

# Sacramento Region Food System Collaborative Phase I: Final Report



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**Sacramento Region Food System Collaborative**  
**Executive Summary: Final Report**  
**January 5, 2010**

**Introduction**

This report is a summary of the activities undertaken by Valley Vision during 2009 for the Sacramento Region Food System Collaborative project, funded by The California Endowment. The project's purpose was to bring together public, private and nonprofit stakeholders in the six-county Capital region of California to inform and influence policy initiatives relevant to the regional food system. Initiatives included food access and security, land use planning, local food purchasing plans, and rural economic development.

The project addresses several key challenges in the region: food security and access, defined as “access by all people at all times to enough nutritious food for an active healthy life”; the rise of food-related diseases such as diabetes, obesity and heart diseases; food safety; and the loss of agricultural land primarily due to ag land conversion (200,000 acres from 1998 to 2005). Consumers' ability to access nutritious, fresh food is largely dependent on market-based systems that offer food choices based on price and convenience factors and are limited to available access points, many being remote or absent in underserved areas. Locally sourced foods can be fresher and healthier yet are generally more expensive and less convenient than pre-packaged foods to prepare. These economic realities and others, when combined with a web of laws and regulations, conspire to block healthy food access to far too many residents of the region. Additionally, only 2% of the food produced in the region is consumed in the region.<sup>1</sup>

Dozens of different agencies and organizations are working on these issues in this region along the continuum of food production, distribution, access, and land use planning, but these diverse stakeholders had limited opportunity and capacity to network or work collaboratively. The California Endowment funded Valley Vision to convene public, private, and nonprofit stakeholders in a process that will approach solutions for the primary needs together to improve chances of food system impact: increasing the consumption of healthy foods, especially in underserved communities; strengthening the local market that supports agriculture in the region; and linking food security, access and health.

The project achieved several significant outcomes:

- Built an expanding and inclusive food system cohort of diverse stakeholders – the Sacramento Region Food System Collaborative – committed to working together on health and food policy system issues;
- Created three Workgroups (Food Access, Education and Ag Sustainability) that have recommended eight interlocking priorities for policy focus and action to advance the goals and outcomes of the Collaborative for the next stage of the project;
- Raised the visibility of food policy issues and opportunities in the region;
- Developed alliances with organizations including state agencies that can support implementation of the Food System Collaborative (FSC) recommendations.

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<sup>1</sup> See “Sacramento Region Local Market Assessment” [www.sacog.org/rucs/wiki](http://www.sacog.org/rucs/wiki).

- Documented the process, including preparation of resource materials, for developing a food system collaborative that could be replicated in other regions; and,

This document is supplemented by an appendix that includes all reference materials prepared during the course of the project such as research and policy briefs; meeting agendas and summaries of FSC convenings and meetings of the three Workgroups; presentations; a snapshot of the website; and stakeholder mapping of the food system network to date.

### **Methodology**

One of the goals of this project is to create a “methodology and approach [that is] replicable to benefit other areas of California in similar need.”<sup>2</sup> In this section, we provide detailed notes about the methodology and approach used thus far. We will share an outline of this information in further outreach and communication plans, as well as incorporating any further methodology into the final replication process.

#### Initial research report: “Food Access in the Sacramento Region: An Assessment of Access to Healthy Foods in Low-Income Communities of the Sacramento Region.”

In order to gain a better understanding of the environment surrounding food access and food security policy issues in the six-county region, 28 stakeholder interviews were conducted during March and April 2009 to access expert opinion and facts. Because this project encompasses the local food system, access to healthy foods in underserved communities, and the issues that arise at the intersection of these two things, careful attention was paid to the construction and representation of the interview sample. Interviewees included representatives from the region’s health care systems, public health officers, nonprofits that serve low-income communities, food banks and pantries, growers, agriculture commissioners, county Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) directors, and others involved in local food access issues. The interviews were conducted by phone and in person, and took an average of 45 minutes each. The full report is included in the Appendix to this Executive Summary and features the list of interviews and interview questions..

In addition to these 28 interviews, five key informants drawn from different food sectors were involved in two project start-up meetings, and asked to provide information, insights, and advice on various matters. During the second meeting of this group, an exercise was conducted to uncover barriers to food access in the region, as well as to identify strengths within the current system. The outcomes of that exercise are also included in the report, along with the list of participants and details regarding the structure of the exercise.

