

Solano Local Food System Alliance
February 4, 2021 Minutes
Zoom meeting, 3:30 pm – 5:00 pm

You can access the recording of the meeting for the next month here:
https://zoom.us/rec/share/IOWQx6ySksdIsZYd8O73ZzJnW3t_ENRxG26j30NNnH5va6Hq3eGtSOJJgsG51UuR.KrRrInE9fEXZoaop

Attending:

Elena Karoulina, Sustainable Solano
Stephanie Oelsligle Jordan, Sustainable Solano
Maggie Kolk, Sustainable Solano
Allison Nagel, Sustainable Solano
Noah Dove, Mills College graduate student
Robin Cox, Solano Public Health
Mike Ioakimedes, Solano County Fair Association
Tim Murrill, Small Business Development Center
Brianna Boyd, Small Business Development Center
Jahniah McGill, Solano Environmental Health
Elizabeth Monteadora, Community Local Food Advisory Board
Paula Schnese, Cultivate Community Food Co-op

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

Objectives for this meeting: Discuss and agree upon 2021 goals for the Alliance

I. Welcome / introductions: Elena Karoulina, Sustainable Solano & Alliance members

II. Campaigning for Local Food: Project alternatives and evaluation for Solano Local Food System Alliance, Noah Dove, Mills College Lokey School of Business and Public Policy

Presentation introduction highlights:

- County residents don't have access to the fresh food they need each year, leading to food insecurity and diet-related disease issues
- Very little of the food grown here is consumed here
- Challenges of a consolidated ag industry, particularly when it comes to the middle of the supply chain/distributors
- Distributors skew the system to favor large organizations, making it more prohibitive for smaller buyers, who have to carry additional fees
- Progress comes from partnership between elected leadership, agency administrations and community groups

2 approaches to a successful campaign:

- Have a strategy session to determine the issue, come up with programming and take to elected leadership for direct action/policy adoption
- Start with elected leadership (Board of Supervisors), exert pressure to enact an initiative that can be delegated to administration for study and then comes back to the board for a vote

Criteria for Evaluation

- Any solution must close the price gap to be effective, should also consider effectiveness, equity, feasibility, sustainability

4 alternatives discussed: Procurement; Direct Subsidy; Community Agriculture; Alternative Distribution

Alternative 1: Procurement

- Change the policies public institutions use to source food
 - Direct procurement – helping institutions make contracts directly with farmers
 - Procurement ordinances – if order more than a certain minimum, have to have a certain percentage sourced locally (Good Food Purchasing Program provides technical assistance)
 - County-run food hub – isn't profitable, but there are nonprofit and government models

Discussion:

Tim – the Board of Supervisors tends to look for where this has been done before and how successful it was, so important to really tell those stories well and know the results; but they also want to do something that is unique to Solano

Robin: Board of Supervisors wants to align what's being considered with what departments are most closely impacted or can give advice on that topic; ultimately they are the decision-maker, but the channels a new policy would go through would vary depending on the type of policy

Where interested in starting discussion?

Elena: There is interest from schools, but have issues with distributors and the illusion of local food (Central Valley is not local, but many define it as such)

Alternative 2: Direct subsidy (pay farmers, restaurants and consumers directly)

- Solano Grown – certified local, county pays for distribution/subsidy; connecting farmers through something connected to consumers
- Restaurant Relief – there are restaurants that source locally, but difficult for them; county could have program helps connect restaurants and farmers, technical assistance

- CalFresh Fresh Creds – EBT get 50% off fresh produce programs; currently nonprofit; no reason HHS couldn't do it themselves (structured like Market Match, which is just for farmers markets; but double-up program is for grocery stores that sell fresh food)

Discussion:

Noah: The county already has administrative databases, already doing it, so could be more streamlined to manage additional funding.

