



# COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

## LAND USE AGENDA ITEM

### BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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**DATE:** December 11, 2024

# 11

**TO:** Board of Supervisors

### **SUBJECT**

**RECEIVE THE FOOD JUSTICE COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN, DIRECT FISCAL ANALYSIS OF SELECT ACTIONS, AND RELATED CEQA EXEMPTION (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

### **OVERVIEW**

On June 4, 2024 (12) the County of San Diego (County) Board of Supervisors (Board) directed County staff to (a) convene a regional summit of stakeholders, service providers, community leaders, local farmers, and other governmental agencies; and (b) develop a regional community Food Justice Community Action Plan (FJCAP) with recommendations for the County to implement, to improve food access and reduce food insecurity. The Board directed a 90-day report back on the status of the summit and action plan as well as a return back on the final FJCAP. A memo with progress updates was sent to the Board on September 27, 2024. Today's request is for the Board to receive the FJCAP and, if the Board chooses, select one, multiple, or none of the actions for subsequent additional analysis. The actions, derived through community roundtables and informed by community priorities, aim to increase collaboration between the County and community partners, promote transparency and accountability, and improve food security in the region.

The FJCAP was informed by existing efforts and guided by community engagement, including individuals and communities with lived experiences related to food access and food insecurity. Staff received more than 1,500 comments, ideas, and shared experiences across a two-month timeframe. This also included letters from organizations, such as the San Diego Hunger Coalition, I Love to Glean, UC San Diego Center for Community Health, and the San Diego Food System Alliance. These comments, ideas, and experiences represented about 200 unique community ideas, reflecting the breadth and depth of input received from the community. County staff from a wide range of County departments reviewed these ideas and solidified them into 20 distinct actions the County can take based on alignment with County programs and services, scope, expertise, and/or resources. The full list of the more than 200 community ideas for action and the final 20 FJCAP actions and descriptions are included in Attachment A. The FJCAP actions are not comprehensive but rather a starting point for the County to take which can help build momentum for collaborative change to improve food access and reduce food insecurity in the San Diego region.

**SUBJECT: RECEIVE THE FOOD JUSTICE COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN, DIRECT FISCAL ANALYSIS OF SELECT ACTIONS, AND RELATED CEQA EXEMPTION (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

The final 20 FJCAP actions are divided into three groups based on readiness of implementation and resource needs:

- A. **Community-informed actions that are part of an existing County program or effort, which can continue to be implemented with no additional resources.**
- B. **Community-informed actions that are part of an existing County program or effort that could be modified or expanded with additional resources.** Further analysis would need to be conducted on the specific resource needs, including funding needs and identification of funding source and amounts along with implementation plans.
- C. **Community-informed actions that do not fit within current County programming and would require additional resources.** Further analysis would need to be conducted on the specific resource needs, including funding needs and identification of funding source and amounts along with implementation plans.

Today's request is for the Board to receive the FJCAP and, optionally, direct staff to report back in 120 days on the resources needed to implement any actions the Board would like to explore from Category B and/or C.

**RECOMMENDATION(S)  
CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER**

- 1. Find that the proposed action is exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Section 15378(b)(5) because it is not a project and because it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the action plan would have a significant effect on the environment.
- 2. Receive the Food Justice Community Action Plan.
- 3. Select unfunded actions, if any, from Category B and Category C in Attachment A of the FJCAP, and direct staff to report back in 120 days on resource needs and implementation steps for selected actions.

**EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

The San Diego region is home to over 4,000 small family-owned farms and more than 300 organic producers—the largest number of organic producers of any county in the country. There is also an active fishing industry, over 15,000 diverse food facilities, a year-round growing season, and 37 farmers markets. The County also currently leases over 130 acres of County land for food cultivation (through agricultural leases); over 9,000 acres of land for grazing, and 3-acres of land for a community garden. Despite the region's robust food system there are gaps in access. One indicator is the San Diego Hunger Coalition's estimate that one in four individuals in the region experience nutrition insecurity, or are unable to provide three, nutritious meals per day for themselves and/or their families. This negatively impacts our residents' health, longevity, and quality of life.

