a free, digital, statewide Native Business directory that makes connecting with businesses, artisans, professionals, nonprofits, foundations, tribal colleges, associations, and economic development and financial services organizations owned by or led by Natives, tribal enterprises, and tribal governments easier. |
| NORTHEAST ORGANIC FARMING ASSOCIATION OF VERMONT (NOFA VERMONT) | Vermont | NOFA Vermont works to grow the state’s supply of organic food while supporting the viability of organic farms. The organization’s staff and team of farm advisors provide wraparound services and programs that use peer-to-peer learning to support farmers at all levels of development. They organize several well-attended events that promote networking among producers and food business owners all along the food value chain. |
| PRACTICAL FARMERS OF IOWA | Iowa | Practical Farmers of Iowa provides beginning farmers with resources for business planning, financing, and land access. They also organize beginning farmer meet-ups, socials, and annual retreats—events that bring beginning farmers together to network, plan, and discuss ways to improve their farms while helping to build a sense of community. |

This table contains only a selection of examples. It is not intended to be a comprehensive list.

Strategies

03

ENCOURAGE CREATIVE STRATEGIES THAT FARMERS AND FISHERMEN CAN IMPLEMENT TO INCREASE PROFITABILITY

Business support strategies for our region’s food producers must address longstanding and emerging threats to viability, including historic inequities and climate change. As highlighted in Objective 1, given current trends, it is clear that farmers and fishermen will have to be nimble, diversify as much as possible, and implement creative strategies for generating additional revenue in the years ahead.

EXAMPLES OF CREATIVE STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING FARM AND FISHERY PROFITABILITY

| Strategy | Connection to Profitability |
|---|---|
| ADOPT CLIMATE-SMART PRACTICES | A tremendous amount of funding for climate-smart food production—creating water and energy efficiencies, adopting renewable energy, implementing carbon farming practices—is available from sources such as cap-and-trade money administered through California Climate Investments , as well as numerous other public and private funds. Leveraging these dollars and adopting climate-smart practices can increase profitability for farmers and fishermen. |
| INVEST IN INDOOR PRODUCTION (HYDROPONICS AND AQUAPONICS) | Given the issues related to water stress in California, indoor crop production provides a viable alternative to traditional farming. Hydroponic agriculture can lead to yields that are much higher than traditional farming, using less water and occupying less space. ³⁶ Aquaponics systems create natural ecosystems that recycle water continuously, using significantly less water versus traditional farming. |
| INVEST IN AQUACULTURE | Aquaculture—cultivating and harvesting seafood in controlled aquatic environments in systems on land or in a body of water—is another alternative that may require relatively little land, water, and other resources. |
| IDENTIFY NICHE MARKETS | Niche marketing is particularly well suited to smaller, management-intensive farming operations. It focuses on supplying relatively small quantities of unique products, allowing farmers to respond to the unique preferences and individual needs of specific customers. Niche marketing also focuses on value rather than cost, thus avoiding head-to-head competition with mass marketers. Many San Diego producers are already engaged in growing and marketing niche products, including coffee, passionfruit, dragon fruit , sprouts, and other rare fruits. Niche products often command a higher price per unit for producers. |
| ADOPT COMMUNITY SUPPORTED MODELS | With Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), members pay farmers before the growing season begins, thus providing debt-free, working capital for the farm as well as a guaranteed market. In turn, farmers provide members with regular produce representing a share of the harvest throughout the growing season. Similar benefits occur with Community Supported Fisheries (CSF). Community supported models can provide economic security and increase the connection between producers and consumers. In multi-producer models, cooperation can lead to greater efficiencies and cost-sharing among participating producers. |
| EXPAND AGRITOURISM | Agritourism—U-pick, farm stands, farm stays, tastings, tours, weddings, classes, corn mazes, pumpkin patches—is one way to drive more support and dollars to local producers. Research from the University of California has found that many agritourism operations in California “are maturing into profitable enterprises with significant revenue and year-round employees.” ³⁷ Agritourism offers unique experiences that can increase connectivity between consumers and producers, and provide an additional revenue stream for farms. |

This table contains only a selection of examples. It is not intended to be a comprehensive list.

SPOTLIGHT

California Seaweed Company

AS TOLD BY BRANT CHLEBOWSKI, PRESIDENT

Despite having over twelve thousand miles of coastline, 99% of all seaweed consumed in the United States is imported. For Brant Chlebowski, founder of [California Seaweed Company](#), this travesty has become an opportunity. “Health-conscious consumers are seeking out seaweed as a vitamin-rich, protein-packed, plant-based snack and ingredient, and chefs love seaweed for its crisp flavor and superfood properties,” says Brant. “We want to bring locally grown, sustainable, native seaweeds to the food and beverage market from local, West Coast farmers.”