Robin: Challenge is not all grocery stores sell local produce, so even if use double-up program, that doesn't ensure the grocery store is buying local

Stephanie: Could we bypass grocery stores have double-up for CSA programs? If there was more of a market, more CSA sites could be created

Robin: There are processes for farmer to be EBT provider. Not clear which additional programs are managed in the county (double-up, Market Match) – need to talk to Juanita.

Alternative 3: Community Agriculture (build residential agricultural capacity)

- Conservancy gardens – eg. Solano Land Trust's ag easements to prevent sprawl; could do community-focused conservation with a community garden on the space or allow farmers to continue to grow on the land
- Redevelopment gardening – cities have vacant lots, blighted properties, AB551, city can negotiate contracts with landowners where tax break to turn into community garden
- Fund gleaning – have few small gleaning groups, would do better if funded

Discussion:

Elena: Sustainable Solano and Food is Free Solano put big proposal forward for county for food rescue; need something centralized and funded; can't expect county to pay for this

Maggie: Manages a successful community garden with share plot for donated food; requires commitment and champions

Elena: Commercial urban ag could be a solution; new farmers who can't find land would have an opportunity to grow; for conservancy, Solano Land Trust is redeveloping its strategic ag conservation plan, but works with very large parcels, which could be a constraint that urban ag could address

Noah: if could get into general plan it would make it a county priority to preserve ag land and keep food local

Robin: last major update of Solano County general plan was in 2007/2008; one of the Board of Supervisors' major goals is to help sustain agriculture in Solano County; the county has an

orderly growth initiative that protects where the growth happens -- about 94% of the county's population in incorporated cities

Alternative 4: Alternative Distribution

- Farmers Markets: are there ways for more local producers to become a certified farmers market providers; movement to more locally managed farmers market
- Farm to food bank – increase connection with farms; bring in higher quality food
- Community distribution – have Food is Free Solano; community food hubs; bring food more directly to residents (especially good for equity issues)

Discussion:

Elena: Have discussed consolidated Solano Grown stands to help with the burden on small farmers who want to participate in farmers markets but don't have the staff
Do we promote more diversified farms or go regionally to bring them here?

Noah: Farms might be inclined to grow more fresh produce if the county has programs in place that support them

A lot of allies we can draw from

Where do we want to go? What think plans can be? How engage to make this happen?
What is feasible?

Noah: SuSol can be the backbone organization and network capacity; is there a county-level initiative or task force in regard to local food? If not, maybe start with going to the county so can work with that person or group to get the ball rolling

Brianna: has there been discussion with a lot of area farmers?

Stephanie: There is a farmer on the Alliance, hope to have more. All want to try to sell more; handful in close contact with are smaller family farms that are diversified, mostly organic; mostly fruits and vegetables

3-4 of them have CSA programs in addition to trying to sell to wholesale accounts

Solano Grown brand – some are interested in that, others kind of lukewarm

Farmers want to sell, also want to connect with own communities

Maggie: do local farms have capacity to provide on a regular basis for a school district? Can they fill the need?

Stephanie: On their own they may not have the supply and they are growing very seasonally, which not a lot of schools or even restaurants are used to cooking that way

Farms may have to band together with neighboring farms to provide supply, or how could the distributor incorporate their smaller amounts into their supply chain?

Juan Cordon in Vacaville purchased peaches from Cloverleaf, ran through the distributor, and Cloverleaf shipped to the school

It's a matter of getting all parties to the table and figuring out how they can work it out

Role of Alliance in 2021

Goals for this year:

- Continue building awareness of local food system, finding champions
- Present to Board of Supervisors: share successes and where gaps are
- Tangible projects – prioritizing, looking for funding
- Midwest Academy Strategy process – to prioritize work and defining landscape

Elena will set up 1-on-1 meetings with Alliance members to discuss where we are heading, the above goals

Discussion:

Robin: SuSol and the Alliance are in a unique position for advocacy and systemic policy change; there are a lot of allies that can help, but the Alliance's role is to be conveners, get discussion going and be backbone for it

