


**Building a Community of Good Stewards:
A Summit on Sustaining Agriculture for Ventura County's Future**

A Report to the Community

Building a Community
of Good Stewards

A SUMMIT ON SUSTAINING AGRICULTURE



FOR VENTURA COUNTY'S FUTURE

THURSDAY, MARCH 30, 2006

OXNARD PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

CONVENERS
Ag Futures Alliance of Ventura County
Ventura County Civic Alliance
University of California Hansen Trust

TITLE SPONSOR
Limoneira Company

COHOSTED by the League of Women Voters of Ventura County

Ventura County Ag Futures Alliance
Report No. 5
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Chart 1. Ag summit participants by geography and sector

Chart 2. Ventura County ag summit participants by city and sector

Table 5. Participant Responses – Actions to Support Sustainable Agriculture in Ventura County – By Sector

Action	Ag production	Non-profit / Community	Government	Housing	Ag support	Education	Financial	Elected	Students	Press	Other / Unknown	Total
Take direct action	36	32	11	11	9	7	6	5	4	1	10	132
Speak with decision makers	15	17	6	5	3	3	1	3	1	1	7	62
Show video	13	17	3	3	4	4	2	3	1	1	6	57
Join stewardship cmte	15	5	3	2	4	3	2	2		1	2	39
Join land use planning cmte	12	5	4	2	3	1	1	5			3	36
Join FWH cmte	5	11	1	6	1		1	4		1	4	34
Join FW health cmte	5	6	2		1		1	3		1	2	21
Specific direct actions:												
Support candidates & policies	29	28	7	9	6	7	4	2	2		9	103
Support FWH	22	28	6	11	5	5	6	5	2	1	7	98
Reduce toxics	13	26	4	9	7	7	3	3	3	1	9	85
Urge grocers to stock local	23	23	5	8	6	4	6	3	2		4	84
												83
Reduce water use	14	25	5	10	6	5	4	3	3		8	
Request origin labeling	12	19	3	3	6	4	3	2	2		4	58
Support buffers	10	17	8	4	3	4	3	4	2		3	58
Other direct action	6	6	2			4			2		1	21
Number of respondents	47	34	14	13	12	9	8	7	5	2	15	166

Goal #3: Demonstrate the power of respectful, cross-boundary engagement and problem solving.

Results relative to this goal are difficult to measure, but were evident nonetheless. Perhaps most telling is that the vast majority of the audience for the summit stayed for its entire duration, with minimal attrition even over the lunch break period. What stood out for many people was how many culturally different people, from a wide range of businesses and endeavors, participated in the day. Many remarked upon the value they received from the interactive table talking, the diversity of speakers on each panel and how unique and necessary this kind of collaborative gathering is for the future of agriculture in the county.

The average rating participants gave the summit (on a scale of 1-10) was 8.8, with 5 being the lowest rating given by anyone and many individuals rating it a 10. See Table 6 for a summary of summit ratings by category of participant.

Table 6. Summit Ratings

Sector	Number of Responses	Average Rating	Highest Rating	Lowest Rating
Elected	4	8.0	10	6
Ag support	9	8.3	10	5
Government	9	8.5	10	7
Ag production	29	8.6	10	5
Other / Unknown	8	8.9	10	8
Financial	3	9.0	10	8
Housing	10	9.0	10	8
Students	5	9.0	10	8
Education	6	9.2	10	6
Non-profit / Community	26	9.2	10	8
Grand Total	109	8.8	10	5

CONCLUSIONS

The summit confirmed the value of addressing agriculture as everybody's issue, of bringing diverse community members together with farmers to find ways to work together to achieve common goals related to sustaining agriculture in Ventura County. It underscored the importance of directions that the Ag Futures Alliance is already taking in the areas of education, outreach, and broader engagement of community members in action-oriented task forces modeled on the successful AFA Farm Worker Housing Task Force.

It also confirmed the interest and energy around building distribution and marketing of locally grown products, a major theme that emerged out of an AFA community roundtable on ag stewardship in November 2005.

The summit also highlighted some important gaps in AFA's current approach, and pointed to new opportunities to address those gaps:

- **Addressing the issues and concerns of mid-size and large farms and farmers** – Comments both during and after the summit indicated that some mid-size and larger farmers felt that the summit did not address the economic realities that threaten their long-term survival in Ventura County. AFA recognizes that it doesn't have all the answers right now. But the summit has been an important step toward identifying and raising awareness of those issues, and launching the beginnings of a dialog and collaborative community action to address them. Within AFA a conversation has begun about what exactly we mean by "preserving agriculture in perpetuity" in Ventura County – what kind of agriculture, and over what area?

- **Financial incentives to preserve farmland** – the summit helped to revitalize discussion in the broader community about creating financial incentives to preserve farmland – from ag conservation easements to tax incentives for retailers to stock locally grown produce. The AFA Land Use Committee is turning its attention to conservation easements and other mechanisms for permanently protecting farmland, and the Stewardship Committee is exploring several avenues for promoting local distribution and marketing of Ventura County products.
- **Local distribution and marketing** – conspicuously absent from the summit were representatives of local and regional food distributors and retailers, though AFA has made initial and promising efforts to engage this community in dialog and is actively exploring opportunities for collaborative initiatives in this arena. Also thinly represented at the summit were east county, urban communities. Helping to build partnerships between rural/producer communities and urban/consumer communities, both in Ventura County and in neighboring southern California regions will be a major focus of future AFA work.
- **Integrated regional planning** – a recurring theme at the summit, in participant response forms, and in the press following the summit was the lack of, and need for, integrated countywide approaches to addressing regional issues of growth and sustainability, including housing, transportation, economic development, agricultural viability, and preservation of farmland and open space. The Ventura County Civic Alliance is developing a regional visioning and planning initiative with the Ventura Council of Governments and others and will work with AFA to ensure that agriculture is an integral component of the effort that moves forward. AFA will also be working with Ecotrust and the Roots of Change Fund to implement a Vivid Picture pilot project in Ventura County, utilizing map-based scenario analysis tools to develop a picture of what a sustainable food system could look like in our region.

