

**AGRICULTURAL VISION AND
ECONOMIC INNOVATION FOR SUISUN VALLEY**

**SUBMITTED TO:
SOLANO COUNTY AGRICULTURAL DEPARTMENT
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Six miles long and two miles wide, Suisun Valley is a relatively small but fertile agricultural region in California's Solano County, less than one hour from San Francisco and Sacramento. In 1982, the federal government classified it as an American Viticulture Area (AVA), the second such classification in the nation and just a year after the Napa Valley AVA. Officially part of the North Coast Appellation, Suisun Valley is recognized for its quality wine grapes, as well as its fruits, vegetables, nuts, legumes and flowers. Agriculture in Suisun Valley produces nearly \$20 million in sales annually.

Despite its proximity to the world-famous Napa Valley, Suisun Valley is comparatively undiscovered, even to residents in nearby cities. The area's wines, farm-fresh produce and stunning vineyards and orchards fail to receive the recognition they deserve. Farmers struggle to compete with California's better-known growing regions, as well as with global and domestic markets. Further, urban encroachment is a concern. As a result, farmers in Suisun Valley face increasing pressures and an uncertain future.

Recognizing these challenges to Suisun Valley's agricultural industry, the County of Solano (the County) with financial support of the Suisun Valley Fund (the Fund), a joint venture of the City of Fairfield and Solano Irrigation District (SID), hired American Farmland Trust (AFT) to help the farm community articulate a vision of agriculture and identify ways to achieve that vision. Toward that end, AFT facilitated a nine-month long, farmer-driven public input process, including individual meetings and two listening sessions; researched and wrote 10 case studies based on successful models from around the country; and developed a strategic outline for implementing recommendations on how to sustain and enhance agriculture in the Suisun Valley. This work will contribute to the University of California, Davis (UCD), project, *Solano County Agricultural Futures: An Economic Focus*, which is assessing the future of agriculture for the entire county. It is hoped that both the AFT and UCD reports will become integral to the development of a General Plan Update for Solano County now in progress.

During the listening sessions, farmers were asked to share their "vision for the future of farming in the Suisun Valley." From their responses, AFT drafted the following vision statement:

Suisun Valley is a unique farming region that supports profitable family farms and quality of life for all its residents. It is a destination for tourists seeking world class wine, identifiable Suisun Valley farm products and a beautiful agricultural landscape with no fallow land. The SV appellation is so famous that it creates new markets and increases demand for Suisun Valley wine and other farm products outside of the region.

AFT used this common vision, farmers' concerns and recommendations, and the successful projects highlighted in the case studies to form a strategic outline for agricultural economic development in Suisun Valley and the greater Solano County.

The four major steps of the strategic outline include:

1. Reach consensus on a common vision for agriculture in Suisun Valley.
2. Increase political will and infrastructure to support agricultural economic development.
3. Write an Agricultural Development Plan to increase the profitability of Suisun Valley farms.
4. Create an Agricultural Development Program to implement the plan.

The strategic outline lays the groundwork for the County to develop and implement a plan that will support its farmers and ensure the future of Suisun Valley agriculture.

INTRODUCTION

SITUATION

Suisun Valley is a relatively small but fertile and historic agricultural district in California's Solano County. Six miles long and two miles wide, with an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 acres, it is nestled between two coastal mountain ranges, the Vaca Mountains on the east and the Mt. George Range on the west. Geologically, the valley is an alluvial fan that drains from highlands in the north to Suisun Marsh in the south.

The federal government classified Suisun Valley as an American Viticulture Area (AVA) in 1982, the second such classification in the nation and just a year after the famous Napa Valley AVA to the west. Like Napa Valley, Suisun Valley is officially recognized as part of the North Coast Appellation, which also includes Sonoma, Marin, Lake and Mendocino counties, and is renowned for ultra premium wines.

Agriculture in Suisun Valley produces nearly \$20 million in sales annually. In addition to wine grapes, the area also is recognized for its farm-fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as nuts, legumes and flowers. This production takes place on rich, fertile soils that consist of Brentwood clay loam, Sycamore silty clay loam, San Ysidro sandy loam and Rincon clay loam. The productive soil, mild climate and good water quality and availability make Suisun Valley a unique and important agricultural area.

Along Suisun Valley's southern and eastern edges is the growing City of Fairfield. Famous for being home to the Jelly Belly world headquarters, Fairfield also claims an Anheuser-Busch brewery, Travis Air Force Base and a current population of more than 106,000.¹ The valley is easily accessible to San Francisco and Sacramento, both less than an hour away via Interstate 80. This proximity to urban populations and infrastructure has the potential to create niche and high value market opportunities. At the same time, however, farmers express frustration about rural residential development pressures and high land prices from land speculation. Competition from global and domestic markets, including better known growing regions nearby, also has farmers concerned about the future viability of agriculture in Suisun Valley.

Agriculture in Suisun Valley contributes more than money to the local economy; the vineyards, orchards and farms are a fundamental part of the larger community's heritage and character. Some land has been farmed by the same family for generations, and the scenic vistas created by the vineyards and orchards add to the quality of life and bring tourists from nearby cities.

For many years, land use controls have restricted urban expansion in Suisun Valley. In an agreement executed in 1974 (and expiring at the end of 2010), the neighboring City of Fairfield and Solano Irrigation District (SID) decided not to provide potable water to

¹ Association of Bay Area Governments, Estimate 2007

Suisun Valley. Further, Solano County’s “Orderly Growth Initiative,” which voters passed in 1984 as Proposition A and then in 1994 extended through the year 2010, generally prohibits conversion of unincorporated agricultural land (such as Suisun Valley) to other uses without a vote of the people. Finally, in 2003, Fairfield’s voters established an Urban Limit Line that prohibits City annexations in Suisun Valley through 2020.

While these land use controls have curbed urban expansion in the valley, none are permanent, and farmers in Suisun Valley face increasing pressures and an uncertain future. Recognizing this fact, in 2002, Fairfield and SID formed the Suisun Valley Fund (the Fund) and an associated Suisun Valley Fund Advisory Committee (SVFAC) with the mission to “preserve and enhance” Suisun Valley agriculture. The Fund receives \$100,000 per year from each of the two agencies for eight years, terminating at the end of 2010. SID holds and administers the Fund, and its Board of Directors has the final say in expenditures, subject to the agreement between the SID and Fairfield. In accordance with the agreement, SVFAC advises SID on how the money is to be spent. The Fund is a primary financial source for this study and many other Suisun Valley programs.

PROJECT GOALS

Recognizing these challenges to the agricultural industry, the County of Solano, with support from SVFAC and the Fund, hired AFT to help the farm community articulate a vision for agriculture and identify ways to move toward that vision. AFT, the only national nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting America’s farmland, has more than 25 years assisting in the development of programs and policies to keep land in active agricultural use.

The SVFAC and the County had three goals for this project:

1. Help the agricultural community articulate a common vision for agriculture in Suisun Valley;
2. Identify agricultural economic plans from throughout the country that would have application in both Suisun Valley and in other areas of Solano County;
3. Write an outline of a strategic plan for the future economic development of agriculture in the Suisun Valley and in Solano County.

PROCESS

AFT used a multi-pronged approach to understand the issues facing farmers in Suisun Valley. This included:

- Facilitating a farmer-driven public input process that included individual interviews and two listening sessions;
- Researching and writing 10 case studies based on successful models of innovative agricultural economic development from around the country; and
- Developing a strategic outline to implement recommendations on how to sustain and enhance agriculture in the Suisun Valley.

AFT's work will be integrated into the University of California, Davis (UCD), project, *Solano County Agricultural Futures: An Economic Focus*. This larger study assesses the future of agriculture for all of Solano County and includes case studies of examples of agricultural economic development efforts specifically in California. It is hoped that both the AFT and UCD reports will become integral to the development of a General Plan Update for Solano County now in progress.

The Project Oversight Committee (POC) and the Agricultural Advisory Team (AAT) provided guidance and direction for the AFT project through monthly meetings. These groups included members from the SVFAC, Solano County Agricultural Advisory Committee, University of California, Solano County Farm and Home Advisors/University of California Cooperative Extension (Solano County Cooperative Extension), as well as other leaders in the Solano County agricultural community and County staff. For background information, AFT also reviewed a 1998 report, *Suisun Valley and the Future*, prepared by the Solano County Cooperative Extension and UCD, which presented the findings of focus group interviews with farmers, residents, business leaders and county officials.

AFT received direct input from the farming community through individual interviews and two listening sessions. Based on farmers' recommendations during these meetings, AFT formulated a vision statement for agriculture in Suisun Valley, assessed farmers' concerns for the future of local agriculture, and researched 15 models that could have beneficial application in Suisun Valley and Solano County. These models were presented to the POC and AAT in December 2006 to identify 10 case studies that may be economically sustainable and appropriate for adaptation to Suisun Valley. The results of this selection are the basis for the 10 case studies presented in this report.

Finally, AFT developed an outline to form a strategic plan for agricultural economic development and conservation in Suisun Valley and Solano County based on an assessment of farmers' visions and concerns that came out of the listening sessions and the successful programs highlighted in the case studies.

FARMERS' VISIONS, CONCERNS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUISUN VALLEY AGRICULTURE

AFT considered the involvement of the agricultural community of utmost importance to this report. Most of the input from farmers was gathered during the two listening sessions. In addition, AFT conducted individual interviews with farmers who could not attend these sessions.

The listening sessions were held on two consecutive evenings at the Rockville Inn in Suisun Valley. Valley farmers Bob Hansen and Ron Lanza opened the October 17th and October 18th meetings, respectively. They provided attendees with an overview of the project and process, explaining the goals of the listening sessions and how they would tie into the larger countywide process to sustain agriculture in Solano County. More than 30 people participated. By a show of hands, the majority were active farmers with substantial ties to Suisun Valley agriculture.

The listening session process included three steps. Participants were asked to write down their vision for the future of the Suisun Valley and their primary and secondary concerns about challenges that get in the way of achieving this vision. They posted their concerns on the wall under broad general headings of: *County Regulations, Agricultural Economic Development, Cost of Doing Business* and *All Other Ideas*. These categories were based on recommendations made during the POC and AAT meetings and interviews with farmers.

After posting their visions and concerns, participants shared their recommendations of ways to address these concerns and advance their visions through an open discussion led by the facilitator. (Please refer to Appendix I for a summary of the listening sessions and Appendix II for complete listening session notes.)

VOICING A VISION

Most participants in the listening sessions envisioned a brighter future for family-held farms. As one farmer described it, “Family-held farms with the ability to make money by inner expansion—wine from grapes, pies from peaches....” In turn, another farmer offered, “future generations will be able to make a living farming...the increasing population and farming can co-exist.”

A few farmers did not have a positive vision for the future of agriculture in Suisun Valley. They felt that too many people had already purchased land with an eye toward development, resulting in many fallow parcels. They saw the valley becoming “largely small,” and farmed by some farmers as “landscape” while full-time farmers would have trouble holding onto their farms. One farmer said, land “will not be cultivated and eventually be converted to housing or industrial development.”

Still, most of the visions share many common elements, such as a change in the scale and scope of farming and the products grown and produced in the valley. They see small

farms offering “an insight into California farming” with “more emphasis on Suisun Valley as its own niche.” Farmers hope for “Agri-tourism like Napa Valley” with a mixture of “wineries, eateries, art, fruit stands, bed and breakfasts.” The Valley would become “a destination where the family can have a great time and experience.” New marketing tools and practices would set aside Suisun Valley produce and wines as their own entity, creating “a farming region distinctive and unique in our region, California, and perhaps the U.S.” with “thousands of Bay Area residents flocking to Suisun Valley each weekend to buy direct, and branded Suisun Valley products in every independent grocery store in the Bay Area.” Others felt the Suisun Valley AVA could “become a high-end, boutique version of Sonoma or Napa” and then the “brand [would] spill over to ALL the ag products.”

Most farmers felt that farms would be “well-maintained” because they would be profitable, and therefore preserving “large open space.” Suisun Valley would have “sustainable high-margin agriculture,” with “no fallow land.”

Based on farmers’ visions for the future of agriculture in Suisun Valley, AFT drafted the following vision statement as a starting point:

Suisun Valley is a unique farming region that supports profitable family farms and quality of life for all its residents. It is a destination for tourists seeking world class wine, identifiable Suisun Valley farm products and a beautiful agricultural landscape with no fallow land. The SV appellation is so famous that it creates new markets and increases demand for Suisun Valley wine and other farm products outside of the region.

MAJOR ISSUES

AFT took what farmers said during interviews and listening sessions and determined that in terms of agricultural development, their concerns fell under two major issue areas:

1. Lack of coordinated agricultural economic development
2. Prohibitive regulatory environment

Farmers also expressed concern about urban encroachment, land speculation and the pressure of high land prices. While these are very important issues as well, AFT did not develop recommendations for them because of the specific scope of this project. However, given AFT’s vast experience in this area, since these issues appear to be of great importance to the farm community, we would be delighted to work with the County and the SVAC to investigate them further at a future date.

The two major issues that AFT identified encompass many specific challenges that farmers face in Suisun Valley. Below is a summary of the concerns farmers expressed about these challenges and their recommendations for ways to enhance agriculture, which were insightful, and most importantly, are achievable with public support.

LACK OF COORDINATED AGRICULTURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Concerns

Without a strong marketing and branding program to promote their products and wine, many Suisun Valley farmers say they are being left behind by global markets and the successful agricultural regions of Sonoma and Napa valleys.

Farmers are concerned because they do not believe the County is helping develop market opportunities especially in San Francisco and Sacramento metropolitan areas. One farmer said, “With no place to sell the product, no way to process, there is no way to make a profit.” Many farmers believe that people from these cities are potential tourists who would visit Suisun Valley farms, bed and breakfasts, and art shops; however, farmers feel that city residents remain unaware that Suisun Valley is a great tourist destination and is a source of many farm products.

