



Land Use & Natural Resources Committee

Meeting Date: March 7, 2024

Agenda Item No. 3

Coordinated Rural Opportunities Plan and Board Workshop Set-up

Information

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Attachments: No

Approved by: Clint Holtzen

Referring Committee: Not Applicable

Issue:

SACOG is wrapping up work on the Coordinated Rural Opportunities Plan (CROP), a Department of Conservation funded effort to highlight promising strategies and infrastructure needs to support the regional agricultural economy. In this presentation, the committee will hear from partner Valley Vision around CROP framing and themes, while Jim Durst of Durst Organic Growers will discuss the Yolo Food Hub as a real-life example of food system infrastructure. The item will also help frame the board's March workshop in Woodland.

Recommendation:

None, this item is for information and discussion purposes.

Background/Analysis:

Agriculture has deep roots in our region's history and future, as we have some of the most productive farmland and expert knowhow in the world. In our region, agriculture is a more than \$2.5 billion industry (with the full food system contributing over \$12 billion a year to the regional economy), and has been called out as a key economic cluster both in the region's [Prosperity Strategy](#) as well as more recent work conducted under the statewide [California Jobs First initiative](#).

Despite the central role food and agriculture plays in the region, the food system continues to face challenges ranging from market (e.g., changing commodity prices, lack of market channels) to environmental (e.g., drought, flood, loss of agricultural land). The [Coordinated Rural Opportunities Plan](#) (or "CROP") is creating a regional synthesis of the challenges affecting agriculture as well as highlighting needed infrastructure investments, policy approaches, and best practice models to support this important part of the regional economy. The work draws on local planning and agricultural expertise throughout the region as well as the decade-old Rural Urban Connections Strategy program at SACOG. CROP presents an opportunity to take a regional view of the economic and infrastructure (land, transportation, water, broadband) investment challenges and solutions that will affect agriculture over the coming decades.

Discussion/Analysis:

The region's agricultural industry has grown from \$1.6 billion to \$2.5 billion over the last decade, underscoring the importance of agriculture to both the rural and regional economy. While the trend has been of increasing value, the sector has experienced significant variability over that same timeframe. For example, the regional agricultural output in 2022 (last year of available data) was down \$200 million over the year prior, with declining walnut prices and limited water availability being two driving factors. During the same year, Sacramento County experienced the inverse with its highest ever agricultural output value in 2022. Compared to some other areas, agriculture in Sacramento County relies more on groundwater, and so was less affected by surface water limitations. Further, the county has a different set of primary crops, such as dairy, which had higher prices in the most recent data.

The CROP hones in on food system infrastructure as a means to maximize agricultural value and stabilize the sector against large fluctuations. Of course some factors (such as global commodity prices) will be outside of the region's ability to control, but enhanced food system infrastructure will help diversify market channels, provide a more reliable source of inputs, preserve valuable land, and serve as connective network infrastructure.

CROP has defined food system infrastructure as the following:

CROP has defined agriculture infrastructure as a physical investment that does one or more of the following:



The CROP effort delves into food system infrastructure needs in four key areas:

- Water
- Land use and housing
- Transportation and broadband
- Food system and governance

At the March committee meeting, staff will be joined by partner Valley Vision and Jim Durst of Durst Organic Growers to talk through the Yolo Food Hub as an example of food system infrastructure benefits highlighted in the CROP effort. The [new facility](#), located in Esparto, builds off early RUCS work on the need for aggregating and processing infrastructure for locally grown foods. The Yolo Food Hub will expand food production and distribution channels for local food while also increasing employment and job training opportunities in the food system. The Yolo County Board of Supervisors' \$2 million investment for site acquisition and building improvements was a catalyst in making the project viable.

The committee presentation also helps setup the second annual Race, Equity and Inclusion Tour before the board meeting on March 21, in Woodland. Attendees of the tour will learn about how this ag community is working to enhance the connection between its urban and rural roots to provide housing, economic opportunities, and food to community members. Tour highlights include a behind the scenes look at AgStart, a nonprofit food and ag incubator; Yolano Donnelly public housing and expansion project just east of downtown Woodland; and the Center of Land Based Learning will be sharing more about their Farm to Business Academy Incubator and Mobile Food Hub programs.

Fiscal Impact/Grant Information:

CROP is funded by the Department of Conservation's Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation (SALC) program.