

Area Urban Agriculture and Food Systems Advisor for Santa Clara, San Mateo/San Francisco, Alameda, and Contra Costa Counties

Developed and proposed by: This proposal was developed by the Urban Agriculture and Community Gardens Program Team and Area Director Andrew Miller (representing Areas #10 and #12), with input from the Statewide UC Master Gardener Program, the Food Systems, Food Waste, and Business Support Program Team, and advisors Sheila Barry, Laura Vollmer, Alexa Erickson, Jessie Godfrey and Cristina Murillo-Barrick. Forty-three external stakeholders responded to a survey to indicate their priorities for this position and express support; the survey included a link to the draft proposal, so they could review and comment. External stakeholders who support this position include urban and peri-urban farmers in the five-county region (e.g., Veggielution, GROW San Mateo, Planting Justice), nonprofit organizations (e.g., Second Harvest of Silicon Valley, Fresh Approach), and City, County, and agency staff (e.g., North Santa Clara Resource Conservation District).

Position title: Area Urban Agriculture and Food Systems Advisor – San Francisco Bay Area

Headquarter location and coverage area: This position will be headquartered at the UCCE Santa Clara County Office and serve Santa Clara, San Mateo/San Francisco, Alameda, and Contra Costa Counties. These five counties have more than 6 million residents and include three of the state's most populous cities: San Jose, Oakland, and San Francisco. A major metropolitan region, the Bay Area is home to impactful regional food system initiatives connecting urban consumers and institutions with small and mid-size producers, innovative local food policies, and active and supportive clientele groups. State and federal agencies have also identified the Bay Area as a key hub for urban agriculture; it was selected to host one of 27 pilot USDA Urban Service Centers nationwide and was a core region for CDFR's inaugural urban agriculture grant program. In addition to presenting valuable opportunities for economic and community development, urban agriculture and food systems programming addresses needs for access to culturally relevant food in a region where more than a quarter of residents are at risk for food insecurity.

It is important to note that Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties currently have an urban agriculture and food systems advisor that has been 50% soft-funded through UCCE's contract with Santa Clara County. While UCCE has a strong partnership with the county, the county faces a \$1 billion budget deficit for each of the next several years because of federal spending cuts. As a result of this deep structural deficit, the county is making cuts systemwide including to the funding it provides to UCCE-Santa Clara. The current county contract expires soon, and upon contract renewal UCCE-Santa Clara's county budget will no longer include funding for advisor salary. We seek funding for a Bay Area urban agriculture and food systems advisor position to avoid its loss during a time of fiscal crisis, and in doing so, to leverage the investment that has been made since 2018 in program and partnership development for long-term impact.

In addition, the former East Bay urban agriculture advisor position has been vacant since 2022, and the geographic scope of the proposed position has been expanded to provide service to those counties. The proposed position complements and would continue ongoing collaborations with advisors in the four county offices specializing in small farms and specialty crops, community health and nutrition, 4-H youth development, organic materials management, and BIPOC community development. As the academic advisor for the Santa Clara County UC Master Gardener Program, this position also works with Bay Area environmental horticulture and IPM advisors.

Position overview: This position will serve community organizations, local policymakers and agency staff, and urban farmers and gardeners to 1) support successful urban food production and distribution, 2) meet the challenge of uneven food access in urban areas, and 3) craft and help implement agriculture and food security policies that advance a more equitable, sustainable, and resilient regional food system.

A minimum of a master's degree in food systems, community development, public policy, urban and regional planning, horticulture, or other closely related field is required. Understanding of community development, food security, and agricultural production is expected. Experience building partnerships and collaborating with cross-sectoral, multidisciplinary teams is also essential.

This position will report to the Area Director for Santa Clara and San Mateo/San Francisco Counties as well as the Statewide UC Master Gardener Program Director (for work done with the UC Master Gardener Program).

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This advisor will work closely with county colleagues, other Urban Agriculture and Food Systems advisors statewide, and will collaborate with the Urban Agriculture and Community Gardens; Food Systems, Food Waste and Business Support; Systemic Inequalities; and other relevant Program Teams (PT).

Justification: The Urban Agriculture and Community Gardens PT ranked this position as its #1 priority because it stabilizes an established, high-impact Urban Agriculture and Food Systems program serving one of California's major metropolitan regions. Without this position, there would be no urban agriculture advisor in all of central and northern California, creating a significant gap in coverage for UC ANR. The position is tied as the #1 priority for Areas 10 and 12, collectively representing the urban core of the San Francisco Bay Area.

Needs: As agricultural production that's integrated into city life, urban agriculture has unique challenges and characteristics that are best addressed by dedicated Extension personnel ([Reynolds 2011](#), [Surls et al. 2015](#)). Recent assessments as well as steady expansion of the existing South Bay program highlight the need for the proposed position. A 2026 assessment of Bay Area urban agriculture, done by the current advisor with the Community Alliance for Family Farmers (CAFF), found the biggest challenges facing urban growers were land and water access and affordability, restrictive local policies and complex local government bureaucracies, need for sustainable funding sources as well as programs and services tailored to urban agriculture, and a lack of peer networking opportunities. Overcoming these barriers is key to unlocking the multiple economic, social, health, cultural, and environmental benefits urban agriculture has the potential to provide to neighboring communities. Broader food system assessments—such as the Santa Clara County Food System Workplan (2021)—emphasize the need for increased access to diverse regional markets, land access to maintain or expand the number of urban and local farms, investments in climate-smart agricultural practices, a supportive regulatory environment, and increased awareness of the social value of regional food systems. Results of the external stakeholder survey (n=43) circulated for this proposal reinforce these needs. Respondents' highest priorities were food security/food sovereignty (77%), access to resources, like land and water (72%), food system preparedness and resilience (67%), policy and regulation (63%), and increasing public engagement in food and farming issues (63%).

