



What food issues are important to San Diego County restaurant owners?



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 restaurant owners in our region.

OVERVIEW

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

SELECT RESPONSES

- "El respeto hacia el negocio,y mi equipo de personal ,el hacernos sentir parte de su familia y de su comunidad." (Respect for the business, and my staff, making us feel part of their family and their community)
- "We value the relationship we have with our guests and community. We support each other."
- "We care a lot about our guests and community. We value that they keep coming back and supporting us through thick and thin."

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

SELECT RESPONSES

- "We want people to understand what different ordering platforms mean and how they affect the restaurant and the quality of service we are able to provide."
- "It's really hard. If we could do it all over again, we would have never come to California at all. It's a sad fact. But San Diego County can be more business friendly and they aren't."
- "I'd advise San Diegans not to open a restaurant. The market is more than saturated and costs like power, water, waste, and rent are high. It's difficult to make a profit."
- "SD has extra challenges because everyone is already paying to live here. Because of that, when they vote for your business with their dollars it really means something. Awesome access to local ingredients, a lot less competitive than a big city."
- "That our regulations are extremely difficult, and that we are under tight scrutiny. Restaurants operate at very small margins."
- "It's very very expensive and it's very hard work. We love San Diego but it's a very complicated and expensive environment for restaurants."
- "Great to be tied into the community. We are in a servant business, but we are human, too."

CHALLENGES

What are the top challenges or needs for your restaurant business?

TOP CHALLENGES

- Achieving profitability/making a living
- Finding affordable and skilled labor
- Providing affordable health care for self and/or for employees

DESIRED RESOURCES

Which of these resources would you most likely use?

TOP RESOURCES

- Network for restaurant owners/managers
- Workforce assistance (e.g., support for recruiting and managing labor, human resource issues, etc.)
- Website and event guide helping tourists find authentic food and farm experiences in San Diego County

LOCAL SOURCING

Do you source food from San Diego County for your menu? **76%** of respondents answered 'yes,' they do source local food

What types of local products do you offer on your menu?	TOP SELECTIONS	
	Vegetables	Beef
	Eggs	Berries
	Avocados	Pork
	Citrus	Non-citrus fruit
	Seafood	Other
	Poultry	

What prevents you from offering local food products on your menu? **TOP SELECTIONS**
Distributor does not carry products from San Diego County
Limited product availability

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

How has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted your restaurant business and how do you anticipate it will affect your operations in the coming months? **TOP SELECTIONS**

- "We had no income for 5 months, but had to pay FULL rent on two spaces so it's been devastating. Other bills—electricity, security—those didn't stop either. We are in the hole and don't see a solution out. One place will close."
- "Devastating. Sales have not recovered after 5 months of decline. Currently operating at 55% of pre-COVID revenue. PPP loan has helped us keep doors open but the money is running out and the sales are not improving."
- "We do large events (festivals, weddings, etc.)—our business has been decimated and we don't see it returning any time soon. We are pivoting to more of a catering approach. Currently operating at 10-20% of pre-COVID revenues."
- "It impacted us that we changed whole operation to be as contactless as possible. We had to change the POS system for that. We need to invest to transform the restaurant to survive; however, we have less capacity, so it's tough."

ASPIRATIONS FOR RESTAURANTS

What is your vision for your restaurant in the next five to ten years? **SELECT RESPONSES**

- "To survive. To continue to employ great people. To continue to be a pillar of our local community. To remain family owned, family funded, family operated."
- "To do our best to stay open, but eventually expand to more locations."
- "I've managed to stay in business for 25 years. I envision that if this continues, I will be out of business in a year at best."
- "Simplify our menu and operations to make up for the increase costs of doing business."
- "More restaurants will be out of business. Only fast casual to casual and fine dining will survive. More delivery and takeout will be popular."
- "Fully operational, employing more staff than pre-COVID, higher wages for kitchen staff, expanded dining footprint, enhanced takeout."
- "Survive for now, grow later."
- "Taking it out of the brick and mortar and into the fields. I believe we will be doing smaller party/family-style dining. Using our own farmed ingredients to create these menus."

ASPIRATIONS FOR RESTAURANTS (CONTINUED)

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

SELECT RESPONSES

- "Definitely the local food hub (digital or physical) that connects local growers, fishermen etc with restaurants."
- "To further educate administrators about the needs of restaurants, from a labor and structural standpoint."
- "San Diego workforce is mostly Spanish speaking. Would like to see more required health department trainings offered in Spanish. More HR services offered in Spanish, etc. Right now I have difficulty finding food handlers , sexual harassment certified trainers to teach in Spanish."
- "Let us produce and supply all the restaurants and food trucks with everything we need, right here in San Diego. Lets build our San Diego."
- "Easier and more affordable permitting processes, legal support for restaurants, and a clear path to get the answers we need for questions that come up DAILY in the trenches of our industry."
- "We pay a living wage and so when we do find good people, we can retain them. But a network to find those good people would be wonderful. More public awareness of the high cost of REAL and local and good food would be great too. We'd happily work with other restaurateurs towards all these goals and more. Collaboration is key!"
- "Have the city wake up and actually help small businesses to succeed and stop the run-around. Get city employees to make helping the customer the first priority! Just like we do."
- "I would like to be easy to access local vendors that supply local sourced food to purchase."
- "Would like to see more resources, and a better balance in the labor force and regulatory environment."
- "I am alright with rules and regulations but these need to match our needs to be able to survive and grow."
- "Support for living wage and health care for restaurant workers, affordable rent solutions and tax breaks to offset heavy losses sustained by COVID-19."
- "Incentives to food providers who put an emphasis on healthier, sustainable, and local ingredients. Advertising around this. Help from the city with getting permitted and license at rates that are manageable (especially for those food providers with 5 employees or less)."
- "Would love more access to local food. We would buy everything local if it was available and cost efficient. Working together with other restaurants or creating a network to help lower delivery costs, especially minimums that many companies require, would allow costs to go down and maybe make some items more affordable."
- "Would like to collaborate on strategies to implement green initiatives, including solar, greywater, Ocean-Friendly Restaurants, waste reduction, etc."
- "The infrastructure to support our local farmers and producers, making them more accessible to the people of San Diego County. Through farm dinners and farmers' markets and tours, promotion of seeking locally sourced goods first."