“Declining agricultural profit” is forcing farmers to pull out or abandon their orchards and vineyards. Farmers are concerned because they don’t know what other crops to plant that will be more profitable. They are concerned about the risks of making whole farm changes and say the lack of support they receive to develop and implement new business plans is a barrier to remaining profitable.

Recommendations

Farmers believe their wine and products and the charm of their valley are equal to those of Sonoma and Napa. One participant pointed out that “Suisun Valley AVA is the second oldest in America, it’s a valuable asset.” Other farmers agreed that the County has not recognized what a valuable asset the AVA is and has failed to adequately support and promote it. They made many recommendations related to agricultural economic development. AFT organized these recommendations into three categories with specific initiatives that farmers suggested should be part of the County’s agricultural economic development program. The three categories include:

- *Agri-tourism*
- *Marketing and branding*
- *Infrastructure for value added*

Agri-Tourism – Put Suisun Valley on the Map

To put Suisun Valley “on the map” as a destination, farmers called for more agri-tourism funding to build retail niche markets for everything from wineries to bed and breakfasts to fruit stands—provided the regulatory climate changed to encourage such ventures. Many supported making connections to the arts as another way to draw people in and create more visibility for the valley’s offerings. Several added that a successful agri-tourism campaign would encourage visitors to seek branded Suisun Valley wines and

other products when they have returned home from the valley, which would expand local markets to San Francisco and ultimately beyond, like Napa Valley and its wine.

Reflecting the valley's proximity to Interstate 80 and the Bay Area, specific suggestions to develop Suisun Valley agri-tourism included:

- Develop more wineries to anchor agri-tourism and expand profitability for commercial growers.
- Make Suisun Valley a tourist destination using a family-oriented approach.
- Use agri-tourism efforts to link artists and art galleries with Suisun Valley heritage.
- Make better use of public relations person currently in place.
- Allow more than one Suisun Valley "Fun Family Farm Day" (a program initiated by the Suisun Valley Fund in 2006) a month to encourage families to explore the Valley and see where their food is produced.

Identify New Marketing and Branding Opportunities

Farmers emphasized the idea of using the Suisun Valley AVA as a valuable and "brandable" asset. Many expressed the need for a successful branding and marketing campaign to attract visitors from the Bay Area and elsewhere. They spoke about Napa Valley as a model for how to advance agri-tourism through promotion of a product, such as wine. Participants pointed out that Suisun Valley is positioned as Napa was in the 1950s and '60s and economic development should focus on the AVA. Some considered it crucial for the County government to be involved in developing incentives for a communal crush facility, in-county grape purchase and use, and joint tasting rooms to increase the potential for more wineries. Others felt agriculture should be recognized in the General Plan as a "driver of local economy."

Participants want to identify new high-margin market opportunities and figure out how to anticipate and be ready for changes while avoiding over supply and low prices. Matching up the capabilities of Suisun Valley with the marketplace could also require changes in approach, such as those needed to enter new markets that want fresh local produce. Farmers requested "new marketing tools" and practices to establish Suisun Valley's reputation in California and even in the United States as a distinctive and unique farming region. Solano County would support all agricultural endeavors, not just those that created open space; local markets would buy and sell local produce. Recommendations included:

- Launch a "Try Suisun" campaign.
- Create a name or brand for Suisun Valley.
- Have the County help finance the marketing of the Suisun Valley AVA.
- Gain County support to increase market opportunities through promotion of all agricultural products.
- Reestablish markets for agricultural production from the valley—replace commodity crops with specialty crops and emphasize direct marketing.
- Assist farmers with direct marketing efforts, such as fruit stand operations.

Infrastructure for Value Added

Agri-tourism, branding and marketing efforts only will be possible with the system-wide support of Suisun Valley and Solano County governments. Farmers cited the need to identify capital, fully explore options and diversify markets. Community support was seen as an important step toward Suisun Valley becoming the next Napa, or new Napa, along with farmers taking on more leadership roles and getting more involved with planning and problem solving. Getting more local supermarkets to promote Suisun Valley products and increasing collaboration among farmers, agricultural organizations and the county also were seen as necessary steps toward creating a strong infrastructure to support agriculture. Other specific recommendations were:

- Create a communal custom crush facility to produce artisan wine; ensure barrel storage and other needed support infrastructure are available for artisan wine.
- Create a permanent full-time position for a County agricultural economic development specialist—someone looking out for new opportunities who could assist farmers in transitioning to new ventures.
- Provide assistance in attracting the capital for the infrastructure needed to move large quantities of Suisun Valley products.
- Offer more educational programs, e.g., technical seminars on growing olives and other new crops, marketing and sales to support new ventures, and identifying mentors.

PROHIBITIVE REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

Concerns

Farmers mainly were concerned about declining profits and the way current regulations limit their ability to expand or make changes in their operation that would allow them to remain viable. They said the regulatory environment in Suisun Valley and Solano County is not supportive of agriculture and the types of value-added infrastructure they believe is necessary to expand their businesses. Many farmers shared the opinion that there are “constrictive regulations dealing with all facets of agriculture.”

Farmers were frustrated by the lack of flexibility in regulations and by regulations that were not friendly to agriculture of the type that might be successful in Suisun Valley. One farmer cited the example of a regulation that punished small farms by not allowing smaller vineyards to offer wine tastings because they used a community crush facility rather than their own. Another concern was the “lack of current enterprise districts to allow the grower base to be profitable. We have lost our commercial customers (canneries/processors)...” Another added, “Present county regulations do not support value-added activities on agricultural lands, such as processing, agricultural tourism, farm stays, frequent special events.”

Prior to an unsuccessful County vote in November 2006 on Measure J, which would have extended the Orderly Growth Initiative from 2010 through 2036, farmers were concerned that its approval would be a deterrent to the long-term economic viability of farming.

Farmers shared the opinion that “zoning restrictions” were working against them, while another asked, “Will the County allow the changes we may need to survive?”

Recommendations

Create a Farmer Friendly Regulatory Environment

Discussions focused on the need for flexibility, for bringing regulations into harmony with those in surrounding counties and with active land use and agricultural practices in Suisun Valley. Acknowledging the fear of development that proposed infrastructure improvements can generate, participants suggested meeting with the community so people could work together to resolve traffic and agricultural infrastructure challenges. Other specific ideas include:

- Allow more flexibility in regulatory interpretation of local laws for value added and agri-tourism.
- Have County regulator adopt an attitude of support for changes that update regulations to meet current needs of farmers wanting to expand value added; lower costs of permitting to be less prohibitive.
- Encourage the County to clarify the rules, make timely decisions and create certainty with respect to regulations, so that growers would know whether or not to invest in such ventures or in direct marketing facilities.
- Elect new Supervisors who would revisit the regulations to overcome identified hurdles.
- Educate voters on the real costs of open space protection; help them understand farmers’ needs—voters need to support sustainable agriculture.
- Create an agricultural enterprise district² to give broader parameters and allow more flexibility to try new things rather than the agricultural use permit, which limits activities.

Help Suisun Valley Farmers Stay Competitive with Local and Global Markets

Comparisons frequently were made to Sonoma and Napa valleys, regions known world wide for their wine and agri-tourism. Farmers noted that without regulations being updated it would be impossible for Suisun Valley to build itself as a tourist destination or to develop sought after *Suisun Valley* products. A number of farmers said they hope for a future when, through changes in county regulations, they are able to pursue the best use of their farm or ranch land to keep their business profitable, for example, by developing value-added enterprises such as selling “wine from [Suisun Valley] grapes and pies from [Suisun Valley] peaches. Specific recommendations were:

² Agricultural enterprise areas, or agricultural district programs, allow farmers to form special areas where commercial agriculture is encouraged and protected. Incentives and regulatory relief vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Enrollment is always voluntary.

- Level the regulatory playing field; allow SV farmers to do what farmers in neighboring counties can do.
- Have a local crush facility for artisan wines without having personal winery—allow on-farm sales.
- Increase u-pick operations to reduce harvest costs (make insurance affordable).
- Lower permitting costs so Suisun can stay competitive.
- Need to go retail—bed and breakfasts, fruit stands, more family oriented ... but we have to get the regulations in place/relaxed so we can do these kinds of things.

CONCLUSION

Suisun Valley farmers are facing difficult challenges, but most share a vision of a high-margin, profitable agriculture where farms are well maintained, good for the environment, preserve open space and there is no fallow land. They see the valley as a great destination for families and envision a future where commercial agriculture is supported by agri-tourism and people come from the Bay Area and beyond to visit local farms, farm stands and wineries, stay at bed and breakfasts, and support the arts. They want the Suisun Valley AVA to become a “high-end” version of Sonoma or Napa, and for consumers’ desire for the Suisun Valley “brand” to spill over to ALL Suisun Valley products. Many farmers also recognize that the vision, passion, leadership and action must come from within their own ranks.

Based on the visions, concerns and recommendations shared by farmers at interviews and the listening sessions, AFT researched model agricultural economic development programs from across the country. The POC and AAT encouraged AFT to focus on 10 agricultural economic development programs that promoted:

- Agri-Tourism
- Marketing and Branding
- Value Adding
- Economic Incentives

While all of the concerns raised by farmers during interviews and the listening sessions require attention and solution, the POC and AAT considered the lack of coordinated agricultural economic development as where insight from case studies would be of most value. The final chapter includes an outline for a strategic plan to plot a course of action to address the major issues. The strategic outline lays the groundwork for the County to develop and implement a plan that will support its farmers and Suisun Valley agriculture. As one participant concluded, “We need to find the next step, then go. Just go!” The strategic outline provides that next step.

CASE STUDIES: AGRICULTURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

AFT researched programs from across the country that have successfully addressed issues similar to those raised by Suisun Valley farmers. Out of the 15 national models of agricultural economic development programs that AFT presented to stakeholders in a meeting on December 13, 2006, the POC and AAT chose 10 that they believed could provide the most valuable insights for Suisun Valley.

AFT's case studies provide examples of ways other communities have addressed challenges similar to the ones expressed by Suisun Valley farmers. It is hoped lessons learned from these can be used as the foundation of a blueprint for action in Suisun Valley. For example, a strategic partnership in Madison County, North Carolina, brought together the arts and agriculture to promote agri-tourism. The Tourism Plan of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, is premised on the importance of agriculture and integrated into its County Comprehensive Plan. Marketing campaigns in special places such as New York's Catskill region, the area around Washington's Puget Sound, and Massachusetts' Pioneer Valley have branded local agriculture and increased sales by promoting values such as conservation, quality and freshness, and support of local farms and businesses. These efforts have all combined local government involvement with community support to be successful.

Mentoring programs in Kentucky and the Delmarva Peninsula help farmers diversify their operations, while wineries in Washington, Pennsylvania and Connecticut have programs to add value to selling their wines. The Massachusetts Farm Viability Enhancement program provides assistance with business planning followed up with grants. In Florida, Hillsborough County's promotion and expansion of agricultural business development is predicated upon a county led initiative to streamline the regulatory environment and make it more farmer-friendly.

AGRI-TOURISM

Farmers voiced the "need to market [Suisun Valley] as a destination." Many felt Suisun Valley's location along Interstate 80 and its close proximity to major population centers in the Bay Area and Sacramento are ideally suited for targeting agri-tourism as an agricultural economic development program.

A successful agri-tourism program in Madison County, North Carolina, promotes agriculture and the arts, while a program in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, is an integral part of Lancaster County's Strategic Tourist Development Plan.

North Carolina – Madison County

In 2003, leaders in Madison County, North Carolina, identified key local stakeholders and formed a strategic partnership to develop a sustainable cultural/heritage, agri-tourism program. This group became known as the Madison County Partnership and consists of local government and community leaders, farmers and craftspeople, HandMade in

America, the Madison County Arts Council, the Madison County Cooperative Extension Service, Mars Hill College, and the Hot Springs Health Program.

Madison County is located in the Appalachian Mountains of western North Carolina, about 30 miles north of Asheville. The county is made up of three small towns with approximately 970 farms. The area's Cherokee and Scotch-Irish heritage of crafts complements its agricultural industries. In the face of the declining tobacco market and uncertain job prospects, agri-tourism seemed a natural fit to diversify the local economy by promoting the county's arts and agriculture.

The Partnership's goals, adopted in 2003, are to help local farms identify alternative ways to generate income, create community wealth and build capacity in marketing and product development within the community. The Partnership was led by the nonprofit organization HandMade in America, which encouraged partnerships, creating a climate that recognizes and supports entrepreneurship, and a community development strategy based on existing assets: agriculture and the arts. The implementation phase of its goals incorporates building leadership capacity, tourism product development and marketing.

Initial funding for the engagement phase of the program came through a three-year grant (2003–2006) from the Duke Endowment Program for the Rural Carolinas to fund operations and marketing. The grant was \$75,000 per year. The Partnership held community meetings and led visioning exercises that addressed questions such as, "What do you want Madison County to look like in 10 years?" Funding for the program supported a part-time coordinator and provided seed money for various projects.

Through surveys conducted in 2003, the Partnership gathered information from more than 200 farmers about local farm production and farm needs. It also received surveys from almost 200 local artists and craftspeople. From these responses, a program intern created an inventory of farmers and artists interested in promotion or joint marketing activity or events. Results were used to develop plans for farm tours, printed directories of small businesses usually overlooked, quarterly (seasonal) guides to local products, annual community festivals, a Web site promoting both farmers and artists, and marketing workshops. The Partnership formulated objectives for the project to increase the income of individual farms and crafts enterprises by \$500 per year and to build the capacity of Madison County leadership to allow for growth.

