

Solano Local Food System Alliance
August 6, 2020 meeting minutes
Zoom meeting, 4 pm – 5 pm

Attending:

Elena Karoulina, Sustainable Solano
Stephanie Oelsligle Jordan, Sustainable Solano
Maggie Kolk, Sustainable Solano
Allison Nagel, Sustainable Solano
Heather Pierini, Food is Free Benicia
Priscilla Yeane, Solano County Agriculture Department
Ed King, Solano County Agriculture Department
Mike Ioakimedes, Solano County Fair Association
Louise Dawson, Small Business Development Center
Elizabeth Monteadora, Community Local Food Advisory Board
Juanita Fleming, Solano County Health and Social Services Department
Jahniah McGill, Solano County Environmental Health
Kristin Kiesel, UC Davis Agricultural & Resources Department
Lisa Núñez-Hancock, culinary arts instructor, UR what U Eat

Mission: Create an environmentally sustainable, economically viable, socially just and equitable local food system in Solano County.

I. Welcome & Alliance update: new members, USDA Regional Food Systems Partnership grant application - Elena Karoulina, Sustainable Solano

Several new members have been invited to join the Alliance

- [Solano Land Trust](#)
- [Innovative Health Solutions](#)
- [Food is Free Solano](#)

Local Food Bites newsletter

- First one [launched in June](#)
- Will go out between the Alliance's quarterly meetings to keep members updated about the latest news from Alliance members and local food system news.
- Next one will be in early October. Send news and updates to be included by the end of September to allison@sustainablesolano.org

[USDA Regional Food System Partnership Grant](#)

- Have applied to strengthen the Alliance's efforts and bring in expertise to make the Alliance's work carry more impact
- If get grant, would work in the next 18 months with [Ag Innovations](#), which has helped guide several local food systems

- Our USDA grant application has been recommended for peer review

II. County farming updates; Solano Grown Brand; Farmbudsman transition – Ed King, Agriculture Department; Elena Karoulina; Kristin Kiesel, UC Davis

Effects of COVID-19

- Farms were overwhelmed by demand, with each farm CSA adding a waitlist
- The challenge will be to see if the demand continues
- Kristin Kiesel contributed to an [issue on the impact of COVID on California food and ag](#)
 - She is interested in collecting information on the impact in Solano County
 - There will be a related seminar on Sept. 9

Farmbudsman

- In June, the county Board of Supervisors elected to not continue the Farmbudsman contract
- The SBDC has taken on that position with Sarah Hawkins still fulfilling that role

Solano Grown

- The county Ag Department is now charged to run the program
- Once the county is through with the budget process in the fall, discussions will continue with the Board of Supervisors on the future of Solano Grown
- There is interest in using the established brand for farmers, promotions such as Bounty of the County and the Alliance's work

III. Community Awareness & Support

Bounty of the County – Mike Ioakimedes, Solano Fair Association; Stephanie Jordan, Sustainable Solano

- Originally planned as a food celebration at the Fairgrounds that would celebrate Solano County and its rich agricultural heritage, healthy food and cooking
- Pivoted due to COVID-19 to make more virtual event starting Aug. 24 and continuing through September with each week featuring a trio of farmer, restaurant/chef and winery
- In partnership with Solano County Fair Association and Small Business Development Center
- Each week will feature live presentation on Zoom with cooking demo, farmer talking about crop, winery on pairings
- Promotional and marketing opportunity for all involved
- More [details and participants here](#); [Press release here](#)
- Possibility of tie-ins, such as [Ag & Art Film Festival in Vacaville](#)
- Hope relationship between restaurants and farms will continue beyond the event
- Could possibly do again in the spring

Restaurants - Louise Dawson, SBDC

- Some clients participating in Bounty of the County
- Challenging time for all restaurants
- A lot of focus on securing loans, strategies with landlords so they can keep afloat
- [Webinar at 2 pm Aug. 27](#) about restaurants going to a “provisioner model” – selling produce boxes, wine sales, artisan food and grocery items to make up for missed revenue