Food is fundamental to quality of life. The food system has various elements, including all processes and infrastructure involved in feeding a population: growing, production, processing,

**SUBJECT: RECEIVE THE FOOD JUSTICE COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN, DIRECT FISCAL ANALYSIS OF SELECT ACTIONS, AND RELATED CEQA EXEMPTION (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

storage, distribution, preparation, purchasing, consumption, and disposal. This system relies on a complex network of stakeholders, communities, and individuals. Conceptually, food also represents connection; it creates linkages between individuals and households, cultures, and the environment. Decisions made about food within one part of the system can have powerful ripple effects that, in turn, impact community and individual health outcomes. Therefore, to reach individuals and communities with lived experiences of food insecurity, staff worked with various County departments to promote engagement opportunities by sharing information through channels and networks, passing out fliers, partnering with community-based organizations to share the information, and used emails and social media posts to spread the word. In addition, in preparing the County actions, County staff analyzed over 1,500 public comments from diverse residents, community organizations, and local governments who shared their ideas and perspectives through comments provided in direct emails, Engage online, in-person and virtual roundtables and meetings.

**SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

The community-informed proposed actions to address food security and food access across the region contribute to Sustainability Goal #1: engage the community in meaningful ways and continually seek stakeholder input to foster inclusive and sustainable communities; Goal #2: provide just and equitable access to County services, policy decision making, and resource allocation in support of sustainable communities; and Goal #4: protect the health and wellbeing of everyone in the region, with a focus on collaborating with community partners and advocating for environmental justice for communities that have been disproportionately impacted. Throughout the development of the Food Justice Community Action Plan, County staff engaged with individuals and communities most impacted by food access and the input provided directly informed and shaped the actions for Board consideration.

**FISCAL IMPACT**

There is no fiscal impact associated with receiving the Food Justice Community Action Plan (FJCAP). Existing programs that are currently operational and contribute toward the FJCAP may be funded with various funding sources, including grants and current year revenue, included in the Fiscal Year 2024-25 Operational Plan. At this time, there is no funding source identified to support new investments for any of the unfunded actions outlined in FJCAP. If the Board directs further analysis of any actions, any future costs and funding for unfunded actions in Category B or Category C that the Board identifies would be reported back to the Board in 120 days. Any new costs associated with those unfunded actions may include one-time and ongoing resource needs, which may be funded by the reallocation of existing resources from other programs.

**BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT**

N/A

**ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT**

N/A

**SUBJECT:** RECEIVE THE FOOD JUSTICE COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN, DIRECT FISCAL ANALYSIS OF SELECT ACTIONS, AND RELATED CEQA EXEMPTION (DISTRICTS: ALL)

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Development of the Food Justice Community Action Plan**

To foster collaboration, accountability, and sustainable solutions that address food justice, the Board directed the development of the Food Justice Community Action Plan (FJCAP) on June 4, 2024 (12). The FJCAP was informed by existing efforts and guided robust community engagement that reached individuals and communities with lived experiences. This effort was led by the Office of Sustainability and Environmental Justice (OSEJ), in close collaboration with Public Health Services (PHS) and the Food System Initiative (FSI) Working Group that is made up of County staff representing 13 departments across the Business Groups. FSI is facilitated by OSEJ and is made up of: Agriculture, Weights, and Measures; Behavioral Health Services; Department of Environmental Health and Quality; Department of Parks and Recreation; Department of Public Works, Child and Family Wellbeing, County Library, Medical Care Services; Planning & Development Services; Public Health Services; and Sheriff.