The Partnership also serves as an advocate for farmers and craftspeople facing county regulatory issues. Many studios in Madison County are on farms zoned for Agricultural/Residential, which does not allow for retail. The Partnership worked with the County Manager and Zoning Board to help some farms receive exemption from this rule. The Partnership also worked with the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Agri-tourism Office to help address the expense of liability insurance, which is a burden for small businesses. While not a replacement for insurance, the North Carolina Department of Agriculture approved to pass a law to "Limit Liability for Activities Arising from Agri-tourism Activities." Members of the Department of Agriculture's Agri-tourism Networking Association are given free signs

printed with text and legal requirements found in the law passed by the General Assembly in 2006.

To meet its goals, the Madison County Partnership focuses on three strategies: building leadership capacity, tourism product development, and providing education and collective marketing strategies. The Partnership core planning team has met monthly since 2003. The stakeholders and each community define their own goals and needs while the organization works on a plan to implement those goals over the next 20 years, creating long-term solutions for these communities to become financially self-sufficient. The Partnership helps nurture small and micro-businesses by providing appropriate and innovative marketing assistance.

Within three years of the program's inception, all participants in the project had increased their income by more than \$500. Tourism statistics also reflect the county's success: in 2005, Madison County had the highest increase in North Carolina in domestic traveler expenditures, with a 16.6 percent increase over 2004. By comparison, direct domestic traveler spending in North Carolina increased 7.3 percent in 2005. Other parts of North Carolina are asking how they can build this positive momentum in their regions.³

For more information, contact Handmade in America, www.handmadeinamerica.org/ or www.madisonfarms.org/.

Pennsylvania – Lancaster County

In 2003, the Lancaster County Board of Commissioners and Lancaster County Planning Commission appointed a 12-person Tourism Task Force to address tourism related opportunities and challenges. In 18 months, the Tourism Task Force developed the Strategic Tourism Development Plan, which was adopted as part of the Lancaster County Comprehensive Plan in 2005. The Tourism Plan was designed to help maintain the county's successful tourism industry by remaining competitive in the tourism arena and addressing changes occurring within and outside of the county. It is an example of agriculture taking center stage to promote the entire county, and not the other way around. It also demonstrates how agri-tourism has been integrated into the equivalent of California's General Plan.

One of the plan's guiding principles was to include the public in all of its planning efforts. Stakeholders were drawn into the planning process through numerous one-on-one interviews and group meetings. Focus groups and presentations to organizations with interest and involvement in tourism-related issues were conducted. Other guiding principles of the plan included sustainability (supporting the successful preservation efforts that Lancaster County have in place), using studies and research that already exist, and forming recommendations that were concise, straightforward and "doable." Research data from the public involvement phase were distilled into a listing of major strengths, weakness, threats and opportunities.

³ "How to Start a Sustainable Tourism Program," (Arlington, Va., The Conservation Fund, n.d.)

Five key strategic areas evolved from the planning process: Product Development, Infrastructure and Mobility, Marketing, Outreach and Public Involvement Strategy, and Organizational and Collaborative Strategy. In 2006, the Pennsylvania Dutch Convention and Visitors Bureau (PDCVB), in partnership with the Lancaster County Tourism Development Council, assumed responsibility for the implementation of the Lancaster County Strategic Tourism Development Plan. PDCVB has created a five-year product development plan as part of the Strategic Plan's marketing goals. The plan builds on Pennsylvania's five heritage themes, one of which is Food Ways. This specific effort is promoted as the PA Dutch FlavorFest, "an event so big it lasts all year," and includes events to celebrate locally produced crafts and food such as a master crafts tour, Culinary Trails and Signature Tours. The PDCVB Web site features events, market towns, foodie towns, recipes, learning vacations and *The Foodies Guide to Culinary Trails, Restaurants and Specialty Shops*. The Great Pennsylvania FlavorFest™, a three-day festival scheduled for Memorial Day weekend in 2008, will feature cooking and cook-offs celebrating all aspects of the Pennsylvania food industry.

Other activities of the Strategic Tourism Development Plan include engaging in niche marketing, educating and involving the community in tourism planning and promotion, creating a tourism development organization and partnerships, and supporting the creation of additional lodging in the city of Lancaster, including small hotels, bed and breakfast operations, and urban inns. The Strategic Plan, completed in June 2005, will identify potential sources of funding for specific recommendations and the plan in general.

Various results of the plan have been predicted for different scenarios according to the level of current tourism activity and projected future trends. Under the "moderate scenario," which assumes Lancaster's growth will exceed national growth by 50 percent, the plan is projected by 2009 to result in an additional \$630 million in total expenditures, \$144 million in annual earnings, and over 2,700 jobs in tourism-related industries in the county, and an additional \$438 million in state and local tax revenue.

For more information, see the Lancaster County Strategic Plan available online at www.co.lancaster.pa.us/planning/cwp/view.asp?a=619&Q=563755&PM=1 or the Pennsylvania Dutch Convention and Visitors Bureau Web site at http://www.padutchcountry.com/our_world/flavorfest.asp.

MARKETING AND BRANDING

During both listening sessions in Suisun Valley, attendees expressed the need to bring greater attention to the Valley by aggressively developing an identifiable Suisun Valley Brand. As one participant stated, "Suisun Valley AVA is the second oldest in America, it's a valuable asset. Napa [Valley] has become extremely aggressive at protecting its AVA, proving what a valuable asset this is, so we need to brand Suisun Valley wine... So start with the Suisun Valley wine, then it will be easier to market all the other Suisun Valley products." Another attendee added simply, "Try Suisun Valley wine—it gets back to branding."

Included here are successful branding campaigns: The Buy Pure Catskill campaign, which makes the connection between good local food and the pure water that flows to New York City; the county-driven “Puget Sound Fresh” branding for direct marketing; and the Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA) that uses the “Be a Local Hero” slogan to celebrate local farms and businesses, and has become a valued part of the community buying culture.

New York – Pure Catskills Buy Local Campaign

In 2002, the Watershed Agricultural Council (WAC) in New York state developed the Pure Catskills branding campaign to mobilize support for fresh farm products grown, raised and manufactured in the Catskill region. The WAC’s mission is to support the economic viability of agriculture and forestry through the protection of water quality and the promotion of land conservation in the New York City watershed region. Pure Catskills is an Economic Initiative of the WAC, which sponsors the program in collaboration with farmers and purveyors of fresh food across Delaware, Greene, Otsego, Schoharie, Sullivan and Ulster counties in New York state.

The Pure Catskills brand underscores the conservation value of an economy based upon the region’s natural resources. It is meant to bring to mind the purity of the water, silt-rich valleys, and grassy mountain slopes that sustain an agriculturally diverse landscape. It stands for the people who, for four and five generations, have demonstrated a love for the land through their stewardship.

The goal of Pure Catskills is to coordinate supplies of fresh produce grown by small, mostly independent farmers to a wide range of distributors, retailers and foodservice operators. Major chains including Whole Foods Market now look to growers in the Catskills for supplies of fresh produce. Though tourism is the driving force behind this and other buy local campaigns, growers receive the benefits of market exposure with increased sales and profit. The growers are also given opportunities to contribute to consumer education about the importance of agriculture and the farmers’ specific products.

Regional farms, markets, restaurants, stores and other businesses and organizations may join Pure Catskills by participating in membership standards, through which they agree to represent goods and services from the Catskill region and use the best conservation practices available. The majority of participants come to the program through WAC’s whole farm planning program so the farms involved have already met this requirement. In return, participants receive promotional support from the campaign through signage, advertising, media outreach and special events.

All participants will be listed in the *Pure Catskills Guide to Farm Fresh Products*. There is a minimum \$25 fee to join; farms and businesses may also increase their support and receive display ad space in the *Pure Catskills Guide*.

Pure Catskills events provide training and showcase local agriculture through workshops, dinners, festivals and farm tours. In 2006, the third annual Down on the Farm day featured free guided tours on various farms. A recent Cauliflower Festival had more than

2,000 participants. In 2004, to facilitate the development of the buy local campaign, WAC sponsored a Buy Local workshop for nearly 50 farmers, WAC staff and partners. These events provide an opportunity for the community to identify with the agrarian culture that is a crucial part of the region's identity and appeal.

Other economic initiatives of the WAC include farm-to-market projects that offer farmers a range of tools to support business viability, from business plan development and marketing workshops to efforts to improve buying and distribution networks.

Support for this project comes from Pure Catskills members, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Catskill Mountain Foundation, and New York City Department of Environmental Protection. Pure Catskills farms are located on farmland that protects clean drinking water for 9 million New Yorkers. These farms grow and harvest crops as part of a world-renowned innovative partnership focusing on healthy, working farmland and the water protection practices it takes to keep streams and reservoirs safe.

The Pure Catskills logo was adapted from a colorful early 20th-century crate label for cauliflower shipments from the Walton-Hamden Cauliflower Co-op, based in the northern Catskill region. "The girl in the red dress" graced the crates of this Catskill crop with the slogan "Pride of the Catskills." The new label was adapted in 2004 to emphasize the connection between good food from our region and the famously pure water that flows from the region to New York City taps.

During the first year of the Pure Catskills *Guide to Farm Fresh Products*, 10,000 copies were distributed throughout the six-county region. In 2005, 30,000 copies were distributed. The organization supports 143 agricultural businesses, of which 100 are fruit and vegetable producers in nine Catskill Mountain region counties. One hundred farmers signed on to be listed in the 2006 *Guide*.

For more information about Pure Catskills, visit www.nycwatershed.org/index_wachistory.html and www.buypurecatskills.com/.

Washington – Puget Sound Fresh

Over the past 30 years, groups of farmers and other concerned citizens in Washington's Puget Sound area have worked to limit development and galvanize community support for agriculture in this 12-county region. In 1995, the King County Agricultural Commission created Puget Sound Fresh to encourage consumers, wholesalers, retailers and restaurants to purchase locally grown agricultural products. That same year, the county provided \$3 million in bond issues for agricultural economic development initiatives. Some of those funds supported direct marketing efforts to sustain farming, such as start-up funds for three new Seattle farmers' markets and the Puget Sound Fresh label. The county also established a local Farm Link program that helps connect retiring farmers with entering farmers looking for land. In March 2002, the county passed overall management of the Puget Sound Fresh program, along with the Farm Link program, to Cascade Harvest Coalition, a nonprofit organization dedicated to local agriculture and partnering with local counties.

Cascade Harvest Coalition has supported preservation and revitalization of the food and farm system in Western Washington since 1999 when representatives from a number of diverse groups met to address the need for greater unity and a stronger voice within the agricultural community. It now owns the Puget Sound Fresh logo and is responsible for operating the program, though the county continues to be a major funder and partner.

The key goals of the Coalition's Agricultural Programs are to: (1) increase public awareness and appreciation of the values of local agriculture, (2) promote preservation and protection of agricultural lands, (3) enhance community food security and health by improving access to and consumption of locally produced food, and (4) provide a forum for improving the dialogue, collaboration and actions on issues affecting the region's farmers, agricultural resources and quality of life. Through forums, promotions, better communication, research, education and collaboration, Cascade Harvest Coalition's member organizations and individuals effectively address the threats to sustainable Western Washington agriculture.

Branding of products with the label "Puget Sound Fresh, good for all of us" has been a key component of this campaign. As part of the program, locally grown products are labeled with a Puget Sound Fresh sticker or banner, which indicates the product was grown, raised or harvested in one of the 12 counties that border Puget Sound. The program encourages area grocery stores and farmers' markets to promote local produce and farm products by using the Puget Sound Fresh logo. Currently, nearly 50 farmers' markets in the region sell Puget Sound Fresh products. The Seattle metropolitan counties of King, Snohomish, Pierce and Kitsap support this effort, and local retail grocery stores, including Puget Consumers Co-op, Larry's Markets, Metropolitan Market, Thriftway, Madison Market, Safeway, and Haggen/Top Foods feature Puget Sound Fresh. Marketing efforts include a Web site, farm and farmers' market guide, farm tours and cooking classes. In 2001, the three new farmers' markets, located within Seattle's city limits, grossed \$2 million.

For more information about Puget Sound Fresh, visit <http://dnr.metrokc.gov/wlr/farms> and www.cascadeharvest.org/.

Massachusetts – Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture (CISA)

CISA started in 1993 as a broad-based coalition of farmers, consumers, Cooperative Extension agents, agricultural support professionals, nonprofit staffers, and regional and state political leaders working toward a common goal: the preservation of farming in a developing region of college towns, bedroom communities, aging mill towns and small cities in the Connecticut River Valley of Western Massachusetts. CISA's founders wanted to ensure that local communities supported working farms that, in turn, provide open space, practice soil and water conservation, and produce bountiful, fresh, local food. According to the 2002 U.S. Census of Agriculture, CISA's campaign encompasses approximately 1,586 farms and more than 162,000 acres. Early CISA activities included supporting farmer networks and various volunteer groups working to address particular issues affecting agriculture, including land preservation, labor, marketing and more. In 1993, CISA received

a four-year, \$1 million dollar grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's Integrated Food and Farming Systems program, which helped support activities of these groups, a small part-time staff and initial marketing research.

CISA's working groups did research, held workshops, convened forums and gave small grants to farmers. A milk marketing cooperative of eight family farms grew out of the dairy group. Over time, however, CISA staff and volunteers agreed that a promotional campaign to encourage local consumers to support local farmers when they made purchases could help sustain strong, successful farm businesses and address the other challenges facing agriculture. With an additional \$250,000 grant from the Kellogg Foundation, CISA launched the *Be a Local Hero, Buy Locally Grown™* campaign in 1999.

Market research conducted before the launch of CISA's campaign revealed that local consumers understood the importance of supporting local farmers and the benefits this provided to their neighbors and to the local economy. They believed, however, that it was often inconvenient to buy locally grown products. CISA's campaign was designed, first, to make the *Be a Local Hero, Buy Locally Grown* message as visible as possible, in order to ensure that residents remembered the importance of buying locally grown when they made purchasing decisions. Second, the CISA campaign staff worked to bring locally grown products into as many markets as possible, and to use signage and labeling to make it easily identifiable, thus addressing the perception that buying local was inconvenient.

