



Uplift Regional Plan Part II: Petition by the Central Coast Resilient Food Systems Community of Practice for the Inclusion of Local Food System Transformation

To: Uplift

EDC

REACH

MBEP

Steering Committee: (Northern) Francisco Rodriguez, Kristina Chavez Wyatt, Gabriela Lopez Chavez, Enrique Arreola, Richard Vaughn, Michael Castro, Jackie Cruz, Alma Cervantes, Eloy Ortiz, Diane Ortiz, Maria Elena Manzo, (Southern) Jeremy Goldberg, Michael Boyer, Cameron Gray, Joyce Howerton, Nicki Parr, Vanessa Bechtel, Wendy Sims-Moten, Corlei Prieto, Rita Casaverde, Rebecca Evans, Denise El Amin, Scott Lathrop

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submitted via electronic mail

Re: Uplift Regional Plan Part II: Inclusion of Local Food System Transformation

The Central Coast Resilient Food Systems Community of Practice is encouraged by your bold and public commitment to economic opportunity, equity, and sustainability, which will build more resilient regional economic development for our collective future. In order to effectively achieve such a goal and ensure the greatest impact, our regional food system and its necessary and localized transformation must be prioritized.

Based on Brookings Institute data, food systems, particularly agriculture and hospitality, not only are the largest employment sector, but are also projected to be the largest job creators over the next several years. If equity and environmental justice are two critical criteria for the future economy of the Central Coast, then the transformation of many current, as well as the development and actualization of new opportunity jobs for regional food systems is required. Due to ongoing confusion about the scope of food system work, this definition is provided:

"A localized food system encompasses the closed-loop path of food as it moves from farm to table within the same region, including where it is grown, processed, distributed, consumed, and disposed of."

Agriculture and Hospitality, the top industries in our region, are the dominant sectors in our food system employing a large existing workforce. Uplift has stated that improving job quality and productivity in these parts of the food system is essential. The global food system today is one of the largest contributors to climate change, generating [one-third of all greenhouse gas emissions](#). Food economies are among the key leverage points to influencing systemic change and our Central Coast region can lead in contributing to and coordinating effective new strategies for healthier, more just, and resilient food systems.

The [Federal Government](#) affirms the importance and benefits of regional food systems, “The most effective solutions will address the interrelated challenges across both [food and nutrition security](#) and [climate change](#) and work towards [transforming national and global food systems](#). This work will include strategies to [promote local and regional food systems](#), which have been shown to reduce food waste, support local economies, increase the biodiversity, freshness, and nutritional value of foods, and reduce food insecurity.”

Communities become more resilient in the face of disasters and climate change when they regionalize/localize their food system. Creating shorter food supply chains composed mostly of local producers provides a more sustainable and equitable alternative to the dominant way of moving food, while also retaining more capital for local reinvestment. Small and midsize producers can capture a greater share of the consumer dollar, connect with local market opportunities, and feed local residents. To transform our food economy, we must:

1. recreate the regional and community-based businesses and jobs that were lost decades ago to distant centralized monopolies;
2. invest in our small and midsize producers and local food businesses;
3. invest in infrastructure needed to store, aggregate, process, distribute, and market their products within our region.

These economic investments should be informed by a rational, climate friendly, and equitable long term plan for food systems rooted in shared community vision. The Regional Plan Part II would position our region to draw down more government, philanthropic, and private investment funds for infrastructure and partnership implementation that often require a local match and evidence of community buy-in. State and Federal funding sources favor regional clusters, for example. Furthermore, to be competitive in seeking resources the Central Coast must plan and collaborate across counties to protect our largest industries - making the Regional Plan Part II the foundation to that work.

Like many regional food systems and rural economies, the six counties of the Central Coast are all characterized by a deep wealth gap divided along racial lines, leading to serious levels of poverty and lack of equitable and affordable access to nutritious food. Some areas of this region are known for wealth and fame, creating a misconception about our food system’s stability and economic prosperity. The fact is counties within the Central Coast have the highest poverty rates in

California: for children, 17% and for single adult families with or without children, one of the highest in the state at 29.5%.

