



# What food issues are important to San Diego County farmers?



In the summer of 2020, as part of [San Diego County Food Vision 2030](#), San Diego County residents answered a few survey questions to express their unique needs and aspirations related to food in their communities. We're excited to share what we heard from farmers in our region.

## OVERVIEW

What do you value in your relationships with your markets or your community?

### SELECT RESPONSES

- "Providing good quality to our community and building a relationship with each person."
- "I value reciprocity. The best relationships are where we give and take in balance and treat each other with respect."
- "Fair prices, dependability and win-win relationships."

What do you want San Diegans to know about your experiences operating a farm?

### SELECT RESPONSES

- "It's an all-day commitment, not a part-time job. We do it because we love it."
- "That they think it is hard. But, it is even harder than that. Farming is an incredibly complicated profession and it takes a very special person to be a farmer."
- "Heat, cold, rain, drought. Farmers directly affect and are affected by nature. It's an intimate and beautiful relationship. Full of hard work, tears, joy and wonder. I wish more folks would commit to this relationship; we need more farmers."
- "Water expense, regulatory expense is destroying farming."
- "We value the Earth and support the health of the soil and the ecosystem; their support makes this possible. Subsidies for commodities make small farms and organic practice more difficult. We have to clean up after others."
- "It's also important to maintain local farms and not displace them to build more housing. Farms provide many jobs that would not be replaced by housing. Farms also provide local food security."
- "That we use organic and sustainable farming methods, and that it's possible to do this and still be profitable."
- "You cant just pull something off a shelf; it takes a lot of planning and working around the changes in weather, etc."
- "How expensive it is to grow avocados. Sometimes dangerous picking conditions and how hard the pickers from Mexico work. Absolutely indispensable and knowledgeable."
- "Beyond organic and regenerative agriculture practices, a worker-owned and operated system focuses even more on food justice and accessibility."

## CHALLENGES

What are the top challenges for your farm?

### TOP CHALLENGES

- Achieving profitability and/or making a living
- Finding affordable and skilled farm labor
- Accessing sufficient and affordable water
- Navigating permitting/regulatory issues

What are the top production challenges for your farm?

### TOP CHALLENGES

- Managing pests
- Adapting to climate change

## CHALLENGES (CONTINUED)

What are the top marketing challenges for your farm?

### TOP CHALLENGES

Limited consumer awareness of local farmers, products, and values  
Accessing profitable direct markets (e.g., farmers markets, farm stands, CSAs, online, etc.)

What are the top quality of life challenges for your farm?

### TOP CHALLENGES

Maintaining a good work/life balance  
Working long days

## DESIRED RESOURCES

Which of these resources would you most likely use?

### TOP RESOURCES

Matchmaking program that connects farm with markets  
Regulatory and legal assistance (farmbudsman)  
Farmer-to-farmer technical assistance network

What type of business/technical assistance do you prefer?

### TOP SELECTIONS

Digital/online workshops/webinars  
Peer to peer network of farmers  
One-on-one assistance

## COVID-19

How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your farm and how do you anticipate it will affect your operations in the coming months?

### SELECT RESPONSES

- "It changed our marketing model, but, the increased demand has been great. We just hope people better understand the value of local agriculture to their food security and continue to support us."
- "We had to restructure our business and got creative, we opened a farmstand on our property and are slowly bring customers to us."
- "It has reduced our sales by over 25% and will result in significant financial losses in 2020. Hopefully 2021 will be better, but the future is uncertain and impossible to forecast."
- "When the state shut down, we thought we were going to lose our business because all our orders were cancelled. Since then, our customers have been ordering. As long as people want plants, we will be able to keep the business going."
- "I am not able to hire the women who would work part time while their children are in school. There is a dire need for guest workers to come work farms."
- "The trees don't know COVID, the fruit still has to come off and be sold."
- "Losing pickers at the height of harvests; reduced sales to distributors and restaurants; excess fruit not sold but donated to the local food pantry."
- "Loss of childcare/school, difficulty incorporating new workers, higher expenses for packing."
- "It actually increased the demand for fresh produce at a local level."

## ASPIRATIONS FOR FARMING (CONTINUED)

What is your vision for your farm in the next five to ten years?

### SELECT RESPONSES

- "Build a strong customer base and become a destination for small groups to come enjoy our community."
- "Keep building and sharing our regenerative practices; use our experience to support other beginning farmers; increase diversified fruit/veg/row crop production in San Diego County."
- "To responsibly and organically grow a variety of products such as fruits, berries, melons, mushrooms, honey and vegetables."
- "Vineyard in full production, good market for San Diego County grown fruit. Overall improvement in San Diego County wines with county fruit rather than imported fruit."
- "We want to bring tourists to view our farm and we want to skip the packing house and sell direct to restaurants, stores and the public."
- "If water prices are lowered I expect the farm to be at full potential."
- "At least break even."
- "Become profitable!"
- "We are watching what climate change is bringing and whether we can continue growing cherimoya."
- "Establishing greater work/family balance in relation to income needed and hiring choices, feel more confident in the application of regenerative practices that match practicality of work(load) and income needs."
- "Growing production capacity and the network of local farms supporting each other."

What would you like to see happen as a result of San Diego County Food Vision 2030?

### SELECT RESPONSES

- "Consensus on goals, plans and strategies for food system equity."
- "That there is a comprehensive vision that farmers and the public can jointly embrace. You can't force farmers to keep farming if there aren't profits being generated, yet that appears to be the public's attitude!"
- "Continue on the path to bring knowledge to communities to think outside the box of grocery stores and take an adventure to the farms of San Diego."
- "Create a comprehensive list of regulations and requirements a new farm needs to conduct business in our area."
- "Increase in organic production and more focus on sustainable strategies and ecosystem support and renewal. More people involved in food production and distribution, recycling."
- "We need more than reports."
- "Recognize that the only way any farm can stay in business is if they are profitable."
- "More support and recognition of the contributions and needs of small farms. Ag, Weights, and Measures should limit undue influence by factory farms and be more responsive to small family farms."
- "More appreciation in the public for the need to maintain small, local, and locally owned farms. We should not have them sold off to be built on."
- "Limit imported food products, especially those bringing new pest into our area. Public awareness of environmental impact of importing food."
- "Better networking between farmers. Accessibility and sharing information and knowledge."
- "Education back into schools on sources of food, food hygiene and how to prepare fresh and healthy meals instead of fast food and buying lesser food value pre-prepared meals."
- "Organize more local market options."
- "That policymakers and local government recognize and support the work of small organic farmers and their impact in food security and the local economy."