CISA's campaign has used radio and print advertising, events, an annual print and Web-based *Farm Products Guide*, bumper stickers and point-of-purchase materials to get the Local Hero message out. In addition, CISA provides technical assistance to farmers, retailers, restaurants and institutions that produce or purchase locally grown food. In 2006, CISA's Local Hero campaign included 143 farm members, 21 restaurants, 45 grocery stores and four institutions.

Evaluation has been an important tool for monitoring and improving CISA's work. Market research done in June 2006 indicates that 82 percent of consumers in CISA's core region are aware of the Local Hero brand. This consumer research, as well as reports from CISA's farm members, indicates that consumer buying behavior has also been positively affected by the campaign. What began as a program for farmers has extended to all local businesses. It is about entrepreneurship and celebrating the whole experience of where you live and making it a special place. The Local Hero campaign has become a valued part of the community's buying culture.

Today, CISA manages several additional programs that build markets for farmers and improve access to locally grown food for all residents. These include programs focused on farm sales to cafeterias, workplace CSA distributions, a Senior FarmShare program that provides a free share of the local harvest to low-income seniors, and activities that support varied farm-to-school efforts.

In addition, CISA has worked to diversify its funding base in order to build financial stability. CISA now receives about a third of its budget from local sources, including individual and business donations, corporate sponsorships, advertising and fees for services.

Foundation grants and state and federal support make up the rest of CISA's budget. In 2006, 120 volunteers contributed time to CISA's work.

For more information about CISA, visit www.buylocalfood.com/.

VALUE ADDING⁴

In envisioning a regulatory environment in Solano County that encourages new options, one farmer summarized the thoughts of many by stating such changes would "allow value-added ventures." Another farmer added that farmer friendly regulations would "Help farmers with direct marketing...."

The following case studies include a value-added home-based "microprocessor" program that addresses Kentucky's regulatory barriers, a farm mentoring program that assists farmers transitioning from commodity crops to direct marketing of their products, and an Adopt-a-Vine program that adds a personalized experience for promoting wineries and wine growing regions. This program could also be adapted to other crops in Suisun Valley.

Kentucky – Value-added Home-Based "Microprocessor" Project

In 2003, Kentucky farmers became frustrated with county health department regulations that prevented them from selling their homemade farm products at farmers' markets. The University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension and the University Horticulture Department contacted the Kentucky Department of Public Health to make them aware of this ongoing problem. Members of these departments gained the help of three legislators supportive of agriculture. Working with farmers, the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service, Kentucky Department of Public Health, Kentucky Department of Agriculture and Kentucky Farm Bureau, the legislators and individuals from Cooperative Extension wrote the law that became Kentucky House Bill 391. The bill allows for two levels of home-based food processing: home-based processing and home-based microprocessing.

Home-based processors must file an application with the Kentucky Cabinet for Health Services and are allowed to produce and sell lower-risk products, such as whole fruits and vegetables; mixed greens; dried herbs, nuts, fruits and vegetables; jams, jellies, preserves, fruit, butter, and sorghum; and breads, cakes, pies and cookies that contain a fruit, vegetable or nut grown by the processor. The farmer only can sell the products from the farm, farmers' market or from a Farm Bureau certified roadside stand. Farmers are not charged a fee to become a home-based processor.

To gain certification as a home-based "microprocessor," farmers must go through a certification workshop and pass two tests in order to sell other products such as salsa,

⁴ The United States Department of Agriculture, Rural Business Development defines value-added products as follows: A change in the physical state or form of the product (such as strawberries into jam, grapes into wine); The production of a product in a manner that enhances its value, as demonstrated through a business plan (such as organically produced products); The physical segregation of an agricultural commodity or product in a manner that results in the enhancement of the value of that commodity or product (such as an identity preserved marketing system).

barbecue sauce, pickled fruits and vegetables, and pressure canned vegetables. Certification costs \$50 and is good for three years. Like the home-based processor, a microprocessor must grow, harvest and process the product for sale. A standardized recipe for each food item must be approved by a process authority and costs \$5 per recipe. A separate application must be filed annually with the Kentucky Cabinet for Health Services, with a payment of \$50. Farmers may sell products beyond the farm, farmers' market or roadside stand, but to do so must have a permitted kitchen.

The program is primarily managed by a Food and Nutrition Specialist of the Cooperative Extension, who spends approximately one day a week coordinating the program, 60 percent of which is spent assisting farmers with developing their recipes and business and marketing plans. The specialist also is responsible for teaching four workshops per year for microprocessing certification. One person at the Kentucky Department of Public Health assists with workshops and product registration while another helps with approving labels.

The program is a source of economic development as it helps producers with cash flow issues. Producers can sell preserved and processed products during the times they don't have fresh products to sell.

Participants in Kentucky have seen great benefits. Since the program has begun, 270 recipes have been approved. Three hundred farmers are selling their products as home-based processors, while 300 others have taken the workshops for becoming certified home-based microprocessors. One home-based processor, a berry farmer who makes jams, jelly and bread that she sells at a local farmers' market, earned \$3,000 her first year of selling her homemade products. By her third year she earned \$35,000 and was able to quit her job to work full-time on her farm—her dream come true.

For more information about the Kentucky home-based processing program, visit www.ca.uky.edu/agc/micro/.

Delmarva Peninsula – Farmer Mentor Program to Access Direct Marketing⁵ Channels

In 2005, the Delaware Department of Agriculture Marketing Department hired a marketing consultant to mentor a group of farmers in developing ways to add value to their products, help them identify and overcome barriers they face, and empower them to sell through the direct market channels available in their region. The success of these farmer collaborations and marketing models will be used to reach out and mentor others beyond the project.

This project was designed to help 12 farmers who are growing fresh produce on the Delmarva Peninsula increase their farm revenue by selling value-added products through any direct marketing channels available. These farmers have been involved in a commodity marketing model for years and in some cases for generations. Farmers draw up a plan for their individual operation and meet one-on-one in mentoring sessions with program staff to review the progress to date, decide on action items to be completed by

⁵ The University of California Small Farm Center defines Direct Marketing as follows: Any marketing method whereby farmers sell their products directly to consumers. Examples include roadside stands, farm stands, U-pick operations, community supported agriculture or subscription farming, farmers' markets, etc.

the time of the next session, and identify and overcome barriers they face in selling value-added products through direct market channels.

Partial funding for the project came through a \$65,000 SARE Research and Education grant, with \$12,400 in matching non-federal funds.⁶ After the minimal success in recruiting farmer participants through the mailing of a brochure and follow-up calls, one-on-one farmer interviews proved the best means for gaining farmer involvement. Significant one-on-one contact is recommended to gain the trust needed for the farmer collaborators to commit to the process. Once that trust is built the farmer collaborators roll up their sleeves and get to work.

As of 2007, 10 of the 12 farmers have increased their profits by selling their fresh produce through direct marketing channels they had not been aware of or know how to access prior to joining this project. The other two farmers are in the initial phase of developing their value-added products. Two of the successful niche products include personal-sized watermelons and asparagus grown in an area where there had been none before. Though the farmers all sell fresh produce, the size of their farms vary from large to small. Farmers participating in this project have sold their fresh produce locally through farmers' markets, on-farm sales, CSAs (Community Supported Agriculture) and "back door" sales. Given the success of this project, particularly in assisting small farmers, it is likely that the Delaware Department of Agriculture will continue to support the project.

For more information on this SARE funded Delmarva program, visit www.sare.org/reporting/report_viewer.asp?pn=LNE05-221&ry=2005&rf=0.

Multi-Jurisdictional – Adopt-a-Vine Program

Agri-tourism has become a profitable way to promote individual wineries and entire winegrowing regions around the world. Adopt-a-Vine programs created by wineries are relatively simple and inexpensive to initiate and maintain, and yet work to create lasting loyalty with customers.

At Chateau Faire Le Pont Winery in Wenatchee, Washington, (www.fairelepont.net) participants in its adopt-a-vine program are invited to the winery four times a year. Activities during the visits include pruning, selection and tagging of their vines, racking and blending, crushing and bottling, and corking and labeling with a custom-made label. Membership is \$100 per person per year, and though the program costs as much to administer, customers of Faire Le Pont remain loyal and help market the brand.

⁶ Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) is a program of the USDA that functions through competitive grants conducted cooperatively by farmers, ranchers, researchers and agricultural professionals to advance farm and ranch systems that are profitable, environmentally sound and good for communities. The Western SARE program administers grants in several categories that help it achieve those aims. For more information, visit wsare.usu.edu/grants/.

Since its inception in 1998, the adopt-a-vine program at Blue Mountain Vineyards & Cellars in Pennsylvania (www.bluemountainwinery.com) has sold some 200 vines to 150 members, with a one-time charge of \$110 plus tax. Although members do not participate in winegrowing/winemaking processes, during their second through sixth years in the program they receive a private-labeled bottle of wine of the varietal type they have adopted. Each year, they are invited to a ceremony where new members are presented with plaques to place on their vines, followed by a reception.

The Taylor Brooke Winery in Woodstock, Connecticut (www.taylorbrookewinery.com), started its adopt-a-vine program four years ago as a way to increase cash flow. It now has more than 300 members participating in a three-year package, for a one-time fee of \$44.95 plus tax, that allows them to select a favored bottle of wine every year at the tasting room.

This concept of allowing consumers and tourists to become “members” and get involved in the events of the farm could easily be applied to other fruit or vegetable crops, such as cherries, pears, strawberries or pumpkins.

For more information about Adopt-a-Vine programs, visit these wineries’ Web sites.

ECONOMIC INCENTIVES

Participants at the listening sessions in Suisun Valley recognized the need to be positioned to capture new opportunities that will help their farms remain viable into the future. One farmer stated: “I would love to compete. I’ve grown all sorts of things and need help figuring out what to transition to safely and profitably and sustainably.” Another attendee expressed the need to “increase marketing opportunities,” an opinion shared by many others.

The statewide Farm Viability Enhancement Program in Massachusetts operates at the local level to assist farmers with business planning and implementation grants. The Agricultural Industry Development Program in Hillsborough County, Florida, is another example of economic incentives that work to improve the overall economic sustainability of agriculture.

Massachusetts – Farm Viability Enhancement Program

The Massachusetts Farm Viability Enhancement Program was created in 1994 to improve the economic productivity and environmental integrity of participating farms. The state Department of Agricultural Resources administers the program, which has two components: a business planning assistance phase, followed by grants to implement the business plan.

During the first phase, business planning is provided through a planning team selected for each farm depending on the farm’s location and type of commodity produced. The planning team analyzes the current operation and recommends ways to improve efficiency and increase on-farm income through improved management practices, diversification, direct marketing, value-added initiatives and agri-tourism. For farms with identified natural resource concerns, environmental assessments also are conducted.

The second phase of the program provides grants to selected participants to implement the changes recommended in the business plan. Farmers may apply for grants of \$20,000 or \$40,000 in exchange for five- or 10-year covenants not to develop or use the property for non-agricultural purposes. Grants of up to \$60,000 are available to farms placing 135 acres or more under covenant and implementing plans that will increase net income and agricultural employment. The program looks to other sources of federal and state funding to finance any recommended environmental improvements.

Applications are evaluated and selected based on: the degree of threat to the continuation of agriculture on the land; the number of acres to be placed in the program; the current intensity of use on the farm and its significance and contribution to the state's agricultural industry; whether the farm has diversified into retail or value-added activities; the agricultural experience of the operator; whether environmental objectives would be accomplished through the program; and the productivity of the land based on soil quality, physical features and location.

One full-time department employee administers the program. A network of consultants located throughout the state make up the planning teams comprised of professionals from various disciplines including agriculture, marketing, finance, management and environmental sciences. The consultants are paid on an hourly basis and include farmers, commodity experts, financial analysts, builders, natural resource managers and other individuals with relevant expertise from universities, private businesses and federal and state government.

A pilot round of the program was completed in 1996 using funds from the state's farmland protection program—the Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) program. In 1996, the program was officially launched with a five-year, \$5 million allocation from a \$150 million statewide open space bond bill. In 2000, the program received an additional two-year, \$2 million appropriation. In 2002, the program received \$14.5 million to be used over a three- to five-year period.

During fiscal year 2006, the program provided technical assistance to 27 farms, with 23 completing business plans: \$795,000 was spent in direct grants to farms, and more than \$220,000 was spent on technical assistance costs to consultants and business plan writers. As of June 30, 2006, the program has helped stabilize nearly 47,000 acres of Massachusetts farmland with more than 25,000 of those placed in protective covenants. Total cost of the program to date is \$212 per acre. Seventy-three percent of farmers in the program invested additional capital beyond the grant amount to implement business improvement strategies.

Virginia – Agricultural Enterprise Act of 2005

Using the Massachusetts program as a model, Virginia established the Agricultural Enterprise Act of 2005 (<http://leg1.state.va.us/cgi-bin/legp504.exe?051+sum+HB1947>). This new Virginia initiative calls for the establishment of locally designated agricultural enterprise districts. Qualified agricultural and farm businesses located in these districts

may apply to the Department of Agriculture for assistance in developing a new business plan and grant funding of up to half of the costs associated with implementing the plan, to a maximum of \$500,000. There are no results to date for this newly created program.

For more information about the Massachusetts Farm Viability Program, visit www.mass.gov/agr/programs/farmviability/.

