



Farmers & Ranchers Newsletter



Contact Us!

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The RCD is committed to supporting San Diego's ever-growing community of Farmers and Ranchers. We equip hard-working stewards of the land with conservation practices known as regenerative agriculture which help to improve farm and ranch productivity. This holistic approach to managing working lands strengthens agricultural businesses while conserving natural resources, reducing the risk of wildfire and adapting to the effects of climate change.

Para recibir estas noticias de subsidio, eventos e investigaciones de agricultura regenerativa puede contactarnos en español, solo tiene que responder a este mensaje o escribenos a ag@redsandiego.org.

Meat Processing Facing a Bottleneck Effect

By Elizabeth Garcia, Agricultural Technical Assistant

Our food system has drastically changed over time - markets now cater to new trends of shopping locally, incorporating regenerative practices on the land, and consumers wanting to know more about where their food comes from. Food production is also shaped by raging wildfires, extreme weather and in recent years a global pandemic, highlighting that our current food system is fragile and could be improved upon.

The popularity of pasture-raised meats is greatly increasing, creating a new market for livestock producers and opening an opportunity to manage land more regeneratively. [However, in 2020 grocery store meat sections sat empty.](#) Today, the meat industry is highly centralized to only four companies, including Cargill, Smithfield, Tyson, and JBS, which control the show and [supply 80% of the nation's meat.](#) When the pandemic hit, large processing facilities shut down to ensure worker safety, and the supply chain came to a halt. Ranchers were left with livestock to be processed and nowhere to take them.

This distribution within the chain left ranchers jumping through hoops to keep their businesses alive. To adapt they drove longer distances, scheduled processing months in advance without knowing the condition of their product, and increased their direct sales to customers.. With less than [20 USDA-approved slaughter facilities,](#) it fosters the question of why this bottleneck effect has not been addressed.



John Austel, owner of 4J Horse and Livestock | Rancho Jamul Ecological Reserve

Now, farmers and ranchers are tackling the task themselves and appealing for mobile meat processing facilities. Although costly, these smaller mobile units can allow for on-farm slaughter, reducing the amount of time and distance an animal would have to travel to make it to a processing facility. This alternative approach would benefit ranchers, the communities they serve and most importantly the livestock they dedicate their lives to raise.

The [Bay Area Ranchers Cooperative](#) pursued this advancement and came together to create their own mobile meat processing facility, which as of last year is currently up and running. The 16 founding ranchers in the Cooperative hope that their vision and implementation serve as a model to other agricultural communities in shaping their local food system.

In July 2022, President Biden signed an executive order for the expansion of the nation's meat supply chain and [\\$9.6 million in funds were awarded to producers this month](#). This assistance will support business development, increase producer income stability, create jobs and most importantly expand and diversify the meat processing industry in its entirety. Supporting local meat processing is a chance to improve on the fragile infrastructure already put in place, while addressing concerns of wildfire, soil health and drought resilience. We have an opportunity to continue the change within our food system, moving towards a more resilient and supportive model for our ranchers, farmers, consumers, landscapes and the animals that feed us.

Upcoming Events

Saturday, February 4th | 9:00am

Water & Irrigation: Utilizing a Precious Resource - Webinar

Hosted by the San Diego County Water Authority. Learn about strategies to use our limited water sources wisely. [Learn more and register here.](#)

Wednesday, February 22nd | 9:00am - 11:00am

Cover Cropping in San Diego - Webinar

Learn about cover cropping from a variety of producers in the San Diego area. We will hear from farmers who have implemented the practice in different settings, such as row crops and vineyards, and discuss their challenges and successes. The RCD of Greater San Diego County will also share about their experience managing a CDFA Healthy Soils Demonstration grant that funded cover cropping in an avocado grove. [Register here.](#)

Sunday, February 26th through Friday, March 3rd

35th Annual CA Small Farm Conference - Hybrid

Engage in a week of learning, inspiration and community building at CAFF's hybrid conference. There are over 50 online workshops, videos, and interactive forums, and a local

is on a sliding scale. [Learn more and register here.](#)