To make effective use of existing resources, staff developed the FJCAP by starting with the existing San Diego County Food Vision 2030 (<https://sdfoodvision2030.org/>) as a foundation for analysis. Food Vision 2030 is a 10-year strategic plan for transforming the region's food system and was released in 2021 by the San Diego Food System Alliance (SDFSA). It defines food justice as everyone having access to safe, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food in sufficient quantity and quality to sustain a healthy life with full dignity, and includes three overarching goals: cultivate justice, fight climate change, and build resilience; and ten objectives that highlight priority areas in our food system where policy advocacy, programs, and investment are needed. In support of its development, on August 5, 2020 (16) the Board directed the County to partner with SDFSA to advance Food Vision 2030. Food Vision 2030 informed the community roundtables and engagement.

Overall, staff hosted six community roundtables throughout the region to gather input on action development, as well as facilitated a workshop and tabled at the Annual Gathering for San Diego County Food Vision 2030 (regional summit) to socialize community ideas shared in the roundtables and gather additional insights and ideas.

#### *Community Roundtables & Engagement*

OSEJ hosted six in-person community roundtables in August and September 2024 to engage with communities and individuals with lived experiences, as well as organizations, to generate insights. These roundtables explored topics within food security and food access themes, such as successful past/current resources, gaps, and desired partnerships, programs, and policies. They included an introductory presentation, followed by a discussion activity that allowed attendees to discuss ideas and actions with facilitators and other attendees. This structure provided space for conversations to occur between County staff and attendees to identify opportunities for actions.

Two community roundtables were in the central San Diego area (Spring Valley and Lemon Grove), one in south San Diego (National City), one in rural San Diego (Alpine), one focused on agricultural stakeholders (Fallbrook), and one focused on Tribal communities (Valley Center), which also included a virtual option. To help promote the roundtables and opportunity for public

**SUBJECT: RECEIVE THE FOOD JUSTICE COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN, DIRECT FISCAL ANALYSIS OF SELECT ACTIONS, AND RELATED CEQA EXEMPTION (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

input, OSEJ worked with the FSI Working Group to share the information through their channels and networks, and passed out fliers, asked our partnering community-based organizations to share the information, and used emails and social media posts to spread the word.

A total of 107 community members and/or representatives from local government and community organizations attended the roundtables that were supported by various County departments that have a role in the food system, including Agriculture, Weights and Measures; Public Health Services; and Self Sufficiency Services. Those who were not able to attend also had the opportunity to provide feedback through the Engage portal (<https://engage.sandiegocounty.gov/food-justice-community-action-plan>), which received nearly 13,000 visits. In addition, OSEJ was invited to present at various meetings like the Live Well South Region Food Insecurity Working Group, the Edible Food Recovery Working Group, the San Diego Food System Alliance Stewardship Committee Meeting, the San Diego County Farm Bureau, and the San Diego Food Bank. OSEJ also hosted a virtual meeting with the San Diego Hunger Coalition to hear directly from the Hunger Free Advisory Board.

Please refer to Appendix 1 of Attachment A for summarized/grouped comments and ideas received throughout the community engagement process. Below are some summarized examples of what staff heard from the community in terms of successful past/current resources, gaps, and desired partnerships, programs, and policies:

- The ability to use CalFresh and Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) at farmers markets is currently working well. But more resources are needed to increase participation from farmers' markets.
- Farmers' markets are difficult on local growers. Instead, help growers with allowing CalFresh funding to be used on Community Supported Agriculture (CSA).
- Expand and scale up existing programs to support residents accessing food assistance resources in their communities. Utilize promotoras to disseminate information of food assistance programs.
- Continue community garden funding and support. Support land access for food production.
- Create and organize regional seed swap locations with educational aspects. Support locally grown seeds that cultivate climate resilience. Access to local food sources is needed after work hours versus only on weekends.
- Improve connectivity between food pantries and the food system.
- Gaps exist in partnerships and programs to distribute local food to those in need – support and fund infrastructure for food hub networks that can aggregate produce from local farms.
- Partnerships between health and food providers to support food pantries in communities to distribute food could be scaled up with additional resources.
- Continue and invest in the Mas Fresco Plus program.
- Food prices are high. CalFresh threshold for receiving benefits needs to expand with price inflation.
- Support programs that can help residents right away after an emergency, such as Disaster CalFresh.