See Table 7 for a summary of the opportunities for and obstacles to ag stewardship that were identified by the summit participants who submitted response forms.

Table 7. Opportunities and Obstacles for Ag Stewardship

Summarized from summit response forms.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR STEWARDSHIP

Category	% of responses	Quotes
Education	43%	“Education is the key to everything.” “Education is the most powerful tool to create positive change.” “Envision a central goal and implement it.” “Educate – educate – educate!”
Local distribution and marketing	33%	“Buy local!”
Regional dialog and collaboration	33%	“Get together-talk-listen-be honest-get busy-do it!”
Policies	49%	“If you want farming to remain, then you have to let them farm.”
Support ag	16%	
Farm workers	13%	
Economics	8%	
Voting and accountability	8%	
Buffers	5%	
Other stewardship opportunities	11%	“Keep trying to make our community the place we want to live in.”

OBSTACLES TO STEWARDSHIP

Category	Quotes
Economics	“If farmers do not make money, farming will cease to exist in Ventura County.” “Economic factors dictate practices which can realistically be utilized by farmers.” “I see Ventura looking like Orange County by the year 2030.”
Policies and Politics	“Planning dept., building and safety, fire dept., environmental health agencies – how can you begin?”
Education, values and attitudes	“Does everyone understand the difference between large commercial farmers and small family farms?” “Unrealistic expectations – ‘We can protect farmland with SOAR but not support smart growth.’” “Narrow-minded perspectives focusing on 5% of differences rather than 95% of agreement.” “Taking risks on new ways of operating a business.”
Competing Priorities	“Trying to fix too many things!” “The public focuses on actions that directly affect them, rather than what would benefit the larger community (e.g., buying cheap imported produce).”
Local distribution and marketing	“What’s missing is key to making the change – regional/national distributors and grocers.”
Regional dialog and collaboration	“The ten cities and the county need to work together more collaboratively to solve regional problems and to help agriculture.” “Where’s the rest of the county? Simi Valley, Santa Clarita?”
Other obstacles	“Bugs.”

NEXT STEPS

Since the summit, the conveners have been working to harness the tremendous energy from the summit and to coordinate and connect activities countywide. Immediate priorities have included:

- Reporting the results of the summit to the broader community (see appendix for preliminary report sent to summit participants in May 2006)
- Launching ongoing e-news/action alert communications to Summit participants (see appendix for first two issues)
- Expanding and linking AFA and VCCA committees on ag stewardship, regional planning, land use, and livable communities, regional indicators, workforce development, farm worker housing, and farm worker health.
- Working with the Roots of Change Fund, Ecotrust, and UC Davis to undertake a “Vivid Picture” analysis of future ag issues and scenarios in Ventura County

The video “Goods Stewards” that was produced for the summit by Dulanie Ellis of Point of View Films was revised after the summit to give added voice to the issues and concerns of mid-size farmers in the county, and is available directly from the filmmaker (www.pointofviewfilms.com). Individuals who purchased the original video at the summit may exchange it for the revised version free of charge. An Audience Guide is also available for facilitating film presentations and discussion with school and community audiences.

AFA is preparing to launch a series of initiatives that emerged out of the dialog and feedback from the summit along with the ongoing work of the AFA Stewardship and Land Use Committees. Summit participants will be invited to join and help shape and implement each of these projects:

1. **Certification and labeling** of locally, sustainably grown products to build the brand awareness and value of Ventura County agricultural products, both here and elsewhere.
2. **Local distribution channels** to centralize and increase the volume, efficiency and profitability of selling locally grown products to local and regional markets throughout southern California, building on current systems such as the Ventura and Ojai farm-to-school programs.
3. **Urban/rural partnerships** to link Los Angeles County consumers with Ventura County producers.
4. **Ag conservation easements** and other tools and incentives for protecting agriculture in perpetuity.

The AFA Farm Worker Housing and Farm Worker Health Committees and the VCCA Compact for a Sustainable Ventura County Working Group also have ongoing initiatives in which interested summit participants have been or will be invited to participate.

Lastly, this report will be posted on the AFA and VCCA websites as a resource for other AFA or regional collaborative initiatives around the state and beyond that are interested in learning from our experiences in Ventura County or are considering organizing similar activities in their regions. We welcome questions, comments and feedback, which can be addressed to the Ventura County AFA at info@aginnoventions.net.

APPENDICES

- A. Marketing materials
 - 1. Project synopsis
 - 2. Sponsorship appeal letter
 - 3. Sponsorship opportunities
 - 4. Summit Press release

- B. Conference packet materials
 - 1. Summit Program
 - 2. Speaker bios
 - 3. (a) Lunch menu
 - (b) Ventura ag fact sheet
 - 4. Participant response form
 - 5. AFA Stewardship white paper
 - 6. (a) Description of conveners
 - (b) Description of co-host
 - (c) Description of title sponsor

- C. Conference presentations
 - a. Cornelius Gallagher, Bank of America
 - b. Ron Bottorff, Ventura County Civic Alliance
 - c. Eileen Brady, Vivid Picture Project

- D. Town hall questions

- E. Media coverage

- F. Summit follow-up materials
 - 1. Letter to summit participants, 5/5/06
 - 2. (a) Ag Stewardship action alert, 5/5/06
 - (b) Ag Stewardship action alert, 6/12/06