The six counties share a number of common characteristics, including:

- rural, semi-urban, urban, and high wealth to high poverty communities;
- five of the six counties border the Pacific Ocean and are home to three of the state's highest revenue fishing ports while the sixth possesses a wealth of crop and range lands across the greater Monterey Bay's foodshed;
- thriving food systems led by Indigenous and other communities of color that exemplify many of the cultural foods and practices necessary for the health and prosperity of our nation's future;
- growth in local ag tech, marine robotics, and farming drones sectors are accelerating at a breakneck pace and will be key economic drivers in food systems for years to come;
- home to one of the nation's most active environmental movements, which has led to local and national innovation and experimentation with food combating climate change;
- a base of operations for a variety of state level technical resources and research institutions;
- both local and state level non-federal financial resources - many of which are increasingly concerned about the instability of local and regional economies, health, communities, and foodsheds - and the growing awareness of the power that regional food systems have in addressing these matters.

In spite of these shared features, the local and regional food systems of the six counties are highly fragmented - as are governments, non-government resources, small and mid-scale food businesses, communities of color, research institutions, and food system plans, all siloed within themselves. This isolation has created relationship bubbles, disconnect between the state and local levels, and an increased distrust of institutions by communities, especially those most marginalized. By each partner acting independently, unintended consequences in planning and implementation occur, resulting in wasted time, resources, a breakdown of trust, and ultimately a continuation of the status quo. Fragmentation of the food system also has significant impacts on the environment and health and wellness of low-income communities.

RECOMMENDATION: The incorporation of the following regional food system strategies into the Uplift Central Coast Regional Plan Part II:

1. **Preservation of the Food Ecosystem.** Preserve California indigenous cultures through land and sea habitat conservation and direct investment in their business proposals. Support community land trusts and create a diversity of ways for the community to contribute and participate in the ongoing health and vitality of working lands. Expand climate-smart agriculture and organic certification. Support resource conservation districts in implementation of conservation management practices that enhance water supply, improve soil health, sequester carbon, and reduce atmospheric greenhouse gasses. Establish a program targeted to support succession planning, new farmers, employee-owned businesses and existing farmworkers and employees in accessing land and securing equitable land tenure, with a focus on turnover of local land ownership and facilitating land ownerships to family or BIPOC and small farm businesses. Conserve fisheries and marine environments while using them in a sustainable way. Invest in marine habitat restoration and symbiotic aquaculture to produce food.
2. **Workforce Development.** Recruit the next generation of farmers, fisherfolk, ranchers, and food entrepreneurs through employer and industry collaboration with regional institutions of education and vocational and trades training to increase the flow of technically trained and knowledgeable students into the food sector workforce and leadership. Invest in apprenticeship and training programs in technical, in-demand fields (e.g., butchery) to increase access to quality jobs for individuals without a college degree, targeted to disinvested communities. Increase foundational knowledge and skill training of farmworkers through community college certificate programs to broaden career pathways and elevate wages. Support development of school childrens' foundational knowledge about agriculture by enhancing agricultural literacy and education programs at K-12 educational institutions and on farms.
3. **Entrepreneurship for Intergenerational Wealth Building.** Create micro entrepreneurship and ownership entry points with access to educational resources, tools and capital that nurture women's and immigrants' drive to business ownership in the food sector. Improve visibility and ease of navigation of existing support services, particularly for entrepreneurs who are women and/or BIPOC. Increase outreach, education, technical assistance, and loans or other forms of favorable financing to restaurants and small food businesses undergoing worker ownership transitions. Promote land-based training to create a pipeline of farmworkers becoming farm owners and operators.
4. **Work Environments.** Increase technical assistance to employers to create positive and respectful work environments and reduce work-related stress to develop higher quality farming, ranching and fishing jobs. Invest in employer-provided or sponsored language education for monolingual English speakers to learn the community's primary languages (e.g., Spanish, Mixtec), and for speakers of other languages to learn English within standard working

hours to reduce language barriers. Build partnerships and programs that will expand farmworker organizing and enforcement of labor laws in the agricultural sector so farmworkers can increase their collective bargaining power. Support affordable housing and childcare to enhance daily life of food system workers. Address cost gaps in food business start up, such as health and safety permits, equipment, staffing, and financing application fees. Investment in climate smart transportation vehicles and large equipment, such as electric, solar powered, and/or hydrogen cells.