Additionally, Appendix C of the report included information on various structures of Food Policy Councils (FPC), one of the ways many cities and regions are working on these issues. The structure of a FPC may vary depending on the region served and the issues on which the Council is focused, but all FPCs work to strengthen the local food system. Based on online research and phone interviews, this briefing paper offered case studies of several FPCs, highlighting governance structure, best practices, lessons learned, and outcomes.

The “Food Access in the Sacramento Region” report was submitted to The California Endowment on May 5, 2009, and made available for the general public the following day. Additionally, it was used as the basis for the first project convening in June (see below).

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<sup>2</sup> See Valley Vision’s original proposal to The California Endowment December 2008.

### Outreach: Convenings and Workgroups

Effective outreach is crucial on a project that a) is starting “from scratch”, and b) involves such a large, diverse stakeholder population. Valley Vision has utilized several outreach methods to continually increase exposure and participation: email announcements, personal contacts, and attendance at meetings of related projects. A more detailed outreach strategy for moving forward will be presented in a separate communications plan.

The stakeholder database for the Food Collaborative has expanded over the past nine months; currently the database includes over 180 stakeholders. (See Appendix, Section 6.b.) Beginning with a list of about 30 names submitted by staff from The California Endowment, the database initially began to expand from the research interviews and contacts given by interviewees, as well as from Valley Vision’s network including contacts developed through its work on Sacramento Area Council of Governments’ SACOG’s Rural and Urban Connections Strategy (RUCS). Our best outreach effort yet has been through good, old-fashioned word-of-mouth. For the first several months of the project, Valley Vision received 10-20 emails within two weeks of each convening from stakeholders asking to be added to the database, or submitting additional contacts to be added to the database. Additionally, each convening attracted new stakeholders to be added to the database.

Three convenings of the Food Collaborative have been held: June 2, July 23, and September 10, 2009. A fourth is planned for January 12, 2010. Each convening is announced with an initial email to the entire database and followed by one or two more announcements, depending on initial response. Finally, a reminder email is sent within a few days to a week prior to the meeting. Project staff also uses every opportunity to share information about the Food System Collaborative and upcoming meetings at other events and meetings. This includes contacting individuals and organizations whose interests intersect with those of the Collaborative and attending meetings of related projects. The latter approach also helps Valley Vision, and thus the Food Collaborative, stay informed of related work happening throughout the region. Meeting notes are sent to the data base contacts. Information is posted on the Valley Vision website and updated regularly.

Each of the convenings has included presentations on research and initiatives being led by key regional partners. The July 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting also featured a special presentation by Mark Winne, a national food policy expert with over 30 years of experience developing community food systems.<sup>3</sup> Mark’s presentation aimed at familiarizing participants with related activities occurring in other states and regions across the United States. Additionally, each of the workgroups had presentations by participants to facilitate learning and leveraging of existing resources and opportunities. To maximize Mr. Winne’s time, Valley Vision worked with the Capital region’s community leadership development organization, the American Leadership Forum, Mountain Valley Chapter, to host a reception that evening attended by 25+ leaders from business, government, the media, and nonprofits to broaden awareness of these issues and the local effort underway to address them.

In addition, Valley Vision reached out to elected officials throughout the region to inform them about the existence and work of the Food System Collaborative and, in particular, to invite them to the July convening with presenter Mark Winne. Convenings have had representation from top officials in the California Department of Food and Agriculture and California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA), including attendance of CalEPA Secretary Linda Adams at the July meeting. Representatives from State Senate and Assembly offices have participated along with local officials and their representatives as well.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.markwinne.com](http://www.markwinne.com)



convening. Valley Vision will continue providing a dedicated link with access to resources materials from its own webpage until then<sup>4</sup>, with a link to the new website prior to the unveiling.

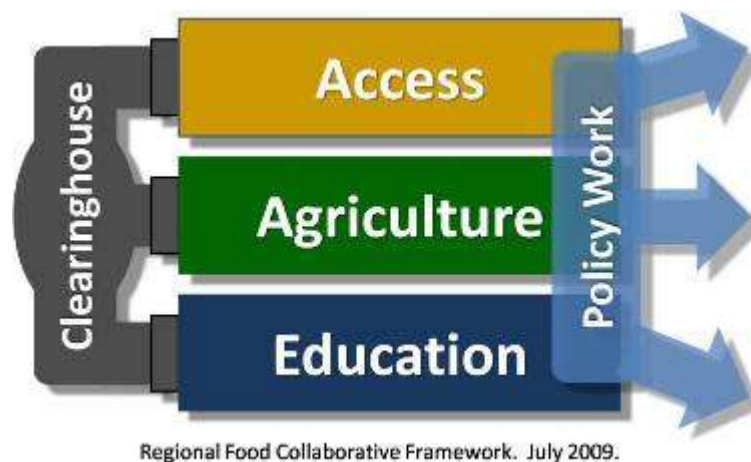
#### Developing a framework and goals

The first convening of the Food Collaborative was June 2, 2009. The highlights of the policy brief on Food Access and food policy councils were presented as context. With 46 attendees, we left with three outcomes:

1. A list of the issues and areas the participants would like to see the Collaborative focus on over the next two years;
2. The realization that stakeholders involved in different parts of the local food system don't have the opportunity to network, and the fact that their work would be benefited from that opportunity; and
3. The opportunity to inform stakeholders about the Food Collaborative and provide an update on the RUCS project.

Following the convening, Valley Vision analyzed the list of 99 items from this visioning exercise and sorted them into 15 themes. The themes were loaded into an online survey tool and stakeholders were requested by email to rank the themes into priorities. Participation in the survey ranking was 33% of email requests sent.

Results of the survey were shared at the July 2009 convening for comment and refinement. Additionally, national food policy expert Mark Winne gave an informative presentation at this convening. Reactions to the priorities and to Mark's presentation led to a robust discussion out of which Valley Vision created an organizational framework that was agreed upon by participants:



This framework was analyzed following the meeting and refined further by Valley Vision staff to best capture stakeholder input and to give context and structure to achieve the goals of the Food System Collaborative in the most efficient and economical way possible. Hence, the energies of the FSC would be organized into three co-dependent work groups: a Food **Access** Workgroup, **Agriculture** Sustainability Workgroup, and **Education** Workgroup. A **Clearinghouse** function would be necessary to store and distribute information, contacts, and project resources for centralized communication and coordination. (Note: the website now in development will absorb some, but not all of this clearinghouse function.) Rather than developing a separate policy "committee," each workgroup would

<sup>4</sup> [www.valleyvision.org/work/priorities/food.html](http://www.valleyvision.org/work/priorities/food.html)

develop high leverage **Policy** changes in its area and utilize workgroup resources and those of the FSC to seek its implementation.

Participants at the September 2009 convening approved the approach and the groups met for the first time in short breakout sessions at that meeting, following an overview of major local projects including the Sacramento Food Bank and Soil Born Farms Education Project. During these sessions, each workgroup developed 2-5 S.M.A.R.T goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound) to be achieved within 2 years. The goals were modified and ratified at October meetings of each workgroup. The workgroups' goals are presented and discussed in the "**Key Findings**" section of this document.

Valley Vision introduced a process of project and goal development and achievement abbreviated to: *Discovery, Design, Implementation, and Evaluation*. During the Discovery phase, project participants brainstorm all additional information needed to accomplish a stated goal. The steps to completion are then Designed and the project is Implemented. Evaluation takes place throughout the process. At October and December workgroup meetings, each of the groups brainstormed their goals, determining what additional data was needed to design steps towards completion of the goals.

#### Lessons learned

This methodology has been successful in creating the Food System Collaborative and planning and development of the project thus far. Along the way, we have found two areas of our approach to be examined more carefully.

Based on the positive outcomes and feedback from the first meeting of the Food System Collaborative (FSC) in June, Valley Vision included a discussion about governance structure on the agenda for the July meeting. Questions related to how decisions would be made by the Collaborative and by whom generated intense discussion and passionate exchange. While the discussion was worthwhile and yielded information that helped inform future agendas and the direction of the project, it became clear that any decisions about governance structure were premature until the goals of the FSC were further refined and ratified. Even so, to date no critical question has arisen involving resource allocation choices or decisions about approach or direction that has required a highly structured governance apparatus to settle disputes. This is likely to change as the FSC matures, but for now, a consensual process of group decision-making by the whole remains the norm.

As with any new project, particularly one with such a diverse stakeholder population, clarifying expectations, identifying existing organizational assets, and reaching agreement on common definitions can be challenging. Significant time has been given to discussions on these issues, as well as identifying critical data gaps that will help inform recommended actions. Because these discussions are an integral part of developing collaborative work and can help create a higher level of commitment among participants, it is important to be aware that they are an essential part of the planning process, and that they are given the necessary time and facilitated dialogue to work them through.

Finally, defining the Collaborative and the purpose of the Collaborative as a whole requires ongoing effort. In order to be of the most benefit to the region, and to get the most input and participation from *all* stakeholder groups, Valley Vision and the Food System Collaborative must continue to affirm that, while one of the main goals is to increase the viability of local markets, this does not exclude the broader value of ag activities in the region—in fact, inclusion of those activities will help to support agriculture in the region in total.

