

## **Feb.6, 2025 Alliance Collaborative Action meeting: Solano County 2028 General Plan update & Local Food System**

### **Attending:**

- Ryan Mulrooney, Meals on Wheels
- Jillian Stevens, Meals on Wheels
- Carl Mehlhope, Think Regeneration
- Priscilla Yeane, Solano County assistant ag commissioner
- Mike Ioakimedes, Solano Community Foundation
- Paula Schnese, Cultivate Community Food Co-op
- Darwin Bosen, Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano
- Erik Hagstrom, Solano County associate planner
- Ashley Hansen, Solano Public Health, health education
- Tara Scheuer, Solano Public Health
- Rema El-Mahmoud, Solano Public Health, CalFresh
- Olivia Henry, UC Cooperative Extension (virtual)
- Maggie Kolk, Elena Karoulina, Stephanie Jordan, Allison Nagel, Sustainable Solano

### **Agenda:**

- 1) Discussion of general plan and role of the local food system
- 2) Alliance planning for community engagement around the general plan update

### **Discussion Highlights:**

- Concept of a local food system should be introduced in the general plan; it could guide policies created outside of the general plan
- Alliance should create a policy statement on what it would like to see
  - What does the Alliance want to achieve and how does it fit with the general plan
  - Not only guidance, but also specific implementation steps
  - Look for where to partner to advance those goals
- Where local food was included elsewhere, there sometimes remained skepticism about whether the policies actually created the outcomes or if electeds were aware of what was in their general plan; this addresses the need for ongoing accountability
- Some general plans included food system workgroups and advisory committees to serve this role of holding to accountability for what is in the plan; could the Alliance serve this purpose?

### **What's Next?**

- Once the county's RFP for a contractor goes out, it will have what the county is looking for in the general plan (should happen in Q1 2025)
- Public forums – interest and involvement from community members (as of now, planned for May 2025)
  - How to structure the community engagement to be true to community's input and yet work within reality

- Specific groups: Focused listening sessions
  - It's important to have a discussion just with farmers to get their voices heard
  - Other parts of the chain (distribution, retail, recovery) should be engaged
- Alliance needs to determine what pieces it wants to engage on/goals it wants to set as part of the process

**Next Alliance Steering Committee meeting** (March 13, 2025):

- Look at who to prioritize for focused engagement/listening sessions
- Come up with a schedule for community engagement
- Plan for May public session on general plan process, what other communities are doing

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**Discussion/Presentation Notes:**

Institutional knowledge present:

Think Regeneration is working with other communities to keep local food local (much of Solano County's agriculture produces products that leave the state). This includes an emphasis on food as medicine.

Priscilla Yeane worked on strategic planning in San Diego

Solano's general plan (GP) is based on sustainability (long term, for generations to come) and deals with environment, economy and social equity, which aligns with the Alliance's work. The public must be involved as part of a community-driven process, so there need to be mechanisms to get the community to the table and make sure their voices will be heard.

Key areas a general plan has to cover: land use, agriculture, resources, public health and safety, economic development, public facilities and services, housing, parks and rec

The current Solano GP doesn't have public health as a separate chapter, but distributed throughout. Part of the conversation now is on whether the county should include a separate Healthy Communities chapter. A third option is to have both – a separate chapter and other information distributed throughout.

The existing GP doesn't say local food system anywhere. For the Alliance, the question is what policies guided by the general plan the group would like to see around the local food system.

Good to keep in mind that the county's general plan is influenced by the state constitution and state action, eg. state legislation that has imposed housing requirements and therefore impacts zoning would supercede GP guidance.

Minimums are set at federal, state level – but county could go further. It is often easier when the GP is following state guidance, but if a city or county GP is ahead of the curve, it's more of a challenge.

GP is the big picture. If the community is communicating what would like to see, how it fits in needs to be considered. This would likely fall to the county's consultant on how that input is incorporated.

The GP process can be a confrontational, rather than collaborative process. Those involved with different interests are interested in getting their point of view represented in the final GP. This means anything being advocated for in the GP needs to be put in language that is convincing to electeds and the public.

