Solano County Strategic Initiative for Agriculture Executive Summary

The *Solano County Strategic Initiative for Agriculture* is a visionary and practical proposal to protect working agricultural lands by enhancing the long-term economic viability of the County's food and agricultural systems. The *Initiative* leverages foundational elements of Solano County's varied agricultural regions, diversity of crops and livestock, broad range of producers and processors, reliable water resources, centralized geography and an engaged community to develop:

- A coalition of strategic partners intent on securing a prosperous local food and agricultural economy;
- An agricultural economic plan ensuring investment in a profitable and enduring future for producers, processors and supporting industries;
- A next generation of land use policies focused on recognizing agriculture as a business while also preserving working agricultural lands;
- A mapping platform to help stakeholders and decision-makers evaluate and protect agricultural lands;
- A climate resilient future for Solano County agriculture.

Solano County is one of the most diverse agricultural counties in the State with ten unique agricultural regions producing over 100 commodities annually. Solano was one of the first counties to adopt an agricultural element into its 2008 general plan, which sunsets in 2028. Despite proactive County planning favorable to agriculture, encroachment by cities into agricultural lands contributed to conversion of over 16,000 acres or 4% of Solano County agricultural lands between 2000-2018. A recent assessment of agricultural conditions within the county identified further compounding pressures on agricultural producers: urban expansion is forcing farmers to remove crops or dramatically alter farming practices; inflationary pressures including market volatility and rising labor and production costs combined with flat or poor commodity prices are hampering economic viability; land access and escalating land values are serving as formidable barriers to new farmers; regulatory compliance is exceedingly complex and expensive; and, climate extremes are causing crops losses and increasing levels of uncertainty.

These challenges require innovative land use policy updates coupled with new economic development planning, mutually beneficial to both rural and urban areas. Agriculture is the second largest economic driver in the county but also provides recreational, tourism, habitat, groundwater recharge, open space and local food co-benefits to all residents. The *Strategic Initiative* will capitalize on these interrelationships and existing planning and economic platforms to further enhance and grow Solano County's diverse agricultural systems by:

- Identifying utility and technological infrastructure needs required to support precision agriculture, processing and production capacities;
- Designing land use policy actions promoting city-centered growth with community separators and workforce housing;
- Developing economic strategies enhancing agricultural processing, agritourism, local food systems, indoor agriculture, and transportation and distribution networks;
- Elevating public understanding of the critical economic, cultural, and environmental roles agriculture and local food systems contribute to community well-being.

Participants

STEERING COMMITTEE	TECHNICAL COMMITTEE	ADVISORY COMMITTEE
BOS Ag Visioning Committee	UCCE Advisors	Solano County Farm Bureau
County Staff	Solano Irrigation District	Pleasants Valley Ag Association
• Agricultural Commissioner	Solano Groundwater Sustainability Agency	Suisun Vintners & Growers Association
• LAFCO Executive Director	Solano Transportation Agency	Farmers & Ranchers
• Resource Management Director	City Planning Managers	Processors (Campbells Soup, Superior Farms)
• Water and Natural Resources Manager	Housing Authorities	Wool Growers Association
• County Administrative Office	County Planning Manager	Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation
UCCE Advisor	Solano/Dixon RCDs	Solano Land Trust
Consultants (Facilitator, Planning, Economic)	Pacific Gas & Electric	Solano Food System Alliance
	Marin Clean Energy	Agricultural Transportation Companies

THE SOLANO COUNTY STRATEGIC INITIATIVE FOR AGRICULTURE is a county-wide effort led by the Board of Supervisors and Agriculture Department along with the agricultural community to pursue the Board of Supervisors' agricultural preservation and economic development priorities. This 2-year project will culminate in agricultural development, infrastructure and land use plans intended to protect the county's working agricultural lands by enhancing the long-term economic viability of local food and agricultural systems.

The Strategic Initiative is funded by a Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation (SALC) program grant through the California Strategic Growth Council in collaboration with the Department of Conservation. SALC is part of California Climate Investments, a statewide initiative that puts billions of Cap-and-Trade dollars to work reducing greenhouse gas emissions, strengthening the economy, and improving public health and the environment – particularly in disadvantaged communities.

BACKGROUND

Solano County is home to an incredibly diverse agricultural community and economy. The County's geography spans Bay-Delta and Sacramento Valley landscapes featuring ten unique agricultural regions that produce 100 commodities annually. Despite proactive County planning favorable to agriculture, encroachment by cities into agricultural lands contributed to conversion of over 18,800 acres or 5% of Solano County agricultural lands between 2000-2020. A recent assessment of agricultural conditions identified further compounding pressures on agricultural producers: urban expansion is forcing farmers to remove crops or alter farming practices; inflationary pressures, market volatility and rising labor and production costs combined with flat or poor commodity prices are hampering economic viability; land access and escalating land values are serving as barriers to new farmers; regulatory compliance is complex and expensive; and, climate extremes are causing crops losses and increasing levels of uncertainty.

OUR MISSION

The Strategic Initiative will meet these challenges through new economic development and infrastructure planning coupled with innovative land use policy updates that keep working farm and ranch lands in active production. Agriculture is the second largest economic driver in the county and provides recreational, tourism, habitat, groundwater recharge, open space and local food co-benefits to all residents. The Strategic Initiative will capitalize on these interrelationships by:

- Developing economic strategies that enhance agricultural production at multiple scales across Solano's diversity of agricultural sectors and regions, secure essential agricultural processing, transportation and distribution networks, promote a vibrant agritourism industry and cultivate healthy local food systems;
- Identifying utility and technological infrastructure needs required to support precision agriculture, indoor agriculture, processing and production capacities; and,
- Designing agriculture-compatible land use policy actions promoting city-centered growth, community separators, workforce housing and other environmental, social and public health co-benefits.

WHAT THE SOLANO STRATEGIC INITIATIVE FOR AGRICULTURE WILL DO:

Engage a coalition of strategic partners intent on securing a prosperous local food and agricultural economy

Build an agricultural economic development plan ensuring investment in a profitable and enduring future for producers, processors and supporting industries

Assess needs and recommend improvements to agricultural infrastructure

Develop a land use action plan supporting the agricultural economy and conservation of working agricultural lands

CALIFORNIA CLIMATE INVESTMENTS
Cap and Trade Dollars at Work

CALIFORNIA STRATEGIC GROWTH COUNCIL

California Department of Conservation

SOLANO COUNTY 1850

For more information contact **Ed King, Agricultural Commissioner: ejking@solanocounty.gov or (707) 784-1310**