## Key Findings

The project generated several overall findings as well as specific findings related to research, presentations, and the Workgroups.

### Overall findings include:

- There are many food access and ag sustainability activities in the region and many different actors; there are strong resources, but they need to be pulled together (see asset mapping of network).
- There is high commitment to expanding and improving the local food system and strong interest in participating in an ongoing Food System Collaborative (FSC).
- The FSC should focus on policy and action; it needs champions among elected officials and key institutions.
- The governance structure should be a focus in the next stage of planning.
- The FSC needs an independent third-party to manage and facilitate the FSC during the next stage of its growth (12-18 months) to help build the capacity of partner organizations to assume FSC leadership and management roles, and to engage communities in need.

### Key findings (from the Food Access Assessment, the Appendix to that report, and from Mark Winne's presentation):

- There are two primary barriers to consumption of healthy foods: "system structure" and "community (dis)empowerment." The former includes issues like lack of grocery stores in low-income neighborhoods; transportation needs; and prevalence of fast food. The latter addresses issues related to awareness and behavior of individuals including education about options for fresh foods, especially fresh food options for children.
- Producers face large structural issues, including a marketplace geared to exports, consolidation of food production infrastructure, and local regulations and policies. Small and mid-size producers often struggle within a food distribution system in many ways geared towards large-scale production.
- There is no Department of Food and Ag at the regional or local level to pull decision-makers for these policy systems together to focus on policy alignment and integration.
- Food policy partnership models include food policy councils, networks, task forces, coalitions, working groups, and collaboratives. They range along a spectrum of activity, from cooperation and coordination, to collaboration with a greater focus on systems change.
- Most food policy councils (FPCs) serve as advisors to governing bodies and focus on comprehensive assessments of food systems. They work within existing governmental frameworks.
- Many FPCs focus on food security, access and health, **or** ag viability issues. However, increasingly they are looking at the intersection of these areas along with an increasing emphasis on health and the environment, including relations to climate change, overall land use planning, and sustainability. Initiatives based on these intersections are increasingly part of community development strategies.
- Most FPCs are local, county, or statewide, but not regional at the scale of the six-county Sacramento region.
- Operational resources for FPCs and other policy bodies are constrained, while interest in and opportunities for food systems policies are accelerating. FPCs and other food policy groups provide an important proactive, ongoing forum. In a few cases, municipalities are creating staff positions to help implement the recommendations of the councils.
- Sacramento will benefit from the integration of food access, health and security issues in the context of a regional strategy, and from having a strong convenor/facilitator.

Workgroups Findings:

The areas of focus for the Workgroups were overlapping and the work as it proceeded was interdependent. Each Workgroup identified priority areas, data gaps, and recommended actions for the next stage of project implementation, which included developing goals for each area. Preliminary research was conducted to clarify data gaps that need to be filled. Priority areas are:

Food Access	Education	Ag Sustainability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The region has a food aggregation and distribution facility dedicated to sourcing fresh, local food that is a replicable model.</li> <li>➤ There are new access points for fresh, healthy food.</li> <li>➤ There are expanded areas of urban land in ag production.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The FSC can support a program to increase access to healthy foods in school lunches with an urban and a rural pilot.</li> <li>➤ The FSC can support community, healthy food education programs, developing educational materials focusing on consumption of local foods for new access points.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The FSC takes action regarding the loss of County subventions due to loss of funding for the CA Land Conservation Act (Williamson Act).</li> <li>➤ Improve integration of technical assistance and resource availability for farmers, especially new ones.</li> <li>➤ Increase direct market sales within each county.</li> </ul>

Achievement of several of these goals requires additional data; some of the data is available but needs to be aggregated, and other data needs to be developed:

- Increase Food Access Points: Develop a better understanding of the current access point baseline in order to set a targeted number of new access points. (Note: Research into definitions by food policy projects in other regions found that food access points are defined broadly and may include any place where nutritious food is widely accessible, or any non-emergency nutritious food source.)
- Expand Urban Ag Land in Production: The target number of acres or areas will be determined following review of currently available information and identification of specific gaps. Several notable projects in other regions focus on developing inventories of public and private lands that could be used for community and local food production, including community gardens and other forms of urban agriculture.
- Increase Direct Market Sales: Define definition for direct market sales and develop current baseline.
- Healthy School Lunch and Education Pilot Programs: Need an assessment of the status of current discussions about issues in potential partner school districts, as well as research into best practices and other programs related to healthy food education currently being undertaken in the region.
- Technical Assistance and Resource Availability for Farmers: Identify the existing assets and work with farmers and farming community to identify gaps.
- Food Access, Nutrition, Health and Ag Viability Policies: Identify existing food and ag-related policies in existing general plans, relevant considerations in general plan updates currently underway, zoning ordinances, economic development strategies and other policy documents.