Florida – Hillsborough County, Agricultural Industry Development Program

In 1995, the Hillsborough County Commissioners created the Hillsborough County Agriculture Task Force and charged its members with assessing the state of the agricultural industry and developing recommendations and an action plan to ensure the continued existence and expansion of the county's agriculture. Over the ensuing two years, the Task Force conducted a comprehensive analysis of the state of the agricultural industry. The study resulted in a number of new initiatives and actions to preserve agriculture in the county. According to the 2002 U.S. Census of Agriculture, Hillsborough consists of more than 284,000 acres of land in farms. Due to the significant economic impact of agriculture (\$668 million in sales in 2003) and its prominence in the local economy, the Task Force called for the development of an Agriculture Industry Development Program. This program works to improve the economic sustainability of agriculture through minimizing the detrimental impact of regulatory processes, increase marketing options, value-added processing, alternative crops, capital financing opportunities, and by promoting the expansion and relocation of agribusiness firms to Hillsborough County.

The Hillsborough County Agricultural Economic Development Council (AEDC), part of the county Economic Development Department, oversees the Agriculture Industry Development Program. The AEDC is comprised of representatives from agribusiness, local chambers of commerce, government industry and business leaders. An Agriculture Industry Development Program Manager and staff handle the day-to-day operation. The program has four major goals:

1. To discourage the premature conversion of productive farmland to non-agricultural use.
2. To minimize the impact of the regulatory process on agriculture's ability to conduct business, while still achieving the goals of those regulations.
3. To improve the economic sustainability of agriculture in Hillsborough County through increased marketing options, alternative crops, value-added processing, capital financing opportunities and identification of other barriers to the expansion or sustainability of agriculture.
4. To promote the expansion and relocation of agribusiness firms in Hillsborough County.

AEDC has achieved these four goals through the initiation of a variety of activities. For example, the AEDC is part of the Hillsborough County Planning and Growth Management Department Land Development Code Revision Steering Committee. Its presence on the committee aims at alleviating an unintended urban bias in the Comprehensive Land Use Plan.

The AEDC created the Agricultural Stewardship Program to encourage the economic viability of agriculture by recognizing and rewarding the benefits or services that agricultural land provides to the community. The program is administered through an Agriculture Stewardship Program Agreement between Hillsborough County and an agricultural landowner. The agreement prohibits the landowner from converting agricultural land to non-agricultural use for the term of the agreement (10 years). In turn, the landowner receives an annual Agriculture Stewardship Grant. The grant is based on a percentage of the ad valorem taxes paid to the county in the prior calendar year on the taxable value of the land classified as agricultural by the property appraiser and agriculture production related structures located on the land. The Hillsborough County Board of Commissioners unanimously approved this program in 2006. It recently issued a request for applications and has 450 applicants.

In order to address the regulatory issues that farmers face, the AEDC identified that streamlining or simplification of county regulations and permits for agricultural operations would allow a better understanding of the regulatory or permit requirements. The AEDC has begun to reexamine several permits and regulations, such as the Agriculture Exemption to the Natural Resource Permit, the Non-Residential Agricultural Building Permit Exemption and potential wetland impacts from Tailwater Recovery Ponds. To support agribusiness firms, the Agriculture Industry Development Program staff assess and address the expansion or relocation needs of their clients and help them to facilitate the permitting process. The Agriculture Program has facilitated more than 250 projects.

To improve the economic sustainability of Hillsborough County, the Agriculture Industry Development Program created a program to demonstrate the importance of agriculture to the community and the benefits of purchasing locally grown agricultural products. The program established a locally grown agriculture promotion campaign, *Hillsborough Grown*, which has three areas of focus: consumer education, retail outlet marketing and product identification. The Hillsborough County Farm to City Festival raises public awareness of agriculture's positive impact on the community. Twenty-two agriculture related organizations participate in the event, and approximately 700 people attend each year.

Other economic development initiatives include assisting the Arts Council of Hillsborough County in establishing a Public Market in Ybor City, which opened in April 2000. The Agriculture Industry Development Program also sponsored the "New Look at Agriculture" seminar to identify steps to ensure an economically viable agriculture for producers. These steps include improved marketing strategies to develop new markets and new crops, improved trade policies and improved consumer education.

For more information about Hillsborough County, Agricultural Industry Development Program, see www.hillsboroughcounty.org/econdev/agriculture/home.cfm.

STRATEGIC OUTLINE FOR AGRICULTURAL ADVANCEMENT IN SUISUN VALLEY

Suisun Valley has tremendous potential to prosper as a unique agricultural region. This strategic outline for agricultural development in Suisun Valley is based on the farm community's input, case studies and other research. It supports the farmers' premise that agriculture must be seen and treated as an important business activity and part of Solano County's economy, and it builds on the needs farmers expressed to promote their wines, market and brand all their agricultural products, diversify operations, support agri-tourism, develop value-added enterprises and recruit new agri-business endeavors.

For agriculture to succeed in this relatively small but fertile valley, the County, City of Fairfield, and other agencies must provide the same support and opportunities that they offer to other industries. The County, City of Fairfield, SID, Solano Economic Development Corporation, tourism agencies, SVFAC, Suisun Valley Grape Growers Association, Solano County Cooperative Extension and other stakeholders must identify and coordinate resources, roles and responsibilities to minimize duplication of efforts and maximize opportunities. The active participation of the larger community in developing economic programs will be essential in generating increased support for Suisun Valley agriculture.

What follows is a two-pronged approach to remove the barriers and move agriculture toward the vision farmers so eloquently expressed. The approach includes raising the reputation of the region's wine grapes by developing a special appellation and supporting the expansion and diversification of other types of agriculture in Suisun Valley with marketing and branding, agri-tourism, value adding, and new agri-business endeavors.

Researching the case studies, AFT found several common ingredients for success. It starts with a vision and a commitment from the farm community. These are followed by public input and the development of a plan. Ultimately, the plan is implemented and supported by funding and human resources, a farm-friendly regulatory environment and leadership from the agricultural community.

This strategic outline is predicated on these ingredients for success. It is designed to contribute to the larger county-wide assessment undertaken in the UCD study, to complement the marketing efforts of the SVFAC and the Suisun Valley Grape Growers Association, and to lay the groundwork to advance agricultural economic development and strengthen the county's infrastructure to sustain the long-term viability of farming in Suisun Valley. It is meant to achieve the farm community's vision (see page 10) of profitable family farms with tourists seeking a Suisun Valley brand recognized for world-class wines and other farm products.

The following four major steps for advancing agriculture in Suisun Valley can be led or coordinated by key agencies and farmer organizations including the SVFAC, Suisun Valley Grape Growers Association, Solano County Cooperative Extension, Farm Bureau,

other farmer groups and stakeholders. It is important for the entire farm community to work together to achieve its vision of a fruitful future for this special valley.

The first two major steps proposed in this strategic outline could be implemented immediately and concurrently. However, the final steps, which include Writing an Agricultural Development Plan and Creating an Agricultural Development Program to implement the plan, would require more time and would likely occur after adoption of Solano County's General Plan.

1. ***Reach consensus on a common vision for agriculture in Suisun Valley. (This should be in place by summer 2007 if it is to be incorporated into the General Plan.)*** Achieving consensus on a vision is the foundation for developing an agricultural economic development program and building community support for agriculture.
 - a. SVFAC will advertise, invite key stakeholders and convene a series of meetings.
 - b. Using the draft vision statement from this report as a starting point, a seasoned facilitator will lead participants through a process to finalize the text of a common vision for Suisun Valley.

2. ***Increase political will and infrastructure to support agricultural economic development.*** Recommendations heard at the listening sessions, interviews and meetings repeatedly emphasized the need for flexibility in the interpretation of local laws to allow value added and agri-tourism. Suisun Valley farmers must also step up to assume greater leadership roles.
 - a. Encourage farmers to run for city council, Board of Supervisors and planning commission. Organizations that do this could include the Farm Bureau and Suisun Valley Grape Growers Association.
 - b. Create incentives to invest in agriculturally related infrastructure. The County or a joint effort between the County and Fairfield could lead this effort.
 - i. Research an Agricultural Enterprise District to accomplish this task.
 - c. Build an institutional framework within Solano County government that is responsive to its farmers and places an organizational emphasis on the business of agriculture.
 - d. The County will take steps to:
 - i. Streamline the permit application process.
 - ii. Remove barriers to new and expanding agricultural operations by reviewing ordinances and other policies to ensure legality and appropriateness. Examples include:
 - Change use permit on wine making so it's easier for neighbors to process other neighbors' wine
 - Allow wine made at a communal custom crush facility to be sold at an on-farm tasting room
 - Review the Williamson Act and the Suisun Valley properties that are enrolled to determine whether and where more Bed and Breakfasts could be established

- iii. Review and reform zoning ordinances to allow for more on-farm economic development.
 - iv. Remove duplications, inconsistencies and inefficiencies in the permitting process.
 - v. Modify permit practices and improve protocols to ensure that reviews and approval flow quickly and efficiently.
 - vi. Reform current policies and enact new policies that encourage on-farm and small scale processing, direct marketing and agri-tourism.
 - vii. Reform policies to vertically “harmonize” federal, state and local inspection and other standards-based regulations at the legislative and department levels, particularly with regard to on-farm processing.
 - viii. Lobby the California state legislature for tiered on-farm, value-added microprocessing permitting legislation similar to that passed in Kentucky.
 - ix. Expedite value-added permitting and outline an easy process “roadmap.”
 - x. Research options available for altering personal property taxes now based solely on the existence of trees and vines.
- e. Investigate a “Farm and Rural Issues” training program for elected public officials.
 - f. Create a marketing campaign to reach out to local citizens on agricultural issues and the importance of agriculture.
 - i. Build on existing efforts with the SVFAC and the Suisun Valley Grape Grower Association.
 - Coordinate with County efforts to fund an Agricultural Economic Development Specialist
 - Support and expand existing branding, marketing and agri-tourism efforts
 - ii. Determine short-term priorities for additional action.
 - Support market research to develop Suisun Valley wine appellation
 - Agri-tourism for all Suisun Valley products
 - Marketing and branding of the entire Suisun Valley
 - Contact Jelly Belly to contract with local growers
 - Identify desired infrastructure development to support local agriculture
3. ***Write an Agricultural Development Plan to increase the profitability of Suisun Valley farms.*** The plan will be based on the common vision and build on this strategic outline. It would flesh out issues, such as priorities for action, what is going on to address these, specific sub-plans for priority actions, who will take the lead on funding and implementation, and so on.
- a. Determine if this is a stand-alone plan for Suisun Valley or part of a Solano County plan. Define future roles of Solano County, SID, the City of Fairfield and others, including Solano County Water Agency (SCWA), Fairfield-Suisun Sewer District and Solano Land Trust. (SCWA is studying flood control issues in the valley and could be a valuable partner in making land use decisions. Solano Land Trust has resources and expertise and has designated the Suisun Valley as a high priority area in its Agricultural Conservation Easement Plan.)

- b. Delegate a lead agency to coordinate the process and develop the plan.
 - i. Assign staff to the process, which is likely to take 12 to 18 months.
 - ii. Fund the process. Possible source is the stakeholders.
 - iii. Explore the possibility of hiring a consultant to facilitate the process.
- c. Determine short- and long-term priorities for action.
 - i. Delegate specific planning elements, e.g.:
 - Expansion of the Suisun Valley wine appellation
 - Agri-tourism for all Suisun Valley products
 - Agricultural Enterprise District
 - Marketing and branding of entire Suisun Valley
 - Infrastructure development
 - Regulatory relief
 - Leadership development
- d. Manage a transparent, public input driven process to write the plan.
 - i. Media outreach, press releases, public notices, etc.
 - ii. Web site
 - iii. Community meetings
- e. Write the plan.
 - i. Keep the process transparent by building in time for public input.
 - ii. Use press releases and the media to keep the public engaged and informed.
 - iii. Have key agencies review and approve draft.
 - iv. Present the draft plan at public meetings.
 - v. Incorporate public and stakeholder input into final plan.
- f. Present the final plan.
- g. Research to identify and determine the applicability of potential sources for sustainable funding to implement the plan. Possibilities include:
 - i. Annual appropriations – County Government
 - ii. Bonds
 - iii. Private funding
 - Foundation grants
 - Corporate sponsorship
 - Business donations
 - Citizen donations
 - iv. Special assessment district
 - Fairfield property tax assessment
 - v. State grants
 - vi. Taxes – county-wide
 - Additional real estate transfer taxes (currently used in other states)
 - Cellular phone or other specialty taxes (currently used in other states)
 - New park and open space district
 - Special fees

4. Create an Agricultural Development Program to implement the plan. A regional economic development program would capitalize on and leverage the County’s business, academic and financial resources to attract, retain and promote agriculture. It would provide

the specifics for implementing the Agricultural Development Plan. The program would address farmers' needs for increased economic development assistance to help diversify their operations, support agri-tourism, develop new value-added enterprises, market and brand their products, and recruit new agri-business endeavors. Key elements include:

- a. Fund implementation.
- b. Create an Agricultural Economic Development function to implement the plan, coordinate the expansion of the grape industry and assist growers with business planning, agri-tourism development, diversification, marketing, branding and value-added efforts.
 - i. Possible options for implementation include:
 - Hire a public relations firm to develop a media and outreach program to advance the common vision and engage community support.
 - Create an Agricultural Economic Development position.
 - Agricultural Economic Development Specialist(s) within the Solano County Cooperative Extension.
 - Agricultural Chamber of Commerce.
 - ii. Identify business planning resources available to help farmers diversify and implement value-added strategies.
 - iii. Investigate value-added opportunities with other local industries, such as the Jelly Belly factory.
 - iv. Develop a strategic Agri-Tourism Plan.
 - Focus on a year-round destination that is family oriented.
 - Link agriculture with the local arts community.
 - v. Provide technical assistance with business planning and/or training for Small Business Development Counselors (SBDC) on agricultural business, development and lending.
 - vi. Provide access to resources for infrastructure and capital funding.
 - vii. Conduct and/or coordinate market studies and research on production methods, crops and agricultural products to improve profit margins and enable diversification.
 - viii. Assist with research and development of possible value-added agricultural products and new products, and support for new agribusiness opportunities.
 - ix. Work with the Solano Economic Development Corporation in expanding or attracting agribusiness firms to the county.
 - x. Pursue SARE grants for microprocessor and farm mentoring programs.
 - xi. Develop and implement a marketing and branding initiative for Suisun Valley wines and other products, using the Catskill, Puget Sound and CISA programs as models.
 - Coordinate efforts of the SVFAC and the Suisun Valley Grape Growers Association on agricultural marketing and branding issues that may start by emphasizing its AVA designation.
 - Initiate a "buy local" promotional campaign that engages Fairfield and other nearby cities' residents.
 - xii. Develop and implement a new farmer attraction program as existing landowners retire from farming and wish to sell all or part of their holdings.