Outcomes/Impact: This position will contribute to the following UC ANR condition changes: 1) improved food and nutrition security, food sovereignty, and access to culturally relevant foods; 2) increased equitable access to resources (e.g., information, education, services, land); 3) increased civic engagement; 4) enhanced food systems and markets; 5) improved land stewardship; and 6) increased agriculture and food system resilience to extreme weather and change in climate.

In 20 years, success would include more City and County policies that facilitate urban agriculture and regional food system development; increased access to resources and material support for urban agriculture and food systems at the local and regional level (e.g., dedicated municipal staff); increased access to locally grown food provided by urban farms and gardens as well as direct-to-consumer markets, retailers, and institutions; greater resident participation in food system decision-making and greater coordination among food system stakeholders; and more equitable access to positive natural environments (e.g., community gardens) in cities.

This position contributes to the *Strengthening Agriculture and Food Systems* and *Cultivating Thriving People and Communities* challenge areas identified in ANR's *Strategic Vision 2040*. Urban food and farm systems are also affected by and engaged in the cross-cutting issue areas of *Climate Change; Regulations, Policy, and Compliance;* and *Systemic Inequities*. Areas of action highlighted in *Strategic Vision 2040* that are relevant to this program include but are not limited to a) offering support for home, school, and community gardens and regional food networks; b) enhancing food policy; and c) providing technical assistance to small growers, businesses, and underserved communities.

Extension: This advisor will coordinate regular opportunities for learning and peer-to-peer information exchange through regional food system networks, such as the Santa Clara Food System Alliance. Collaborating with other CE advisors and local partners, the advisor will host convenings, develop trainings, and organize workshops on key food system or urban agriculture topics (e.g., food hubs, sustainable water management). This position will also work closely with the Small Farms Network to bring relevant information on production to urban growers.

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Providing administrative and academic oversight to the UC Master Gardener Program of Santa Clara County, the advisor will support volunteers in disseminating research-based information to the public and support program impact by aligning the local program with statewide priorities, including outreach to new and historically underrepresented groups. The advisor will develop a mix of web and print materials to share information in accessible formats and languages.

Research: The advisor will conduct applied research on topics that address regional needs and priorities, including the multiple impacts of urban agriculture; barriers to urban and peri-urban agriculture such as land and water access; policy development and evaluation for urban food system issues; marketing and distribution strategies for locally produced foods; food equity; and food system resilience. This position will also direct the urban agriculture research and demonstration site at Martial Cottle Park in San Jose, where current collaborative research includes variety trials for culturally relevant crops, uses of dehydrated food waste for urban agriculture, and development of smart tensiometers for urban and small-scale growers. The advisor will publish in UC ANR publications and relevant food and agriculture journals such as, *Food Policy*, *Journal of Agriculture*, *Food Systems*, and *Community Development*, and *Urban Agriculture & Regional Food Systems*.

UC ANR network:

- a) This position fits into Urban Agriculture PT priorities by providing expertise on community food security and food sovereignty, research-informed policy development, and network coordination. This position provides critical geographic coverage as the only urban agriculture advisor north of Los Angeles, serving the food system needs of the most populous and urbanized parts of the Bay Area through an urban agriculture lens.
- b) Expected collaborators include regional advisors working in small farms, specialty crops, community health and nutrition, community development, and environmental horticulture along with other urban agriculture, food system, and community resiliency advisors throughout the state. The advisor will collaborate with CE specialists at UC Santa Cruz, UC Berkeley, and UC Davis (e.g., in Agroecology, Small Farm Economics, and Metropolitan Food Systems). Expanding the geographic scope of this program will increase opportunities to collaborate with UC Berkeley faculty and the Berkeley Food Institute.
- c) UC ANR has limited dedicated academic capacity in urban agriculture. Existing Southern-California-based urban agriculture advisors provide complementary expertise, but this position fills a unique niche through its focus on policy development and implementation; convening, facilitation, and participatory processes; and food security and equity in the Bay Area.

Network external to UC ANR: Externally, the advisor will collaborate with County and City departments (e.g., Agriculture, Sustainability, Planning, Public Health); State agencies (e.g., CDFA, Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation); Resource Conservation Districts; community organizations and statewide nonprofits (e.g., CAFF); food system networks (e.g., San Mateo County Food System Alliance); and local universities (e.g., Santa Clara University, Stanford University, San Jose State University). These collaborations will support applied research, education, stakeholder engagement, and policy, systems, and environmental change.

Support: As the headquarters for this position, UCCE Santa Clara County will provide office space and administrative support. UCCE Santa Clara County also supports the urban agriculture research and demonstration site in San Jose that the advisor can use for field-based research projects. San Mateo, Alameda, and Contra Costa will provide office and meeting space as needed.

Other support: Potential funding sources include grants offered by the California Department of Food and Agriculture, Western Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (WSARE), Western Extension Risk Management Education, USDA, and private foundations (e.g., Knight Foundation).