Farm to Institution – Stephanie

- Outreach has been to three hospitals and the Early Learning Center at Solano Community College
- An early success was a partnership with the Kaiser Vallejo cafeteria with Eatwell Farm, but that has since ended
 - The Kaiser cafeteria is its own business within the hospital and has had to cut down on production and staff with lower demand due to COVID
 - Had challenges when sourcing during the winter before COVID
 - the menu is not seasonal and has to be submitted for approval 2 weeks in advance, so they need consistent items
 - it was difficult to meet the farm’s minimum order for delivery
 - It may not work well for this model without changes
- Met with NorthBay in January and those conversations continue with the new Food Service director
- Trying to reconnect with Sutter
- With the Early Learning Center, Solano Public Health will subsidize some of the food purchases from Lockwood Acres for their menus
 - Prioritizing replacing the “dirty dozen” – those items that conventionally have the most pesticide use – with organic from Lockwood Acres
 - The final paperwork has been completed
 - Hope to have deliveries start mid- to end of August
- Know of smaller institutions that might be interested in starting to source 1-2 seasonal items? Contact Stephanie at stephanie@sustainablesolano.org

Cooking classes – Stephanie

- These classes are also funded under the CDFR specialty crop block grant to raise public awareness of specialty crops
- Originally planned for in-person classes, pivoted to virtual classes in April
- As of Aug. 6, have held 14 classes with 351 people total attending those classes (with some regular attendees in the audience)
 - 20-30 people per class; had 46 on July 31
- Attendees fill out a survey at the end of the class
 - 95% said they learned something new about specialty crops
 - 89% said they learned about different ways of buying specialty crops

- 96% intend to purchase more specialty crops after the class
- 48% said they had taken a previous class and had increased their consumption since that class (another 48% said the question was not applicable because it was their first class)
- [Past and upcoming classes here](#)

IV. Equity / Food Access

New food access efforts in the county – Heather Pierini / Food is Free Solano

- Need is skyrocketing
- Heather created [Food is Free Solano](#) in response to the increased need she saw in her community and throughout the county
 - Planned to give away as much as possible from her home garden that was created by Sustainable Solano in 2014 as a demonstration food forest this year due to the demand and saw that the produce stand was emptied daily
 - Started Food is Free Benicia, which soon grew to 13 stands moving hundreds of pounds of food to the community from local gardens, donated by community groups, churches and neighbors
 - In seeking sources of large amounts of food, connected with the Farmers to Families USDA food box program where the USDA procures, packages and distributes
 - Has now grown to Food is Free Solano, which works with 35 neighborhood-based free food stands, but also distributes to other organizations that serve people in need. Has raised awareness about food insecurity – both those who are newly food insecure and those with critical need, such as those in homeless encampments.
 - Purpose is to create zero-barrier access and help people connect with more long-term assistance
 - From June 29-Aug. 5, Food is Free Solano has distributed 356,000 lbs. of produce and 8,000 gallons of milk
 - Most of the produce is California produce, but not Solano County
 - Starting Sept. 1, the program will shift with boxes changing to include meat, cheese, milk, fruit/vegetables. Will need to change procedures since these larger boxes will require refrigeration. Working with the Solano County Fair on arranging refrigerated containers.
 - Continue to seek funding to support operations. Did a grant with Solano Community Foundation for summer snack packs since no school lunch program in Benicia over the summer.
 - Have Park-it Market – a trailer that can be loaded with food to bring to food deserts so people can shop for what they would prefer and selecting culturally relevant food
 - Suggestion to connect with Fresh Approach in Concord about their funding; some pandemic-related funding

- Solano Land Trust is addressing food access as well, including fundraising to buy food from local farms to donate through the food bank and looking at the possibility of gleaning on agricultural fields

USDA Urban Agriculture grant application – Elena

- Solano County has untapped potential for urban ag
- Sustainable Solano has applied for another grant from the USDA for urban agriculture through food-producing permaculture gardens
- Would help to serve a need left open when county funding dried up for the [Solano Gardens program](#)

Next meeting: November 5, 2020

First Thursday of the month (February, May, August, November)

The [video recording from the Aug. 6 meeting can be found here](#)

*A **local food system** is a collaborative network that integrates sustainable food production, processing, distribution, consumption, and waste management in order to enhance the environmental, economic, and social health of a particular area.*

***Vision:** To diversify, expand and safeguard a local healthy food economy that will preserve farmland, its integrity and biodiversity in Solano County, and ensure food access for local communities.*

***"5 by 25" GOAL:** To substitute 5% of food spending on all levels with locally sourced food (Solano and neighboring counties)*

Solano County Local Food System