In summary, AFT incorporated the vision, the concerns and recommendations from the listening sessions, and the successful case studies to develop this strategic outline for agricultural economic development in Suisun Valley and the greater Solano County. The outline lays the groundwork for the County to develop and implement a plan that will support its farmers and ensure the future of Suisun Valley agriculture.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I. Suisun Valley Listening Sessions Summary

APPENDIX II: Suisun Valley Listening Sessions Notes

APPENDIX I

Suisun Valley Listening Session Summary October 17 & 18, 2006, 7:00 – 9:00 pm Rockville Inn

AFT is helping the County of Solano and the Suisun Valley Fund Advisory Committee evaluate options for a viable and sustainable agricultural industry in Suisun Valley. Outreach and stakeholder involvement are important components of this study; on the evenings of October 17 and 18, 2006, concerned citizens were invited to identify concerns and priorities as a way of collectively finding solutions that best meet the needs of Suisun Valley's agriculture. The following is the summary of the two listening sessions.

Welcome and Introductions

Suisun Valley growers Bob Hansen and Ron Lanza opened the October 17th and 18th meetings respectively by welcoming everyone and acknowledging members of the audience. Approximately 30 people participated in total. By a show of hands, participants indicated that virtually all were active growers with substantial ties to Suisun Valley agriculture.

Hansen and Lanza provided their respective audiences with an overview of the project and process, explaining the goals for the listening sessions and how they tie into the larger countywide process to sustain agriculture in Solano County. Michelle Harvey, the session facilitator, led the balance of the meetings.

Sharing Concerns

The next meeting segment was designed to elicit from attendees their primary and secondary concerns about sustaining agriculture in Suisun Valley and their vision for the valley. Harvey asked people to first write down their concerns, then to select their primary one to post on the wall under one of four categories:

- County Regulations,
- Agricultural Economic Development,
- Cost of Doing Business, and
- All Other Ideas.

Participants also were invited to list both secondary concerns and vision statements on a different colored sheet and post them. Harvey noted that the open discussion would be organized into consecutive discussion segments of 15–20 minutes each, based on the concerns and visions attendees posted on the wall. People were also asked to write down for their own use in the open discussion their top three to five recommendations on how to address their key concerns and advance their visions. The full list of vision and concern statements from each of the Suisun Valley listening sessions can be found in Appendix II.

Voicing a Vision for the Future of Farming in the Suisun Valley

A number of participants saw a future where, through changes in county regulations, the farmer as a businessman had regained the ability to determine and pursue the highest and

best use of his or her farm or ranch property. This included value-added enterprises such as selling wine from Suisun Valley grapes and pies from Suisun Valley peaches. In turn, future generations would be able to make a living farming while co-existing with the increasing population of non-farmers. The upcoming “Measure J” was seen as a factor in that future ability.

A few felt that too many people had already purchased land with an eye toward development, resulting in many fallow parcels. They saw the valley becoming “largely small,” with holdings farmed by some farmers as “landscape” while full-time farmers had trouble holding on to their farms. The land would cease to be cultivated, and instead be converted to housing or industrial development.

Most others also envisioned a change in scale but also in niche, where small farms and markets offered Bay Area residents insights into California farming while allowing the farmers to thrive—where farming could be “real.” An agricultural enterprise zone and research would lead to the most profitable crops grown and sold on the smallest acreage. New marketing tools and practices would set aside Suisun Valley produce and wines as their own entity, creating a farming area distinctive and unique in the region, California, and perhaps the United States. Solano County would support all agricultural endeavors, not just those that created open space; local markets would be buying and selling local produce. The Suisun Valley American Viticultural Area (AVA) would become a high-end, boutique version of Sonoma or Napa, and then the “brand” would spill over to ALL the Suisun Valley products.

As a result, Suisun Valley would have a successful agri-tourism mix of wineries, bed and breakfasts, eateries, art shops, fruit stands and commercial growers. The valley would become a destination where families could have a great time and experience. People from the Bay Area and elsewhere would visit Suisun Valley on a daily basis. In addition to buying directly from Suisun Valley vendors, visitors would start seeking ‘branded’ Suisun Valley products in every independent grocery store in the Bay Area, and Suisun Valley products would ultimately become an internationally recognized brand like Napa Valley. Farms would be well maintained because they would be profitable, preserving large areas of open space. Suisun Valley would be farmed completely and sustainably in high-margin agriculture, with no fallow land.

Group Discussion on Recommendations to Advance Vision and Address Key Concerns

Based on the posted vision statements and concerns, the discussion sessions focused broadly on county regulations. Discussions about agricultural economic development, the cost of doing business, and other issues were still heavily linked to what was perceived as an extremely constraining County regulatory environment. Individual comments were captured on flip charts; Harvey noted that the list of recommendations would NOT be voted upon, and that the goal was to gather everyone’s best thinking. A summary of the recommendations—which solely represent the viewpoints of the participants—follows.

County Regulations

Suisun Valley is seen as a unique and special place that requires appropriate regulations and incentives to sustain it as a special place. One option would be to regulate the farm community from within, through a committee of local, agriculturally knowledgeable people who would oversee, review and advise the County on farm business and zoning issues, leading to locally appropriate decisions. Farmers know what they would like to do, and the County knows how to get it done. Apple Hill, which has an enterprise district and a growers' committee, was suggested as a model to consider. This approach could be supported by also having the general plan promote agriculture and better address farmers' needs. Planners and other officials could meet with growers to listen and learn and work together for the County's benefit. Changing zoning from A-40 to A-20 to open the door for new and part-time farmers, small-scale niche markets and innovative ideas was proposed as a topic for such exploration.

In general, recommendations regarding County regulations focused on a need for flexibility, for bringing regulations into harmony with those in surrounding counties and with active land use and agricultural practices in Suisun Valley. Current regulations constrain most value-added ventures. Allowing more flexibility in regulatory interpretation, such as having the County regulators adopt an attitude of support for changes that do no harm, was strongly advanced by all participants. For example, accessory buildings could have new uses limited to those compatible with farming and community character, such that use of existing but unoccupied farm facilities would be encouraged but not new development. Acknowledging the fear of development that proposed infrastructure improvements can generate, participants suggested meetings with the community so people could work together to resolve traffic and agricultural infrastructure challenges.

Defeating Measure J and otherwise leveling the regulatory playing field were seen as key to sustaining Suisun Valley agriculture, so valley farmers could have the same business options and economic potential as farmers in neighboring counties. Recognizing that globalization was generating new levels of competition, growers felt that addressing regulatory problems within the valley's scope of control had to happen quickly. Allowing a communal crush facility that would enable artisan wine production for those without personal wineries was one recommended change. Participants also called on Solano County to clarify the rules, make timely decisions and create certainty with respect to regulations, so that growers would know whether or not to invest in such ventures or in direct marketing facilities. The need was cited for new supervisors who would go back to the regulations to overcome identified hurdles.

Agricultural Economic Development

Discussions about the County also targeted the agricultural economic development needs of Suisun Valley. The Suisun Valley AVA is the second oldest in the U.S.; it is a valuable and "brandable" asset. To anchor both agri-tourism and commercial growers, growers saw a need for more wineries, with the County helping to finance the marketing of the Suisun Valley AVA. The County could develop incentives for the previously mentioned communal crush facility, in-county grape purchase and use, and joint tasting rooms to increase the potential for more wineries. Noting the valley's proximity to Interstate 80 and

the Bay Area, participants also called on the County and the agriculture commissioner to increase market opportunities through promotion of all agricultural products, such as a “*Try Suisun*” campaign, and to help farmers to understand and undertake direct marketing efforts.

Matching up the capabilities of Suisun Valley with the marketplace could also require changes in approach, such as those needed to meet new markets that want fresh local produce. Whole Foods’ recent interest in the valley was cited as a new opportunity that required both new infrastructure and sufficient coordination of growers to supply a full product line. A growers’ cooperative was proposed. Citing the need to seek new opportunities without sacrificing investments already made, such as vines, growers asked that newly identified opportunities be accompanied by letters of intent to mitigate financial risks associated with change.

Napa Valley was cited as a model for how to advance agri-tourism through promotion. Suisun Valley is positioned as Napa was in the 1950s and ‘60s. Half of Fairfield residents live within the AVA; economic development efforts need to target the AVA with the same energy as the Air Force base and the cities. To bring in families and tourists requires a critical mass of businesses and events, but current County regulations impede expansion. The recommended agricultural enterprise district could minimize or eliminate the need for agricultural special use permits on new ventures and foster more innovation. Coupling such a district with a program to assess growers as Lodi has done would also create on-going funding for promotion.

More funding was seen as a way to put Suisun Valley “on the map” as a destination while building retail niche markets for everything from wineries to bed and breakfasts to fruit stands—provided the regulatory climate changed to encourage such ventures. The arts are another way to draw people in and create more visibility for the valley’s offerings, from opera and musical theater to sculpture farms and art shops to locally produced foods at restaurants. Another suggestion was to make better use of the public relations person currently in place to make Suisun Valley a tourist destination. Allowing more than one Suisun Valley Fun Day a month could encourage families to explore the valley and see where their food is produced. Maintaining a family-oriented approach was also seen as a way to build a longtime consumer base, because it reaches across generations.

Participants recognized the need to be positioned to capture new opportunities that could take them into the future successfully. Growers asked for support in identifying new high-margin market opportunities and figuring out how to anticipate and be prepared for changes while avoiding over supply and low prices. An agricultural economic development specialist for the County was proposed—someone looking out for new opportunities and who could assist farmers in transitioning to new ventures. Growers also asked for assistance in attracting the capital for the infrastructure needed to move large quantities of Suisun Valley products. More educational programs were proposed, e.g., technical seminars on growing olives and other new crops, marketing and sales to support new ventures and identifying mentors.

Referencing anticipated changes in farming practice and products, participants asked for assistance in switching to crops that require different equipment and new technologies. Some saw the need to identify a new anchor commodity or crop that can both distinguish and sustain the valley, such as grapes had done prior to market globalization. Others again cited the need to identify capital, fully explore all options and diversify markets rather than seek a single silver bullet. Financial support for incubator farms and training of laborers in new crop techniques were seen as valuable, as was fostering collaborations now so people are ready to market Suisun Valley when regulatory hurdles are removed.

Cost of Doing Business

Suggestions pertaining to the cost of doing business were also grounded in regulatory changes. Participants called on the County to relax regulatory restrictions on doing work for and with others in the valley, so that needed equipment was available while expenses of ownership could be offset by revenues generated through contract work. Similarly, easing regulations could foster more cooperative buying and marketing. This could lead to higher prices paid to farmers through direct sale and retail operations, helping to accommodate price increases for fuel and other inputs. California pesticide laws require extra levels of regulations, making farming in California more expensive than in other states. Citing high permit costs at the County level as well, growers called on the County to reduce the need for special permits and to identify ways of generating County revenues other than through farm permits.

Participants also asked that personal property taxes not be based solely on the existence of vines or trees that might have no market, but rather on level of commercial activity. The need for a guest worker program, allowing for temporary employment in agricultural, landscaping and construction, was seen as an important step in easing farm labor problems. One suggestion was for the County to create a farm labor employment agency to ensure proper documentation, pay, etc., and to make it easier for growers to get legal farm labor. Increased opportunities for “u-pick” operations would reduce harvest and transportation costs, as would more local buyers; farmers asked for help in finding affordable insurance.

Noting the difficulty farmers can have especially in starting and changing farming operations, the idea of subsidizing farming in Suisun Valley was proposed; if cities want agricultural land to be their open space, they should help out financially. This led to questions of whether the next generation will be willing to stake their futures on agriculture. Participants felt it was important to energize and support farmers who are feeling defeated and help them figure out what to transition to safely, profitably and sustainably. Solutions might include green payments for the measurable environmental services that farmers are providing today—carbon sequestration, storm water control, improved air quality. Citing recent farmland donations to meet County needs for road expansion, participants felt they in turn deserved the County’s support when they needed it.

All Other Ideas

The discussion then turned toward collaboration and other ways in which the growers could work with city residents to create a farm-friendly vision for Solano County. One

suggestion was to build community support for Suisun Valley to be the next Napa. Fairfield and Vacaville residents could promote Suisun Valley like Napa residents promote Napa, including local markets and shops showcasing locally produced wines and produce. Participants proposed a ballot initiative building from the visioning process underway and asking Fairfield residents to support farms and help pay for needed programs, such as \$100 out of each city household. This would entail educating voters on farmers' needs and the real costs of open space protection such that voters would develop an understanding of sustainable agricultural and support it through regulatory change. This would also require education and outreach to elected officials and staff at the city and county levels, especially the Board of Supervisors. The Supervisors could then direct staff according to the intent of voters who say agriculture is a priority.

Citing the funding coming from Fairfield and the Solano Irrigation District through 2010, the Suisun Valley Fund was called upon to help sustain and build upon current successes in the valley, encouraging and enabling more growers to change. Funds are needed to grow the future, but vision, passion, leadership and action must come from within the valley. With improved attitudes, the valley's farmers can focus on opportunities, not problems, exploring possibilities and what they could bring to the valley instead of focusing on why an idea won't work. Farmers must choose to compete, then differentiate on the merits of the product as the substance of branding. It's not just the logo, but what the logo represents. Concluded one participant, "We need to find the next step, then go. Just go."