**Recommendations**

Overall Recommendations:

- Based on need and participant and policy maker feedback, the work of the Sacramento Region Food System Collaborative to impact the local food system should continue past the February 2010 terminus of The California Endowment’s grant.

- A trusted neutral convenor such as Valley Vision, should continue to provide support to the Food System Collaborative (FSC) to carry out its eight priority action areas and measure their impact; to conduct critical baseline research for informed action; develop the FSC governance structure, and continue to grow participation and build general awareness to enable market development and needed policy changes.
- Sacramento Region partners should continue to focus on a collaborative or network model rather than a food policy council given our unique regional characteristics, while ensuring that its work is connected with local, regional, state, and federal policymakers.
- The next stage of the FSC should focus on building the capacity of current and new leaders and their organizations to manage and facilitate collaborative efforts so that Valley Vision can hand these tasks over to a qualified organization(s) to assure long-term success and sustainability of the FSC.
- The next stage of the FSC should seek to resolve central questions, including but not limited to governance and decision-making, mutual expectations, action timelines, , issues of membership and diversity, and broadening the funding and support base.
- The next phase of the FSC’s growth should focus on conducting and assembling critical baseline research about food access and ag sustainability data in our region for evidenced-based decision-making.
- The next phase should identify champions and educate the general public and policy makers about concepts like food security, sustainability, justice, and food policy. This is a long-term and ongoing process.
- The next phase should affirm its support for all levels of agriculture within the region, from small growers to production agriculture.
- The process should continue to be aligned with SACOG’s Rural Urban Connections Strategy (RUCS).

#### Work Group Priorities for System Change and Capacity Building:

##### Food Access:

- Coordinate with current planning of the Sacramento Region locally-sourcing and marketing food aggregation and distribution hub led by Soil Born Farms and California Association of Family Farmers (CAFF). Partners are working on the business plan, which will define the nature and structure of the proposed facility.
- Map priority access points to healthy food, including: grocery stores, farmers’ markets, farm stands, institutional points, and community/school gardens, as well as corner (convenience) stores that could be converted to carrying fresh produce.
- Continue the conversation regarding “healthy” foods: whether to focus on locally-grown produce only or fresh produce in general. The workgroup was conflicted over whether demand for local healthy food should be created before asking farmers to make this shift in markets, or if only local food should be focused on from the beginning, rather than a shift in messaging after the educational program has been initiated.

##### Education:

- Further clarify two general goal areas to provide support to the other two workgroups and address specific topic/issue areas.
- Determine the feasibility of supporting a pilot program to increase access to healthy foods in school lunches – possible candidates include schools in the Sacramento City Unified School District and the Yuba City Unified School Districts, working with the districts. Explore the possibility of including youth organizing, connecting with existing programs at area schools.
- Assess the opportunity to support community/consume local/healthy food educational efforts, especially with materials to support new food access points. Coordinate with existing partners

involved in related efforts and identify new partners to reach targeted communities, including in The California Endowment's project area in South Sacramento neighborhoods.

Ag Sustainability:

- Send a letter to the Governor and legislative leaders to express support for state funding for the California Land Conservation Act (Williamson Act) subventions to counties, to help farmers maintain viable operations and to conserve farmlands. Consider local strategies for addressing the economic concerns of farmers and counties resulting from severe budget cuts.
- Support creation of a state level ombudsperson to assist with state level regulations.
- Create an ombudsperson to work with farmers and ranchers on local regulatory issues.
- Create uniform codes and ordinances across the region.
- Encourage creation of local Ag Resources Centers; assess the model being developed in Sutter County for possible replication.
- Identify barriers to market entry for small growers, especially those with language barriers.

**Conclusion**

Valley Vision will convene a meeting of all the workgroups and stakeholders on January 12, 2010 to discuss the status of the project and identify the priority implementation recommendations for the next stage of the planning process. Valley Vision is developing a communications plan to disseminate findings, recommendations and next steps, especially to the region's local elected officials and to key stakeholders and institutions. Finally, Valley Vision and partners will continue to work on identifying resources to support the next phase of the planning process, which will result in research to fill critical data gaps, an implementation action plan, governance structure for the Food System Collaborative, and operational resources.