Launching a new commercial seaweed farm from scratch would have been expensive and time consuming, so Brant came up with another solution. “We started with a public-private approach, leveraging the great marine science research being conducted at Scripps Institution of Oceanography to experimentally cultivate local species, which we then licensed to test in markets in San Diego. Our goal is for local consumers to have access to the best seaweed that is sustainability produced.”

Innovative problem solving is fundamental at California Seaweed Company, where over the next decade the team aims to create packaging and processing technology that

can be licensed by regional seaweed farmers to capture more value for their crops. “Now the biggest challenge is identifying the next technological development that can extend the safe transport time of seaweed to allow for longer use,” Brant explained, adding that they have already launched an easy-to-use portal for local farmers to sell their ever-growing lineup of native seaweed varieties to a wider market. “As a start-up, we face the constant task of supporting our mission while supporting the people we work with—producers, chefs, and the public. San Diego is an exciting place with great food culture, a socially and environmentally aware public and world-class chefs.”

Beyond the nutritional value of seaweed, its production is sustainable and low impact. Some studies have even shown that seaweed farms can reduce ocean acidification and neutralize carbon emissions. The sheer potential of seaweed as a food source and a carbon negative form of aquaculture is what motivates Brant to continue to develop technologies he hopes will one day support seaweed farming efforts around the country. "It is a pleasure to learn and connect with local food producers through my work," said Brant. "The health of the global ocean, the prosperity of my local community, and the desire to create a more sustainable future for the following generation is what drives me forward."

Strategies

04

INCREASE COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES ACROSS THE FOOD SYSTEM

Community wealth building models, including cooperatives, land trusts, and employee owned businesses, are fairly limited in San Diego County. These models provide an important strategy for increasing the viability of local farmers, fishermen, food business owners, and workers by building collaborative, inclusive, and locally controlled economies. Community wealth building has the capacity to directly address pressing social issues by building power and generating opportunities for the most vulnerable members of society.

See the Food Vision 2030 special report, [Exploring Community Wealth Building in San Diego County's Food System](#), for a full exploration of challenges, opportunities, and examples in San Diego County.

EXAMPLES OF COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING MODELS IN THE FOOD SYSTEM

| Model | Description |
|---|--|
| COOPERATIVES | <p>Cooperatives are owned by workers, consumers, or producers who believe in the core values of a business and are collectively invested in its success. Cooperative ownership ensures that risks and rewards are shared.</p> <p>Existing and emerging examples in San Diego County include Ocean Beach People’s Organic Food Market, Suncoast Market Co-op, FruitCraft, Foodshed, and Pixca Farms.</p> |
| COMMUNITY LAND TRUSTS | <p>Community land trusts are designed to ensure community stewardship of land and can take many forms. Agricultural land trusts in particular provide small and midsize farms the opportunity to build equity through land ownership.</p> <p>While San Diego County does have a community land trust focused on affordable housing, there are no agricultural land trusts in the region. National examples include Northeast Farmers of Color Land Trust, Black Family Land Trust, and Vermont Land Trust.</p> |
| EMPLOYEE STOCK OWNERSHIP MODELS | <p>Employee stock ownership models are for-profit entities where employees own part or all of the businesses for which they work. Companies with employee ownership often see greater productivity, higher profitability, and increased revenue.</p> <p>San Diego County’s most prominent example is Modern Times Beer. National examples include King Arthur Baking Co., Publix Supermarkets, Winco Supermarkets, Clif Bar, and Bob’s Red Mill.</p> |
| EQUITABLE FOOD ORIENTED DEVELOPMENTS (EFOD) | <p>Equitable-food oriented developments (EFOD) are a relatively new strategy that uses food and agriculture to create economic opportunities and healthy neighborhoods for historically marginalized communities. The key feature of EFODs is that they are built out of resident-driven enterprises.</p> <p>Project New Village and the development of their Good Food District is the primary example of an EFOD in San Diego County. National examples include Mandela Partners, Planting Justice, Community Services Unlimited, and the Cooperative Community of New West Jackson.</p> |

This table contains only a selection of examples. It is not intended to be a comprehensive list.

Community wealth building models hold significant promise; however, there is no silver bullet for small business survival. A comprehensive support system is necessary for creating an environment where community wealth building models can thrive. This system must include the business services, technical assistance, and financing programs listed in Strategy 1, as well as policy changes.

Moving from Viability to Local, Sustainable, and Equitable Food Value Chains

Securing the long-term foundation for agricultural and seafood production (Objective 1) and investing in the viability of producers (Objective 2) still leaves the challenge of connecting the dots across our supply chain. The next objective focuses on building local, sustainable, and equitable food value chains that enable small farms, fisheries, and food businesses to thrive.