Participants were reminded that the content from the listening sessions would be reviewed by American Farmland Trust and used in identifying agricultural case studies that might serve as models for Suisun Valley going forward. Both sessions were adjourned at 9:00 pm.

Visions

My vision for the future of farming in the Suisun Valley is:

- Small farms that offer an insight into California farming to the Bay Area. Finding a niche market that will allow the farmers to thrive.
- A farming region distinctive and unique in our region, California, and perhaps the U.S.
- More emphasis on Suisun Valley as its own niche. Creation of marketing tools and practices to set aside the valley produce and wines as their own entity.
- That future generations will be able to make a living farming. That the increasing population and farming can co-exist.
- Luxury class wines produced from profitable grape growing with the appellation.
- Turn Suisun Valley into a smaller version of Napa Valley, wineries, eateries, art, fruit stands, bed and breakfasts, etc.
- Ag tourism, ability to mix some commercial sales with ag related products.
- Agri-tourism like Napa Valley.
- Unfortunately the valley will be largely small (smallest possible); holdings probably farmed by a few farmers actually as “landscape.” Full-time farmers will have trouble holding on to their farms.
- Most farmers are not profitable without changing the laws. Will not be cultivated and eventually be converted to housing or industrial development.
- Numerous wineries, bed and breakfasts, more restaurants and farmstands; well maintained farms because of profitability. The valley is being farmed completely—no fallow land.
- Dependent on the upcoming elections (Measure J) as to the ability of the farmer as a businessman to determine the highest and best use of his particular farm or ranch property and be allowed to pursue that vision.
- Thousands of Bay Area residents flocking to Suisun Valley each weekend to buy direct, and branded Suisun Valley products in every independent grocery store in the Bay area.
- El Dorado, Livermore Valley, Napa. Local tourism is a marketing device. Wineries leading—Suisun Valley AVA becomes a high-end, boutique version of Sonoma or Napa. Suisun Valley AVA is the second oldest after Napa; let the “brand” spill over to ALL the ag products. Solano County supports all ag, not just leaning on its back for open space.
- A place where farming could be real. However, too many people have purchased land with an eye toward development, resulting in many fallow parcels.
- Family-held farms with the ability to make money by inner expansion: wine from grapes, pies from peaches, local markets buying local produce, ag-related businesses along side; the growing of a commodity.
- Agro-tourism, preservation of large open space, sustainable high-margin agriculture, example being Napa Valley.
- A successful mixture of wineries, fruit stands, bed and breakfasts, and commercial growers. Having a destination where the family can have a great time and experience. This would bring about reverse marketing also where we would be able to develop markets outside the valley.
- Highest profitable crop to grow and sell on smallest acreage; having an ag enterprise zone.

Concerns

My #1 concern on the future of farming in Suisun Valley tied to county regulations is:

- Constructive regulations dealing with all facets of agriculture.
- County regulations and implementers are hostile to agriculture—NOT pro-marketing via any of the suggestions available through USDA, cooperative extension, or otherwise:

- Farm stays and B&Bs
- Value added products, commercial kitchens
- Wine tastings (unless you process your own grapes in your own winery—doesn't allow for smaller vineyards using community crush facilities, so they can't sell/taste their own wine)
- County less interested in supporting agricultural through marketing and helping agricultural sustain than it is in its own bureaucracy and restrictive regs.
- Current county regulations.
- Declining agricultural profits; county regulations not flexible.
- Present county regulations do not support value-added activities in agricultural lands, such as processing, agricultural tourism, farm stays, frequent special events.
- Regulations—zoning restrictions.
- Will the County allow the changes we may need to survive.
- To analyze all county regulations to make the valley economically agriculturally viable for the future:
 - What crops are possible to grow profitably?
 - Used permit possibilities.
- The use of pre-existing building for business purposes on agricultural land. For example, a previous retail building that cannot have a business under current county regulations.

Secondary concerns tied to county regulations:

- Zoning should permit some commercial enterprise such as restaurants, hotels, tourist attractions.
- Change has come—this has been recognized by the farmer, but the County has not changed with the years. County regs are hard to maneuver around when they have not caught up with the times. We see other agricultural areas moving forward with value-added products, processing and sales, and Suisun Valley should be encouraged to do the same.
- Relations with county and other regulatory bodies.
- Environmental restrictions.
- Residential housing is restricting Suisun Valley farm and cropland area. There should be recognition of viable areas and open space regulations put in place.

My #1 concern on the future of farming in Suisun Valley tied to agricultural economic development is:

- Lack of willingness to think in terms of opportunities followed by decisive action.
- Developing markets for present dominant crop wine grapes.
- All others—grapes/vineyards have become a worldwide commodity with consolidation of buyers/wineries that inhibit competitors;
- Re-establishing markets for agricultural production from valley— replacing commodity crops (i.e., prunes, common varieties of wine grapes) with specialty crops and an emphasis on direct marketing.
- That farming can be profitable for all farmers in the valley; we need each other. The infrastructure to support farming will collapse; I can't succeed by being the only vineyard in Suisun Valley. For example, our Suisun Valley co-op needs support from a large customer base. The notoriety for grapes grown in the valley will only come with large numbers of acres in the valley.

Secondary concerns tied to agricultural economic development:

- Need for an agricultural economic development unit capable of facilitating marketing of what we have and the identification of future agricultural-based industries: energy crops; phytochemicals; other innovations.
- Lack of current enterprise districts to allow the grower base to be profitable. We have lost our commercial customers (canneries/processors); need to have value-added products.
- Branding “the Valley” or area.
- We need to develop a name or brand for Suisun Valley (name recognition)
- Are the property owners of the valley willing to participate in agriculture?
- Markets and market rebound competition in foreign markets without quid pro quo.
- Taking the grape harvest past just selling the raw material and start to make finished product in the valley (wineries).

My #1 concern on the future of farming in Suisun Valley tied to the cost of doing business is:

- Economic feasibility: (1) crop choices, (2) pesticide and other government agency issues – more and more onerous.
- Suisun Valley is small in size and small in production, but high in quality. Time has taken our ability to compete on an individual basis. Lost processing, worldwide market, costs to do business on a small farm are big. With no place to sell the product, no way to process, there is no way to make a profit. We have lost and not gained.

Secondary concerns tied to cost of doing business:

- How long it will take to change over into a profitable state of business.
- Urban and rural residential development pressure that makes land too expensive for economically viable agriculture.
- Economic feasibility.
- Finding labor to work farms—county operates an employment bureau?
- Maintaining enough income to keep the next generations interested in farming.

My #1 concern on the future of farming in Suisun Valley tied to other issues is:

- Preservation of character, economic viability, sustainability.
- Since vineyards and orchards have been abandoned and/or pulled out because there was no market for the fruit or grapes, I don’t see much of a future for farming these crops, and since we are in the middle of a campaign that is successful for the proponents, will commit this ground to only agriculture. My number 1 concern is what is to be done with this property?

Other secondary concerns:

- Disconnect between county, city of Fairfield, and farmer – how do we get everyone on the same page?
- No viable program for small-parcel (<20–40 acres) conservation easements that would support small operations, specialty crops, or “incubator” farms.
- Lack of consciousness of the farmers/landowners re: the looming changes. Still living in the old days where buyers and transportation were abundant. Farmers need to get proactive in finding their new markets and adjusting to the new realities of the market place. Farmers need to be cohesive in asking for change in regs and support. Need to wake up.
- Becoming too congested to farm properly; concerns would be spray, drift, noise, dust.

APPENDIX II

Suisun Valley Listening Session Notes – Session 1

Date: October 17, 2006

Location: Rockville Inn, Suisun Valley, California

Facilitator: Michelle Mauthe Harvey

Number of Attendees: 13

VISION STATEMENTS

My vision for the future of farming in the Suisun Valley is:

- Numerous wineries, bed and breakfasts, more restaurants and farmstands; well maintained farms because of profitability. The valley is being farmed completely—no fallow land.
- Dependent on the upcoming elects (Measure J) as to the ability of the farmer as a businessman to determine the highest and best use of his particular farm or ranch property and be allowed to pursue that vision.
- Thousands of Bay Area residents flocking to Suisun Valley each weekend to buy direct, and branded Suisun Valley products in every independent grocery store in the Bay area.
- El Dorado, Livermore Valley, Napa. Local tourism is a marketing device. Wineries leading—Suisun Valley AVA becomes a high-end, boutique version of Sonoma or Napa. Suisun Valley AVA is the second oldest after Napa; let the “brand” spill over to ALL the ag products. Solano County supports all ag, not just leaning on its back for open space.
- A place where farming could be real. However, too many people have purchased land with an eye toward development, resulting in many fallow parcels.
- Family-held farms with the ability to make money by inner expansion: wine from grapes, pies from peaches, local markets buying local produce, ag-related businesses along side; the growing of a commodity.
- Agro-tourism, preservation of large open space, sustainable high-margin agriculture, example being Napa Valley.
- A successful mixture of wineries, fruit stands, bed and breakfasts, and commercial growers. Having a destination where the family can have a great time and experience. This would bring about reverse marketing also where we would be able to develop markets outside the Valley.
- Highest profitable crop to grow and sell on smallest acreage; having an ag enterprise zone.

CONCERNS

My #1 concern on the future of farming in Suisun Valley is tied to cost of doing business:

- Economic feasibility: (1) crop choices, (2) pesticide and other government agency issues—more and more onerous.

- Suisun Valley is small in size and small in production, but high in quality. Time has taken our ability to compete on an individual basis. Lost processing, worldwide market, costs to do business on a small farm are big. With no place to sell the product, no way to process, there is no way to make a profit. We have lost and not gained.

Secondary concerns tied to cost of doing business:

- How long it will take to change over into a profitable state of business.
- Urban and rural residential development pressure that makes land too expensive for economically viable agriculture.
- Economic feasibility.

My #1 concern on the future of farming in Suisun Valley is tied to county regulations:

- County regulations and implementers are hostile to agriculture—NOT promoting via any of the suggestions available through USDA, cooperative extension, or otherwise:
 - Farm stays and B&Bs
 - Value added products, commercial kitchens
 - Wine tastings (unless you process your own grapes in your own winery—doesn't allow for smaller vineyards using community crush facilities, so they can't sell/taste their own wine)
 - County less interested in supporting ag through marketing and helping ag sustain than it is in its own bureaucracy and restrictive regs.
- To analyze all county regulations to make the valley economically agriculturally viable for the future:
 - What crops are possible to grow profitably?
 - Used permit possibilities.
- Present county regulations do not support value-added activities in agricultural lands, such as processing, ag tourism, farm stays, frequent special events
- Current county regulations

Secondary concerns tied to county regulations:

- Zoning should permit some commercial enterprise such as restaurants, hotels, tourist attractions
- Change has come—this has been recognized by the farmer, but the county has not changed with the years. County regs are hard to maneuver around when they have not caught up with the times. We see other ag areas moving forward with value-added products, processing, and sales and Suisun Valley should be encouraged to do the same.
- Relations with county and other regulatory bodies—environmental restrictions.

My #1 concern on the future of farming in Suisun Valley is tied to agricultural economic development:

- All others—grapes/vineyards have become a worldwide commodity with consolidation of buyers/wineries that inhibit competitors.
- Re-establishing markets for ag production from Valley—replacing commodity crops (i.e., prunes, common varieties of wine grapes) with specialty crops and an emphasis on direct marketing.

- That farming can be profitable for all farmers in the Valley; we need each other. The infrastructure to support farming will collapse; I can't succeed by being the only vineyard in Suisun Valley. For example our Suisun Valley co-op needs support from a large customer base. The notoriety for grapes grown in the Valley will only come with large numbers of acres in the Valley.

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- Branding “the Valley” or area.

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- Preservation of character, economic viability, sustainability.
- Since vineyards and orchards have been abandoned and/or pulled out because there was no market for the fruit or grapes, I don't see much of a future for farming these crops, and since we are in the middle of a campaign that is successful for the proponents, will commit this ground to only agriculture. My number 1 concern is what is to be done with this property?

Secondary concerns:

- Lack of consciousness of the farmers/landowners re: the looming changes. Still living in the old days where buyers and transportation were abundant. Farmers need to get proactive in finding their new markets and adjusting to the new realities of the market place. Farmers need to be cohesive in asking for change in regs and support. Need to wake up.
- Becoming too congested to farm properly; concerns would be spray, draft, noise, dust.

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| RECOMMENDATIONS |
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Regarding Cost of Doing Business:

- Foster cooperative buying and marketing—ditto
- Higher prices through direct marketing—ditto
- Relax restrictions on doing work for/with others in the area with your equipment. [shared technology]
- Personal property taxes should not be on vines and trees just because they are producing.
- Taxes and such are out of sync with the times.
- Reduce transportation costs if can sell locally—more local buyers.
- Increase u-pick operations to reduce harvest costs (make insurance affordable).
- California pesticide laws require extra regulations—makes it more expensive.
- Have a local crush facility for artisan wines without having personal winery—allow on-farm sales.

- Allow valley to grow and celebrate what it has without being smashed by restrictive regulations at every turn.
- Get support from county without restrictions.
- Reduce need for special permits.
- Get back when you give—if donate land for county needs, get county support when you need it; can't go it alone.
- Allow more Suisun Valley Fun Days than once/month.
- Solve the labor situation—it's in short supply, support programs that allow “guest” workers for temporary employment in ag, landscaping and construction
- Get the general plan in sync with county (especially farmers' needs).

