

Agricultural Liaison: Connecting the Dots



Students learn about the value of agriculture by planting school gardens in San Jose, Calif.



Branding and marketing help producers sell their products to residents who live and work in Santa Clara County.

Introduction

AGRICULTURAL LIAISONS connect farmers, ranchers and other agricultural businesses with city and county governments to facilitate projects and add value to agricultural enterprises. We help to expand, enhance, and create agricultural enterprises. Our tasks include:

- ✓ facilitating meetings
- ✓ assisting with paperwork & permitting
- ✓ administering special grants from county, state and federal sources.

When people ask who I work for, I say *“My client is Agriculture.”*

There are currently four Agricultural Liaisons – also called *“Ombudsmen”* - throughout the state in Sonoma, San Mateo, Marin and Santa Clara County.

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Method

For the first twelve months on the job, we held a series of **LISTENING SESSIONS** to better understand the needs and priorities of the agricultural community.

- Visited more than 45 businesses to learn more about their operations
- Conducted onsite - and online - interviews with as many farmers and ranchers as possible
- Attended farm bureau, cattlemen's', Asian farmers' and winegrowers' meetings to learn more about individual groups' specific challenges
- Toured publicly-owned open space preserves and county parks to see how they are managing working lands
- Joined several coalitions and alliances to strengthen my network



An economic development strategy supports agri-tourism like pumpkin patches and Christmas tree farms.

Results

- Secured \$150,000 from CDFA Farm-to-Fork School Nutrition grants to get locally-grown food into Santa Clara County schools.
- Assisted local grower with county permitting process to open the beloved Spina Pumpkin Patch on a new site in Morgan Hill, Calif.
- Actively working with two growers to build farmworker housing, fulfilling a huge gap in affordable housing and strong, local workforce.
- Launched innovative Agricultural Resilience Incentive grant program to pay farmers for climate-smart practices.



Favorable land use policies such as the Williamson Act give tax breaks for agricultural operations, preserving open space and ecological benefits.

Aim

There are four focus areas & main objectives in Santa Clara Valley Agricultural Plan:

1. **LAND USE Policy:** Promote working agricultural lands
2. **FINANCIAL INCENTIVES:** Make it profitable to farm and ranch
3. **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY:** Provide support to farms and ranches via streamlining regulatory compliance & encouraging equity programs
4. **MARKETING:** Brand local products, increase awareness about the benefits of supporting local agriculture