For the Alliance, the question is if there is language in GP that aligns with Alliance goals and objectives. Eg. for regenerative agriculture, could that fit with the economic development of agriculture and environmental practices in GP.

The first chance to see what is in the GP will be the county's 20-page RFP that will go out to find the consultant.

### **From Olivia's presentation on GPs elsewhere:**

GP is a big-picture document, but can include specific steps that are measurable and action-oriented.

For Solano, this GP will trigger SB1000, which will require the addition of environmental justice – which includes food access and food justice. In other counties, food justice policies are part of the work of public health.

These are the powers county governments have:

- Zoning (activities allowed)
- Staffing
- Permitting (and making those processes easier)
- Advisory groups/community engagement
- Direct to carry out study/assessment
- Programs and funding pools (directing resources/staffing)
- Internal purchasing policies (how county buys food)

Solano County has one of the lowest percentages of residents living in unincorporated areas across the state.

The county's last GP was 2008. Food was mentioned in agriculture and public health/safety. In agriculture it had specific implementation steps: an ombudsman (no longer exists), county ag committee (no longer exists) and locally led marketing strategies. Public health was very general: increasing access to healthy food.

According to the Berkeley Food Institute's review of 13 policies related to food access and nutrition; Solano had a lot on protecting ag land, almost none on local food production, nothing about edible landscapes.

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City of Richmond plan (2012): clear and actionable language around food access and justice

- Supports urban ag; assessment of food quality and availability
- Expanding supply of health food sources (supports creation of farmers markets, community gardens, co-ops, local groceries)

- Zoning, technical assistance to promote building new grocery store
- City of Richmond figured out how to use a county health stipend to pay for a CSA

Sacramento (2011):

- Section 6: healthy food access
- Directly calls for food system assessment; countywide food action plan; permanent funding for a healthy food fund
- Food assessment was finally done last year through a USDA grant – not actually through county staff

Santa Clara County:

- food system workplan – hired county food systems manager, set up resident advisory committee, good food purchasing policy

Vallejo (2017): Community and People

- Making sure retail has healthy food; collaborate with community partners around urban ag; consider leasing publicly owned land for urban ag

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*Discussion:*

There have to be ways to ensure accountability. CCFC met with city of Vallejo and pointed out things in these plans city leaders didn't even know they had.

Could Alliance be mentioned in GP as part of implementation and accountability? This would also help define the goals for Alliance.

Will the county recognize this coalition (since the Alliance brings together organizations interested in this work)? Especially if EJ is required, the county will be required to work with the community.

How will other plans align with county GP? The county GP informs the strategic plan of departments. Can it also influence city action?

Santa Clara has good food purchasing policy. Could we have something like this for Solano County? Could we have purchase from Solano farmers if feasible?

Could look at policy on how county makes contracts; healthy food in vending machines on county property; or use county stipend/health funding for CSAs.

Market match is a voluntary grant program individual market managers can apply to be part of; for policy, would need to look at something like San Francisco, where farmers markets have to accept CalFresh.

Farmers markets are difficult places for farmers to sell (takes them away from their main work), so they need other options. In Solano County, there are about 26 farmers producing at small scale.

Land use (in unincorporated areas) more likely to focus on for Solano county's GP (rather than retail) – local food production and protecting ag land.

Been a challenge finding adequate local food for the Food Bank, have to go outside of the county for additional funding spending because ARPA funds maxed out what could be purchased through local farmers. Food Bank is trying to direct attention from individuals to what can be done upstream to support local farmers.

There's a need for more long-term, systemic investment from the county – rather than relying on short-term grant funding without strategy. A good purchasing policy could support that.

For co-op, there is a distributor that goes to all co-ops, but the priority is to support local farmers first.

Carrying healthy food is a challenge for some retailers. CalFresh did healthy retail makeovers, but after that's done, there's no guarantee of sustainability if people haven't changed their habits.

Other supporters for healthy food as part of GP could be insurance companies that are interested in the health savings from increasing access to healthier food.