Regarding County Regulations:

- Level the regulatory playing field; allow SV farmers to do what farmers in neighboring counties can do.
- Increase market opportunities.
- Allow value added ventures.
- It's catch up time for value-added, the farmers can see it, but the regs aren't catching up as fast (they're outdated); we need the county to be out there with us; we're ready to do it NOW.
- Cost of permitting is higher here than elsewhere, cost needs to be lower if it is to be more competitive (it's become a deterrent)—county needs other ways to raise revenue.
- Educate voters on real costs of open space protection; seems like they want all this pristine open space but they don't want to pay for it. They don't understand farmers' needs—voters need to support sustainable ag.
- Find ways to match prices farmers get for their products to rising prices for fuel and other inputs.
- Help farmers with direct marketing—county needs to go out and help encourage direct marketing (vs. discouraging it) by rolling out the red carpet of promotion.
- Need to market Suisun Valley as a destination—if can't promote the Valley in an official manner we can't compete with international imports (and gluts/overproduction).
- Need more wineries, places to crush, tasting rooms and joint tasting rooms—develop incentives for same.
- Take advantage of the PR person who is in place to make the Valley a tourist destination.
- Look at the future—figure out what strategies we need to change and how to anticipate changes to be prepared to avoid over supply and low prices; get our dollars to turn around: high margin/market opportunities—need someone to be on the look out for these opportunities.
- You're looking at niche markets—need to go retail—bed and breakfasts, fruit stands, more family oriented, not just adults going wine tasting. Then you build a long-time consumer base because it reaches to the next generation. But we have to get the regulations in place/relaxed so we can do those kinds of things.

- Encourage people to come out and explore the Valley, learn where their food is coming from.
- Look at what Napa did through promotion; they were where we are in the '50s & '60s but now are allowed to have restaurants and such and have come a long way.
- More entertainment, more activities, more things to do to bring families and tourists in—not enough critical mass—regulations are impeding this process. It costs money to do this.
- Need more money to fund promotion to attract people—to put Suisun Valley on the map.
- County could support farmers with marketing.
- Go back to the regulations to overcome the hurdles.
- Bring people together to begin collaborations so people are ready to market when regulatory hurdles are removed.
- County needs to be clear with the rules and make faster decisions about allowing farmers to invest in direct marketing facilities—everyone is stuck in between—County needs to create “certainty.”
- Create an ag enterprise district to give broader parameters (vs. the ag use permit which limits activities) and allow more flexibility to try new things.
- More educational programs, e.g. seminars on olive growing and other new crops and finding markets to support new ventures, provide mentors.
- If you make enough money you can pay for the labor you need.
- Need training for labor in new crops and enterprises.

Regarding Other Issues:

- Educate county staff.
- Suisun Valley AVA is the 2nd oldest in America, it's a valuable asset, NAPA has become extremely aggressive at protecting its AVA, proving what a valuable asset this is—so we need to BRAND Suisun Valley wine, the County should help finance the marketing of the SV and the SV AVA. So start with the SV wine, then it will be easier to market all the other SV products (chocolate example from Napa and El Dorado).
- Get more local supermarkets promoting SV farm products—really push local wines, creating a whole section of local produce.
 - This will require infrastructure; growers need to come together to provide a steady supply.
 - Lots of CA examples, Lodi is doing it, create a program to assess growers and create a district, then fund promotion.
- Look at all options including a SV growers cooperative.
- “Try Suisun Valley wine”—it gets back to branding; *Try Suisun*.
- Increase tourism, county road capacity, address left hand turn lanes, look ahead, plan for agriculture (become a squeaky wheel).
- If it's not done by the group, then one individual has to take on the cost individually—so farmers need to band together.
- Get ag into general plan recognized as driver of local economy—let ag generate the money it could without hurdles.

- Address fear of development that comes with need to improve infrastructure.
- Recognize the value of the arts to draw people in, create more visibility to bring people in—connect agriculture and the arts (opera, music theater, sculpture farm organic food for restaurants, goats for their cheese, etc.)
- Find a home for the art show and opera, and draw young people with emerging music.
- Address the misperception of development and “no growth”— MEET WITH THE COMMUNITY sit down at the table with them to address traffic and ag infrastructure—create room at the table for everyone to work together.
- Change zoning from A-40 to A-20; A-20 is viable here and it would open the door for new farmers, niche markets, new ideas.
- Put someone in charge of looking at economic development for the county (not just the city) marketing for today and promotion for tomorrow—take advantage of resources like UC Davis, take advantage of local research and resources to generate value added products and sell them.
- Create partnership between local farmers and the County to create infrastructure e.g., commercial kitchen or crush facility (Mendocino County example).
- Get planners and others to get together and meet with growers to listen and learn and work together. The farmers know what they’d like to do and the county knows how to get it done, so get us all working together.
- County provide enterprise district and create growers committee that everything affecting ag has to go through (Apple Hill example).
- County or some gov’t entity could hire a marketing specialist to help develop that marketing expertise (could be Chamber of Commerce).

Suisun Valley Listening Session Notes – Session 2

Date: October 18, 2006

Location: Rockville Inn, Suisun Valley, California

Facilitator: Michelle Mauthe Harvey

Number of Attendees: 18

VISION STATEMENTS

My vision for the future of farming in the Suisun Valley is:

- Small farms that offer an insight into California farming to the Bay Area. Finding a niche market that will allow the farmers to thrive.
- A farming region distinctive and unique in our region, California, and perhaps the U.S.
- More emphasis on Suisun Valley as its own niche. Creation of marketing tools and practices to set aside the valley produce and wines as their own entity.
- That future generations will be able to make a living farming. That the increasing population and farming can co-exist.
- Luxury class wines produced from profitable grape growing with the appellation.
- Turn Suisun Valley into a smaller version of Napa Valley, wineries, eateries, art, fruit stands, bed and breakfasts, etc.
- Ag tourism, ability to mix some commercial sales with ag related products.
- Agri-tourism like Napa Valley.
- Unfortunately the valley will be largely small (smallest possible); holdings probably farmed by a few farmers actually as “landscape.” Full time farmers will have trouble holding on to their farms.
- Most farmers are not profitable without changing the laws. Will not be cultivated and eventually be converted to housing or industrial development.

CONCERNS

My #1 concern on the future of farming in Suisun Valley is tied to county regulations:

- Regulations—zoning restrictions.
- Declining ag profits; county regulations not flexible.
- The use of pre-existing building for business purposes on agricultural land. For example, a previous retail building that cannot have a business under current county regulations.
- Constructive regulations dealing with all facets of agriculture.
- Will the county allow the changes we may need to survive?

My #1 concern on the future of farming in Suisun Valley is tied to agricultural economic development:

- Lack of willingness to think in terms of opportunities followed by decisive action.
- Developing markets for present dominant crop wine grapes.

Secondary concerns tied to county regulations:

- Residential housing is restricting Suisun Valley farm and cropland area. There should be recognition of viable areas and open space regulations put in place.

Secondary concerns tied to agricultural economic development:

- We need to develop a name or brand for Suisun valley (name recognition).
- Are the property owners of the valley willing to participate in agriculture?
- Markets and market rebound competition in foreign markets without quid pro quo.
- Taking the grape harvest past just selling the raw material and start to make finished product in the valley (wineries).

Secondary concerns tied to cost of doing business:

- Finding labor to work farms—county operate an employment bureau?
- Maintaining enough income to keep the next generations interested in farming.

Other secondary concerns:

- Disconnect between county, city of Fairfield, and farmer—how do we get everyone on the same page?
- No viable program for small-parcel (<20–40 acres) conservation easements that would support small operations, specialty crops, or “incubator” farms.

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| RECOMMENDATIONS |
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Regarding County Regulations:

- New supervisors.
- Flexibility in regulations—now it’s a cookie cutter, they just say you can’t do it instead of allowing things if they “do no harm.” ***
- Treat SV like it’s a unique and special place and create uniquely appropriate regulations (and incentives) to sustain it as a special place.
- Recognize that 5-acre and other small parcels can be viable enterprises and have zoning to support these start up and other part time farms. **
- Regulate community from within—a committee of people to oversee and overview businesses and zoning—have people regulating us now who have no farm background and are not farmers and not from our community *** need to reflect local needs by “knowing local.”
- City/county split—city can say what the county can do but not the other way around, here ag is an addendum, need a more reciprocal relationship.
- Allow more flexibility in accessory use but limit it so that it is compatible with farming and community character—don’t foster new development, but allow use of existing facilities even if not strictly “ag use.”
- Level the playing field in county regs so that they are consistent with regs in other CA counties and SV can be more competitive with its neighbors (recognize competition you can’t control—globalization—and deal with what you can.
- Have ag commissioner promote ag—get help from county on promotions.

- Allow enough flexibility in interpretation of local laws to allow value-added and agri-tourism.
- Seek ways to level the playing field with international competitors.

Regarding Other Issues:

- Need marketing and promotional assistance from the county (should be Ag Com's job).
- Support incubator farms.
- Make it easier for small farmers to start up – e.g. make it easier for them to get farm labor, maybe the county could create an employment agency for farm labor to take care of the paper work and other related regs to make sure they're documented, paid properly, etc.
- Hire somebody to do economic development for the county (not just the cities) and include ag economic development and advocacy.
- Need the capacity to capture new opportunities to take us into the future.
- Subsidize farmers to farm in Suisun Valley like Europe—if cities want us to be their park, they should help out—OR you allow us to decide what it takes for us to stay in business.
- We need help determining what needs to happen to maintain what we're doing now for profit so we can stay in business.
- Defeat Measure J.
- Redirect attention to identifying services that farmers are providing today, measure them and find a way to pay for that—carbon sequestration, controlling flats, reservoir for capturing rain e.g. eco services (green payments).
- Have a vision—use current process to create it—create the plan sell it and ask the people of the city of Fairfield to help pay for it—ballot initiative asking people to support farms.
- Change the regulations so that you don't thwart agriculture so farmers can't sustain their businesses—create viable ag districts & use other mechanisms to help.
- Can't have both—either ease up on the regs or pay the farmers to keep farming.
- Education and outreach to elected officials at city and county level (esp. Board of Supervisors) as well as the public—have educated supervisors enact new regs.
- Adjust property taxes so that they are more income based so farmers pay less taxes if they don't have a good year.
- Hire a really brilliant marketing person to promote SV ag products (like Napa, Lodi or even the Rogue River Valley in Oregon).
- Market our assets, we're right on Rte 80, close to the Bay Area.
- Need sources of funds to grow the future?—continued funding to promote what's already happening so it can increase.
- Build on current efforts, get more people to do it since some already are.
- Assessment district like Lodi.
- What if you took \$100 out of each city household and put it into the farm community.
- Use funding from the City of Fairfield coming from lawsuit settlement (8 years of \$200K which expires in 2010).
- Identify opportunities not problems.

- Improve attitudes, start exploring the possibilities and possible solutions to problems and what could they bring instead of why they won't work.
- Transition to ways to make money – how to hang on until we get to the other side.
- How to manage cost of switching crops that require different equipment and other technology.
- Identify new markets, e.g. Whole Foods who came to the Valley and were speechless, they want to buy more local, Raleys is buying straight from the fields exploit the supermarkets desire to buy fresh and local—to make this work, WF needs at least 4 local growers to fulfill their produce needs, all we'd need is a refrigerated truck and enough folks to supply a full product line. WF needs to give a letter of intent to show they are committed so the growers will take the risk.
- Change our approach to meet new markets that want fresh local produce.
- Create the infrastructure to make the transition to more lucrative production practices whether for crushing grapes or cooling produce and find a way to bring it to the marketplace.
- Work with new opportunities without sacrificing the investment already made, such as vines.
- Allow more shared use of facilities.
- Match up the capabilities of SV with the marketplace.
- Agritourism is great, but we need more sources for sales than that; you can't get enough tourists here to take home all the wine we produce; promote our area and attract the infrastructure to commit to the Valley to move large quantities of what we grow.
- Look at the capital market not the produce market for infrastructure.
- Need diversified markets, a few niche and direct markets aren't enough to move all the supply—need commitment from new buyers so people feel safer in new ventures.
- Need experience in sales as well as production.
- Need an anchor commodity or crop that can distinguish the Valley and marketing can rely on (grapes have been that, but have been hurt because of the global market).
- Need to start looking for capital and explore all options fully not just the silver bullet, need to stay flexible.
- Need branding for the Valley, incredible location, better growing conditions and soil than Napa, 2nd oldest AVA to Napa, build off of agri-tourism and create an identity to market and use to charge a premium—(Napa started with the wine but has spilled over from wine to things as far fledged as chocolate)—use agri-tourism as a marketing mechanism not an end to itself (Livermore is another example).
- Need ability to be a winery even if not winery facility.
- Farmers must choose to compete, then your competitive platform has to differentiate on your own merits (that's the substance to branding) it's the tenants that you choose to use to compete – not just the logo, the logo is just the symbol of it.
- Use the Fund to build the vision and momentum to make change happen.

- Build community support for SV to BE the next Napa—support agriculture and engage the people of Fairfield and Vacaville to buy local as well as getting it from tourists coming from San Francisco—promote SV like Napa residents promote Napa.
- Find ways to energize and support the farmers who are feeling defeated and encourage them to take the risk to compete and to commit to a future for agriculture in the Valley.
- Find out if the next generation is willing to take the risk and enter agriculture.
- Communicate across the board with the people of Fairfield half of whom are living within the AVA, we need a consolidated, competitive stance and put it at the same level of importance as the air force base, unmix the message.
- I would love to compete. I've grown all sorts of things and need help figuring out what to transition to safely and profitably and sustainably.
- Vision, passion, leadership and action—it should come from within the Valley.
- Need somebody like Mondavi with vision and passion to lead and to act.
- Find the next step—then GO.
- When you go to market, you literally have to go.
- Get the supervisors to supervise the bureaucrats (staff) to intent of voters and say agriculture is a priority and start paying attention to it.
- GO!