



# Technical Panel 3 Meeting Notes

Santa Clara Valley Ag Action Plan Program  
Monday, October 30, 2017 | 1pm-4pm  
County of Santa Clara Offices | San Martin, CA

## Meeting Objectives

1. Present and get input on final draft of the Ag Action Plan
  - a. Inform the Panels about updates since June Meeting
2. Discussion and Feedback on Implementation
  - a. Priority on Programs / Policies / Tools
3. Discuss Roles of Partner Agencies – Collaboration going forward
4. Next steps

## Links

- [Meeting Agenda](#)
- [Ag Action Plan Update Presentation](#)

## Welcome and Introduction to the Action Plan

Rob Eastwood welcomed the joint municipal and agricultural tech panel back to the project. He presented slides 1 to 10 of the [Update Presentation](#) to reorient the group. He noted in particular the change in the program name for the Santa Clara Valley Agricultural Action Plan to reflect the plan's emphasis on ag economic viability. After brief introductions from technical panel members, the staff team continued its presentation on the draft plan.

The Action Plan is built around three core goals:

- Keeping lands in ranching and farming
- Protecting critical lands from conversion to development
- Creating a unified regional agriculture policy

Taken together these goals aim to create the ideal environment for agriculture, which includes:

- Large lots
- Inexpensive lots (leases / fee title)
- Good soil
- Water available and inexpensive
- Seasonal and year around labor (housing)
- No urban interface
- Easy access to markets and customers
- Less "red tape"
- Support System: packing, warehousing, distribution, equipment, farm supply

## Agricultural Resource Area

In this section, the Technical Panel was walked through slides 11 through 13 of the [Update Presentation](#) on the creation of an agricultural resource area.

To implement these its goals for agriculture, the plan calls for creating an Agricultural Resource Area.

This area is:

- A **priority area** that focuses all policies and programs
- Consists of primarily prime farmland soils
- Has access to reliable groundwater
- Outside city limits
- Consists of large contiguous tracts of farming
- Includes adjacent ranchlands

The priority area consists of six sub-areas on the Valley floor including:

- Coyote Valley
- Tennant/San Martin
- Buena Vista
- The Wine Region
- Leavesley
- Pacheco Pass
- Adjacent ranchlands

Within the Resource Area the four elements of the Action Plan—Branding, Education & Awareness Campaign, Rethinking Land Use Policy, Ag Land Conservation Easements & Other Voluntary Incentives, and the Ag Economic Development Strategy—would be focused.

### Panel feedback

The panel was asked for feedback on the concept and the boundaries of the Resource Area. Comments and questions included:

Panel: Is there any sector of south county ag that has grown/ is thriving?

- *Walnuts and cherries (in terms of acreage)*
- *Wineries stabilized (58 with winetasting)*
  - *Production and value per acre up for these*
- Comment: history is best indicator of what works. Good to focus on what is the growing sector.
- Little farms do not survive without big farms. Need bigger operations to make small local-focused farms work.

Staff: Do the sub-regions make sense?

- This map began simply with land use delineations.
- BV/ Leavesley is the best ag areas
- Bloomfield south has bad soil and water
- Most productive ground is in south part of Leavesley, but map is fine
- Buena Vista: 40-100 acre range parcels
- Leavesley 100-200 acres plus, larger scale
- Coyote Valley: best to divide this into north, central, and south

Panel: What were criteria for separating the sub-regions?

- Looking at size of properties, operations, crops grown, general location in regard to non ag uses, class of soils. Geography, dominant resources,
  - But these are conceptual boundaries
- Morgan Hill regards 2 parts of San Martin differently. The northern section is surrounded by development and it is inevitable that your property will be developed.
- Southern: more question about what will happen development. Consider renaming to San Martin/Tennant A and B
- Over period of general plan most likely for growth to happen in A area.
- Example of what happens without proper policy: San Martin

## The Four Elements of the Ag Action Plan

In this section, the technical panel was reintroduced to the four proposed elements of the Action Plan itself and asked to provide feedback on the plan and priority actions. This material was presented in slides 14 to 26 of the [Update Presentation](#).

### Rethinking Land Use

This section includes actions to change zoning/general plan and to promote agricultural worker Housing.

#### Panel questions

Panel: Is there any process to define something as ag exempt?

- Answer: We do have ag exempt on the books but challenge is it is an exemption to a building permit. Concept of ag exempt is that no one is in there. Historically people were putting people in which isn't allowed under ag exempt. If someone is living in the building it can't be ag exempt.

#### Panel Comments

- The pain of getting infrastructure approved is considerable if not within given template
- Bring back ag exempt but make it flexible and multi-use. For wineries/ ag tourism they could benefit
- Facilitate ease of processing/ production by releasing stranglehold on requirements for ag use-related land
- Historically, process with wineries took longer than expected.
  - Intent with ag deregulation on use permit is to lubricate that process. Codes still won't change.
- Farmers don't have much time to innovate— want paths carved. Having use permit process different for everyone is cumbersome. Create blueprint.
  - This can be standardized into different buckets:
    - Processing
    - Packaging
    - Retail
    - Take out of county review process
- San Benito an example of this, but smaller
  - Wineries permit that fits in certain parameters is an example of this. If you have employees can't get away from building permit requirements.
  - We (county) prepared to work with you on this.
- Comment: actions here don't address land speculation issue.