Wednesday, March 1st | 4:00pm - 7:00pm

Voluntary Conservation and Land Management Assistance Workshop

County Operations Center Hearing Room, 5520 Overland, San Diego - Hybrid

The County of San Diego is hosting the 2nd annual Voluntary Conservation and Land Management Assistance Workshop to connect stakeholders with conservation and sustainable land management resources. [Learn more and register here.](#)



A promotional poster for the "5K BEEFIT RUN". At the top left is the "San Diego County Cowbelle" logo featuring a cowbell with "SD" on it. Below it, text reads "SINCE 1953 APRIL 22, 2023 SAN DIEGO COUNTY RANCH RUN". To the right, "5K BEEFIT RUN" is written in large white letters next to a silhouette of a runner. Below the text, it says "JOIN THE COWBELLES ON EARTH DAY FOR A 5K RUN ON A PRIVATE RANCH IN THE SAN DIEGO BACK COUNTRY." Further down, it lists "SIGN UPS OPEN 12/19/2022.", "ENTRIES ARE \$50 PER RUNNER AND WILL INCREASE BY \$10 EACH MONTH.", and "DEADLINE TO ENTER ON 3/1/2023." At the bottom, it states "HOSTED BY THE SAN DIEGO COUNTY COWBELLES AS A BEEF PROMOTION FUNDRAISER FOR OUR AG IN THE CLASSROOM AND SCHOLARSHIP FUND." and "TO SIGN UP, PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE." There is a QR code and a photo of a plate of beef and vegetables. The website "www.sdcountycowbelle.com" is at the bottom right.

Wild Willow Farm Classes

Sunday February 5th - 9:30am | Infused Vinegars and Oils

Sunday, February 26th - 10:00am | Lip Love Balm Workshop

Saturday, April 1st - 10:00am | Beekeeping 101: Intro to Beekeeping

... and MANY more! Check out the full lineup of classes here.

San Diego Agricultural Planning Program

The Agricultural Planning Program is a two-year planning grant funded by the CA Dept of Conservation with Cap-and-Trade proceeds, and is managed by the San Diego Local

Working groups continue to meet monthly to work towards their individual project goals.

The projects that each working group will focus on are:

1. **Land Access:** Creation and management of a central database for matchmaking agricultural producers with public and private lands available for lease or sale
2. **Water Availability & Efficiency:** Design and identify funding sources for a small-scale pilot project of Rancho California's [CropSWAP](#) program which incentivizes the replacement of mature orchard trees with low demand crops or root stock
3. **Agricultural Workforce Development:** Streamline development of farmworker housing by preparing farmworker housing templates that are pre-approved by the County and municipalities, noting ADU exemptions, vulnerable populations and VMT benefits

Our team is finalizing the project report and is excited to share our work with you in Spring 2023. We will be presenting our report at upcoming public meetings including:

- Wednesday, March 1st | San Diego County Voluntary Conservation Workshop
- Thursday, March 2nd | San Diego County Farm Bureau Monthly Meeting
- Saturday, March 19th and 26th | Coastal Roots Gardening Workshops
- Tuesday, March 28th | Ramona Valley Vineyard Association Member Meeting

Stay tuned for additional presentations dates!



Congratulations to the County of San Diego and [San Diego LAFCO](#) who received their own Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation (SALC) Planning grant from the California Department of Conservation. This will allow them to continue working on solutions towards a more supported agricultural industry in our region.

Their project is titled, *Greening Agriculture: Market Analysis to Inform + Support Economically Sustainable Small Farming in San Diego County*, and you can learn more about it [here](#).



Free Irrigation Evaluations for Commercial Ag Operations

If you are interested in receiving an irrigation evaluation or pump efficiency test, *you can sign up at this link*. These resources will be offered to all regions except North West San Diego. Plug your address *into this map* to see if you are located in our jurisdiction or the Upper San Luis Rey Conservation District.

If you are located in the Mission district, you can receive similar support from them *here*. Every drop of water saved is money saved, as well as more stability for managing your farm during extreme weather. We are here to help you improve your operation!