5. **Economic Viability of Food Businesses.** Integrate food system business support services and invest in those in our community for whom traditional business development services are out of reach, with a focus on BIPOC, immigrants, women, and individuals with low income. Increase access to technical assistance for small farmers, especially those who lack higher education, are new and do not speak English. Support access and navigation to existing government programs (e.g., USDA, UCANR, CDFR). Pilot innovative farming and fishing economic viability models (e.g., Farm of the Future) and technology transfer from our research institutions. Develop producer collaboratives, technical assistance and middle of the supply chain infrastructure to enable smaller producers to aggregate supply for opportunities with larger buyers such as school districts. Facilitate the development and deployment of small-scale agricultural technologies and marine robotics, such as drones and sensors, to increase productivity and employment opportunities for newly-trained graduates. Expand direct sales opportunities at seafood harbor markets and farmers markets.
6. **Middle of the Supply Chain.** Establish a network of food hubs, cold storage, warehousing, aggregators, slaughter houses, processing facilities, and distributors servicing institutions, food banks and businesses that can provide greater returns to producers at lower costs to consumers. Invest in commercial kitchen networks, business incubators, and co-packing facilities to support contract processing by start-ups of value-added agricultural and seafood products.
7. **Institutional Procurement.** Leverage buying power of public institutions - hospitals, schools, correctional facilities - to retain food expenditures in the local economy. Increase local, sustainable and equitable “farm to fork” preferential purchasing by restaurants, food service and retailers. Organize an envelope of services (e.g., insurance billing, home delivery, dietary counseling) to support small producers and MEHKOs in servicing medically supportive meals (“food as medicine”) contracts with health insurers.
8. **Food Sovereignty.** Develop support for expanding existing community farm and garden programs and establishing new ones. Enhance land use policies to encourage local food production and sale, e.g., food truck parks, commercial kitchens.
9. **Food Surplus.** Collaborate with producers, businesses, gleaners, food banks, governments and households to reduce food waste all along the food chain and recycle organic wastes into compost that can be applied to restore soil fertility, save water and reduce groundwater contamination.

10. Coordination and Collaboration. Synthesize and elaborate existing and emerging local food system plans. Create and disseminate an open, bilingual mapping of farmers, community-based organizations, agencies and other entities that are part of the Central Coast's food system for regional partnership matching. Identify the synergies and opportunities gained through integrative efforts, analyze the gaps and develop a regional food action plan to guide private and public investment in the food economy.

Each of these elements is already underway, but largely in the form of parallel, disconnected efforts. What is lacking are the communication, consultation, coordination and collaboration that can build and expand synergies, reduce duplication and individual failures, increase efficient allocation of available and new resources and construct a local, sustainable and equitable food system and movement across the region. Through review, analysis and integration of data, strategies and interventions, we can align efforts for maximum impact and return on investment while also identifying critical gaps not yet addressed.

Our working groups will revisit these strategies and continue to identify and refine infrastructure projects to implement them to propose for funding from the Catalyst Pre Development Phase. We believe that they match your criteria to “prioritize the creation of high-quality jobs, equitable access to jobs and resources, and emphasize developing sustainable and resilient economies and industries,” for strategies to be presented in the Uplift's Regional Plan Part II.

Our region can be a leader with a food system that is more just, more humane, more equitable, and sustainable. The people, partners, and resources are here. Strategic investment in small and midsize producers, local food enterprises, and essential infrastructure will enable us to reclaim the food system for our communities instead of sending profits to distant corporations. The efficacy of these initiatives hinges upon a unified community vision and long-term planning aimed at securing federal and private funding. The food system is the platform for addressing the region's multiple challenges and cultivating a healthier and more prosperous future for all. By strengthening the food system, we lift all boats.

BACKGROUND

The Central Coast Resilient Food Systems Community of Practice (CoP) originally organized to propose investments for CA Jobs First funding and position this region for private-public partnerships. The CoP functions as a platform for cross-sector information exchange and collaboration, bringing together stakeholders and potential business partners in the food system. Since its launch in November 2022, the CoP has grown to more than 100 members with members from all six counties of the Central Coast, representing diverse sectors of the regional food system. Our shared goal is outlining an action program to bolster economic development and reduce fragmentation and inefficiency in the food system. The CoP has coalesced to create a sustainable and just regional food system that can provide equity, nutrition security, climate mitigation, workforce development, new jobs, and economic opportunity for historically underserved communities. Together, these leaders have identified shared programmatic priorities and launched working groups to develop infrastructure projects in the areas of working lands, working waterfronts, and food hubs. Additionally, members are initiating partnerships to design a regional Americorp VISTA infrastructure plan and a commercial kitchen/incubation network.