- If someone pays \$145,000 per acre for 10 acre parcel it is likely for land speculation. Different problems.
- What is driving speculation? All things
- Right to Farm:
  - Most people don't read documents when they buy a house.
  - Other problem with right to farm they can find something to harass you about.
    - Air quality
    - Parking for laborers
    - Field encroachments
- "It's really hard to regulate out people being jerks"
- Way for different orgs to mark ag zones and educate public about ag? Is there a way to raise the bar that prevents people from only saying I don't know.
  - Example: Signs at entrances to different areas letting people know they are driving through ag land
  - This question belongs in branding and education category.
- Coaching of planning departments to interface with irate urbanites would help.
- Idea: 10-minute video about right to farm.
- Affordable Housing for Ag workers:
  - How do you get down to \$50K?
    - Modular unit is \$80K
  - Who has been successful with this in nearby counties?
    - Salinas/ Monterey there are examples
  - Is there a NIMBY element to this?
    - Not so much in rural areas.

### Ag land conservation/voluntary incentives

In this section, the panel provided feedback on the plan for creating a farmland security zone, agricultural conservation easement purchase program, and stewardship payments for environmental services.

- How does the Farmland Security Zone work?
  - Landowners would apply/ enroll
  - Similar to Williamson Act
- Are there restrictions to keep it being farmed?
  - Yes, it has to be actively farmed and achieve a minimum farmgate sales level
- An easement could automatically qualify for FSZ. Is there some way to combine the two?
  - Where and at what size would this be financially viable to farmers?
  - Direct hit to general fund
  - Would need a lot of support in ag community
    - If we get sense there is support in ag community we will tee this up
- Templates for ACE being developed by land trust alliance

Need for funding mechanism for these programs:

- Morgan Hill one of only cities that has development fee.
- For ACE, State has own priorities and may be hard to track and may not be reliable. Need something local that won't compete with Central Valley.
- Half cent tax added to county transfer tax on sold properties as one approach
  - Special tax  $\frac{2}{3}$  vote
  - Throughout county including north county
- Grants always tricky this is worth exploring.

- Disappointed that we aren't discussing non-financial alternatives.
- Will existing landowners be able to realize the worth of their land at market rate?
- FSZ: 20 years is a long time when looking at water unknowns and impact on farming.
  - 10 acres for prime, 40 for non-prime you must prove financial gain through Schedule F can claim those contingencies as a loss.

*Farming provides ecosystem services and benefits to the region that are not financially recognized.*

- NRCS has hundreds of practices they will fund- vastly underutilized in SC county. Combine with water use?
- Farmers could use help getting through red tape with water compensation.
- Need to get better at partnering with others
- Looking at overall values of parcels
- WCCD encompasses flood control and fallowing crops during drought.
- Not a primary project because not a lot of benefits but did get approved for South county ag recharge to use ag lands to help recharge groundwater.
- Is it possible to incentivize cluster development and bunching acres for long-term ag lease with tax benefit?
  - Add those criteria and allowances. Could be built that way.
- Now you can do power purchasing agreements. Who are other players that could help me talk to those owners?
- Recommendation: Sustainable Conservation for groundwater recharge
  - Planning for recharge for ag not calculated—only residential etc.
  - Flag conversation about water planning

### **Agricultural Economic Development**

In this section, the panel provided feedback on the proposals to promote agricultural economic development including creation of a farm ombudsperson, and agricultural enterprise grant program, a farm incubator/ag park, and a local food preference procurement policy.

### **Comments**

Question to the panel: It can be very difficult for farmers to navigate regulatory process and obtain permits. Concerns or thoughts about ombudsman position?

- Online portal/ platform as supplemental support could be useful

Question to the panel: How do we give new farmers access to land, technical support, access to markets, and reduced overhead costs. Concerns or thoughts about a farm incubator?

- Would Public lands put to use for this purpose?
  - Yes, one potential is 245 acres at the intersection of Fraser Lake and Bloomfield Rd.
- The County would be willing to give grants to operate beginning farmer/ rancher program

Question to the Panel: It can be difficult to conduct sales to local institutions. Concerns or thoughts about a local food preference program?

- It could be helpful to do a survey of institutions to find out where they are getting their food from
- Concern: based on our experience about what institutions are willing to pay, farmers would not be able to support themselves

## Branding and Marketing

In this section, the panel provided feedback on the proposals to increase the awareness and perceived value of County agriculture through an educational campaign, institutional outreach, and a communications program.

Question to the Panel: we see a lack of public awareness understanding and appreciation of working lands and ag. Concerns or thoughts about a \$250,000 “two valley’s ad campaign that would ultimately be taken over by the ag community?

- Concern: Cities have the responsibility to meet their financial responsibilities. There is potentially a disconnect between cities branding effort and this idea. We need to coordinate.
- The goal of the campaign should be to help SC ag survive:
  - Keep commercial growers in place
  - Brand it in a meaningful way
  - Build a pipeline of new farmers
  - Help find new business models for farming?

## Roles of Partners/Next Steps

Rob concluded the meeting by indicating the Planning Department would be working closely with the cities, the Open Space Authority, the Water Agency, and other organizations to complete the plan. The goal is to have something to the supervisors by the end of the year, with implementation beginning next year.

The meeting concluded with hearty thanks to the advisors for their vital contributions to the shape of the Action Plan and their support in the plans implementation.