Educational Resources & Opportunities

- [Can This Beef Cooperative Become "the West's Largest Climate-Smart Ranching" Program?](#)
- [Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education \(SARE\) Study on the Benefits of Transitioning to Organic](#)

Quarter Acre Incubator Plots Available

Plots available for new farmers at the Tijuana River Valley Community Garden. Low rate plus water costs. Business plan required to apply. Please [visit our website for more information](#) or contact Daniela Mejia: daniela.mejia@rcdsandiego.org.

New Database for Cover Cropping

UC Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program, UC Cooperative Extension, the Napa Resource Conservation District, and the Community Alliance with Family Farmers have created a [searchable database of orchard and vineyard growers](#) experienced in growing cover crops that will help other growers bring the benefits of the practice to their operations. It is currently focused on the Central and Northern California, but is still a great resource!

Enhancing Pollinator Habitat on Working Lands

Are you a commercial farmer or rancher interested in promoting native habitat for

Institute, the RCD of Greater San Diego County is offering site visits to assess the quality of native pollinator habitat on farms and ranches. Assessors then present producers with an actionable plan to enhance native pollinator habitat, as well as connect them with support to apply to NRCS funding opportunities for the installation. [Use this form to sign up for a site visit](#). You can also [consult this guide](#) for more information on the benefits of maintaining pollinators and their habitat on your working lands.



Supporting Flood Relief for Local Farmers

Foodshed Small Farm Distribution is hosting a [campaign to support small farmers](#) affected by recent flooding. If you would like to contribute or if you need support, contact Elizabeth Garcia: elizabeth.garcia@rcdsandiego.org, 619-562-0096 x 202

Funding Opportunities

EXTENDED - OPEN NOW

CUSP Direct Farmer Grant Program for Drought Relief

Deadline to apply is Wednesday, February 15th

These direct grants will assist small-scale and historically underserved producers to apply for relief grants for those most in need of immediate drought assistance. If you can show that your operation has been affected by drought (sales or crop loss reports, water bill rate or usage increase, etc) and have not already received drought relief from a CDFA program, you may be eligible for up to \$20,000 to recover your losses; average award is \$5,000 to \$10,000.

Examples of covered expenses can include but are not limited to:

- Increased electric utility bills of 50% or more due to increased electricity rates
- Surface water costs if increase from year prior
- Cost of hauling water for livestock
- Lowering ag well pumps if a primary source of water is lost
- Emergency upgrades to irrigation system (paired with conservation)
- Decreased crop yields/crop loss due to less water available or having to fallow land

Not Covered:

- [Upgrading pump to a larger size which would draw more water](#)

[Producers must apply for the funds through CA Association of Resource Conservation Districts \(CARCD\) at this link.](#)



US Department of Agriculture offers a variety of programs to help farmers, ranchers, communities, and businesses that have been hard hit by natural disaster events, like drought, fire and flooding. [See here for more info.](#)



Zero Foodprint's Compost Connector is designed to get the maximum greenhouse gas reduction from organic material - keeping it out of the landfill is good, but turning organics into compost and applying it onto working lands is great. Everyone is eligible, though farms willing to take larger amounts of compost will likely be prioritized. Projects can be submitted at any time, and will be fulfilled on a rolling basis. For additional information, head to their [website](#).



Organic Farmers and Farmers in Transition can receive support from CCOF to help cover costs of organic certification and receive educational resources to ease the transition. [See more information here.](#)

Do you want to get serious about conservation practices on your working land? The National Resource Conservation Service offers financial and technical support to agricultural producers and non-industrial forest managers through the **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)**. [See here](#) for how to apply! Deadline for applications is April 1st, with additional funds set aside for border regions.

Looking for other funding options? [Check out UC Cooperative Extension's directory](#) of available opportunities!

Carbon Farming Support

We are here to help you! From direct assistance to technical advice, here are some of the services that the RCD offers to San Diego farmers and ranchers, free of charge:

- **Soil sampling** for organic carbon content
- **Irrigation evaluations** - [sign up here](#)
- **Technical guidance** for implementing conservation practices
- **Request a Carbon Farming Plan** [here](#)
- **Plant selection** for native hedgerows and habitat buffers
- **Free chipping** for at risk homeowners within the San Diego River and Consortium Watersheds - [Visit Fire Safe Council](#)

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