Think we need some champions, political champions like John Vasquez or Erin Hannigan, who is starting work on an equity committee on the Board of Supervisors

Recommend the Midwest Academy Strategy process: <http://www.midwestacademy.com/>

Important to figure out who benefits, figure out who is spending the money. Eg. the insurers benefit from reduced cost from healthy food. Kaiser is an insurer, other health organizations in the county – need to go to their insurers (e.g. Blue Cross/Blue Shield)

Need the right people at the table, eg. talking to school boards if looking at schools

Tim: SuSol is essential to make this happen; all of these organizations care about this or wouldn't be at the meeting, but all play a different role

Really do need to identify who those champions are who have some way to get something done; providing healthy food and support local business

Board of Supervisors' Monica Brown was a teacher, another potential champion

We know what to do, just a matter of getting the support we need

Support trying to get locally grown food into restaurants; what need is a tangible program to be able to take to them, like Bounty of the County

Can the farmers handle orders? Maybe that's an area SBDC can help with processing resources -- whatever's going to help to facilitate commerce (e.g. restaurants) and support this and at same time feed people who need to be fed

Robin: Possibility of hosting a summit? If done well, could be a beneficial way to bring all the players together, as long as actionable items come out of it

Not advocating that we study it to death; the Alliance has a lot of data to share with the Board of Supervisors, could do presentation on what known so far, gaps / where we are stuck, and seeking some direction from them, what do they want to see? Need to take action

On the food desert situation in Vallejo, talked with Hannigan to Sen. Bill Dodd about moratorium being placed on grocery stores by land owner; it's a complicated topic that requires some state legislation to fix, but could be revisited

Follow up discussion: What is the role of the Alliance in changing policies? Are we ready to take on any of the proposed ideas? What's needed to successfully implement any of them? What are the goals of the Alliance for 2021?

The following were not covered in the meeting, but updates are provided below:

III. County farming update: Solano Grown brand, fire recovery, Solano Land Trust ACE Plan update

SuSol submitted a proposal to the Department of Ag for the administration of the Solano Grown brand.

Fire recovery is on its second stage: distributing the grant from Solano Community Foundation. Qualified farms can get up to \$2,500 in grant money. For more details: sustainablesolano.org/fire

Solano Land Trust is doing an Agriculture Conservation Easement Plan (ACE) update. The current plan is from 2002; they needed a reboot with risks and opportunities, update land use polices, funding, mitigation needs and so much more. 12 listening sessions around the county with various stakeholders (landowner, producer, CE landowner, young, diverse and new farmers, planners, ag and resource services, local government and tribal representatives). Sustainable Solano was among agencies interviewed for this process. We'll be in touch with Solano Land Trust on the updated ACE.

IV. Community Awareness & Support: Cooking classes, "5 by 25" / Farm to Institution – Stephanie

CDFA Cooking Classes

- 31 classes completed to date, including last fall's Bounty of the County (goal for project is 88 public classes)
- Had over 6300 people register for classes.
- Recently featured guest chefs:
 - Veronica Bearce, Veronica's Veggies – Kwanzaa class on 12/18/20
 - Sarah Futterman-Devies, Master Food Preservers of Solano & Yolo – Preserving Citrus class on 1/22/21.
 - Chantoll Williams, Rasta Mama's Kitchen – Jamaican Pumpkin Curry Stew on 1/30/21.

Farm to Institution:

Early Learning Center at Solano Community College renewed their sourcing agreement with Lockwood Acres, with subsidies provided by Solano Public Health, for 2021.

We're in touch with a board member of Travis Unified School District who is interested in getting more local, healthy food into their system. Currently food is coordinated by Sodexo, but it sounds like even Sodexo is willing to work with them. More to come.

Pondering doing another Bounty of the County event in the spring; maybe a more intense 2 weeks (instead of once a week for 6 weeks). Stay tuned!