The CoP is grounded by the California Food Policy Council's [Guiding Principles](#) and fully aligned with Uplift's North Star of Economic Opportunity-Equity-Sustainability. Dr. Chris Benner of the Institute for Social Transformation, UC Santa Cruz, has collaborated on incorporating Solidarity Economics into our efforts. Four of the nine Salinas Inclusive Economic Development Initiative cohort community-based organizations are represented in the CoP to carry forward those lessons toward a more inclusive regional food economy.

We welcome your comments, questions or concerns and invite you to contact Shakira Miracle or Melanie Wong. Thank you for your attention.

Central Coast Resilient Food Systems Community of Practice Members



SIGNATORIES (43)

Peter	Adame	Director of Communications & Sustainability	Lusamerica Foods
Chris	Brown	Development Director	Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA)
Melissa	Cohen	Founder & CEO	HoneyGlue Solutions LLC
Shelley	Dearhart	Co-Chairperson, Monterey County Food System Coalition	Monterey County Food System Coalition
Sierra	Doehr	Executive Director	Saticoy Food Hub
Penny	Ellis	Founder	Open Farm Tours
Nile	Estep	Owner	Good Roots Events and Farmers Markets
Maricela	Fabian	Health Coordinator	Encompass Community Services
Nancy	Faulstich	Executive Director	Regeneración - Pajaro Valley Climate Action
Mireya	Gomez-Contreras	Administrative Co-Leader	Esperanza Community Farms
Michael	Graham	Founder, President, Aquaculturist	Monterey Bay Seaweeds
Rosalyn	Green	Regional Black Power-Building & Justice Reinvestment Director	Building Healthy Communities & Monterey County Black Caucus
Carmen	Herrera Mansir	Executive Director	El Pájero Community Development Corporation
Andrew	Hill	Principal	Pharos Creative
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Esther	Hobbs	Development Director	Meals on Wheels of the Monterey Peninsula
Niaomi	Hrepich, RD	WIC Director, Health Program Coordinator	Nutrition & Fitness Collaborative of the Central Coast
Gustavo	Indarose	Member / Host Organization Representative	Pajaro Valley Food, Farming, and Health Policy Council
Estevan	Jimenez	Executive Chef/ Chef Instructor	Rancho Cielo Youth Campus
Reggie	Knox	CEO	California FarmLink
Josefina	Lara Chávez	Executive Director	Regeneration- Latine Alliance in Agroecology and the Food System
Genevieve	LeBlanc	Sr Food Policy Lead and Coordinator of the Monterey County Food System Coalition	Blue Zones Project Monterey County
Ronnie	Lipschutz	President	Sustainable Systems Research Foundation
Arianna	Loera	Health Educator	Go For Health Collaborative
Ann	Lopez	Executive Director	Center for Farmworker Families
Jenn	Lovewell	Chief Nutrition Officer	Real Good Fish
Melissa	Mahoney	Executive Director	Monterey Bay Fisheries Trust
David	Mancera	Principal Consultant	Mancera Consulting Group
Shakira	Miracle	Executive Director	Santa Barbara County Food Action Network
Laura	Murphy	Soil Scientist	Resource Conservation District Monterey County
Kevin	Norton		
Hester	Parker	Executive Director	Everyone's Harvest
Hector	Reider	Farm to Market Program Co-Director	Community Alliance with Family Farmers
Keith	Rootsaert	Executive Director	Giant Giant Kelp Restoration Project
Kim	Selkoe	Executive Director	Commercial Fishermen of Santa
Jacob	Shafer	Senior Director of Advancement	Meals on Wheels of the Monterey Peninsula
Victoria	Voss	Co-Founder	Get Hooked Seafood
Tom	Willey	owner	T&D Willey Farms
Melanie	Wong	Co-Coordinator	California Food Policy Council
Colleen	Wysocki	Registered Dietitian/Owner	ZEST Nutrition
Deborah	Yashar	Ag & Food Co-op Development Specialist	California Center for Cooperative Development (CCCD)
Javier	Zamora	Farmer	JSM Organics
Lucas	Zucker	Co-Executive Director	Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy (CAUSE)