V. Equity / Food Access: comprehensive countywide food waste prevention and food rescue program was developed and the grant to CalRecycle was submitted as a Sustainable Solano and Food is Free Solano partnership

VI. Policy Updates

VII. Children and Youth

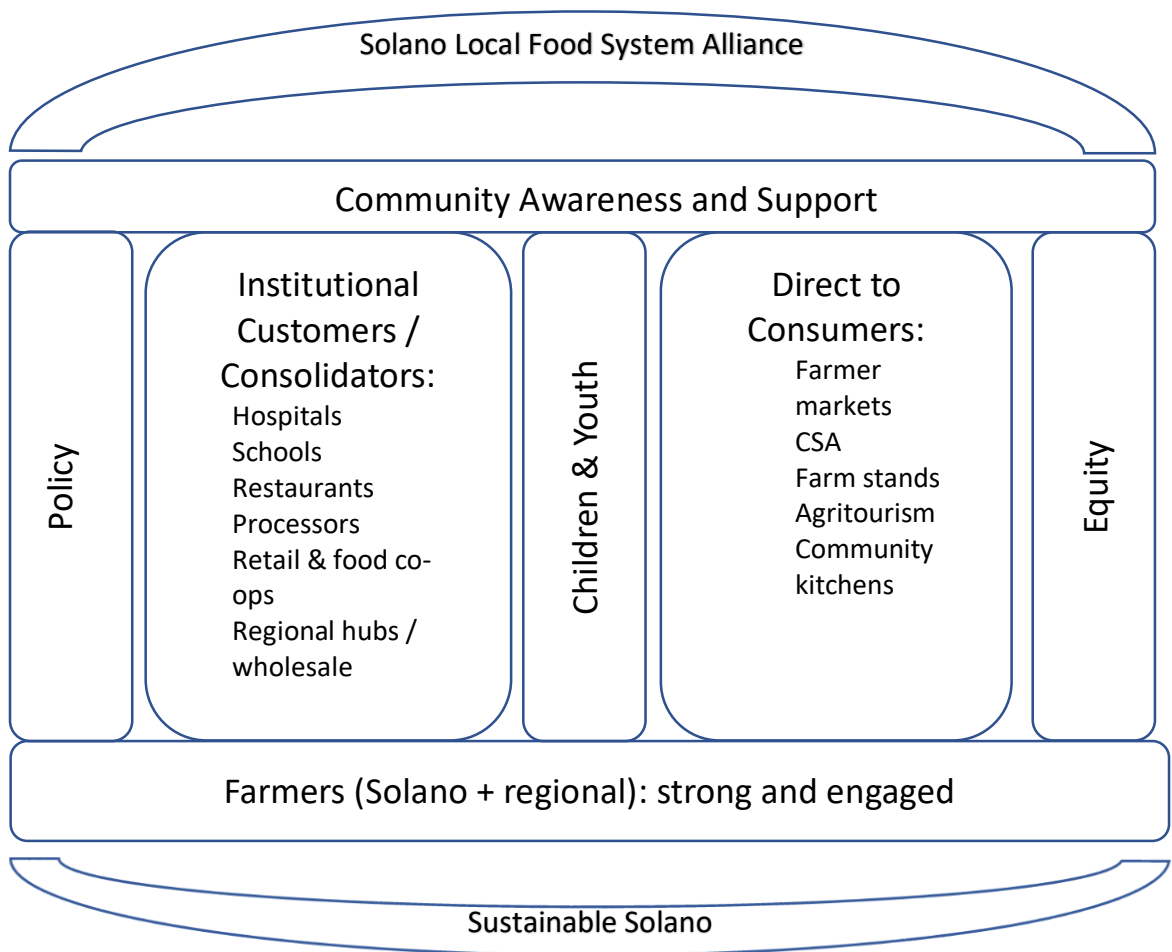
Vacaville Unified School District USDA Farm to School grant

Around the table & wrap up

Next meeting: May 6, 2021, 4 pm – 5:15 pm, Zoom ☺

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

Solano County Local Food System



*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)*