**SUBJECT: RECEIVE THE FOOD JUSTICE COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN, DIRECT FISCAL ANALYSIS OF SELECT ACTIONS, AND RELATED CEQA EXEMPTION (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

Through analysis of all community input received, six broad objectives emerged across all themes as community priorities and opportunities for action:

Objectives	Description
1. <b>Capacity</b>	Opportunities to support building community assets and funding or scaling up existing food access and food security efforts in the region.
2. <b>Culture</b>	Opportunities to support food sovereignty, align County culture and policy, and improve knowledge of ways food impacts communities and the region.
3. <b>Connectivity</b>	Opportunities to address transportation and other needs across the region for connecting food sources and access points to communities and individuals, including connectivity of food recovery organizations.
4. <b>Process</b>	Opportunities to support effective community engagement and participation including transparency in operations.
5. <b>Safety Nets</b>	Opportunities to improve public support programs, including CalFresh and other food and financial support programs.
6. <b>Preparedness</b>	Opportunities for emergency response plans to incorporate regional food resources and broader consideration of decreasing food insecurity.

These comments, ideas, and experiences represented about 200 unique community ideas, reflecting the breadth and depth of input received from the community. The objectives and community ideas for action (Appendix 1 in Attachment A) shaped the content presented by the County at a workshop held at the Annual Gathering for Food Vision 2030.

*Workshop at the Annual Gathering for Food Vision 2030*

The Board directed a convening of a regional summit of stakeholders, service providers, community leaders, local farmers, and other governmental agencies. To effectively and prudently build upon existing efforts and partnerships, the County partnered with San Diego Food System Alliance to facilitate a workshop at the Annual Gathering for Food Vision 2030, which is a robust, diverse, and inclusive annual gathering with representation across the food system.

OSEJ, Public Health Services, Self Sufficiency Services, and Planning & Development Services staff hosted a 90-minute workshop at the fourth Annual Gathering for Food Vision 2030 on October 17, 2024 at the California Center for the Arts in Escondido. Over 500 people attended the Annual Gathering event with representation from government, community, agricultural, philanthropy, and healthcare organizations. About 70 individuals attended the County workshop and provided input on the objectives and community ideas for action. Attendees included community members, farmers, healthcare professionals, youth, and individuals representing community organizations. In addition, OSEJ had an interactive tabling activity during the event which provided an opportunity for attendees throughout the day to contribute feedback.

At both the workshop and tabling activity, group discussions and interactive voting activities were structured to receive input and identify attendee priorities across the six objectives. Over 300 comments, ideas and shared experiences were documented at the workshop and tabling activity. Based on the input received, attendees identified the Capacity and Culture objectives as those with

**SUBJECT: RECEIVE THE FOOD JUSTICE COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN, DIRECT FISCAL ANALYSIS OF SELECT ACTIONS, AND RELATED CEQA EXEMPTION (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

actions that should be most prioritized by the County, followed by Preparedness which received the second most votes for prioritization.

*Bringing It All Together for a Community-Informed Food Justice Community Action Plan*

The Food Justice Community Action Plan (FJCAP) was informed by existing efforts and community input, which County staff reviewed and solidified into 20 distinct actions the County can take based on alignment with County programs and services, scope, expertise, and/or resources. In the FJCAP (Attachment A) the 20 actions are initially grouped by the six objectives (capacity, culture, connectivity, process, safety nets, and preparedness), includes a brief description, key departments, and are divided into three groups based on readiness of implementation and resource needs. These actions are listed below with the corresponding action identifier and lead department:

**A. Community-informed actions that are part of an existing County program or effort, which can continue to be implemented with no additional resources.**

- Regional: Develop and publish materials for how local farms can participate on large County food contracts (Action 1.a).
- Regional: Develop trainings to support local farm and food service providers in large County food contracts (Action 1.b).
- Regional: Promote transparency of Self Sufficiency Services program information and data, including benefit utilization, eligibility requirements, and denial rates (Action 5.a).

**A. Community-informed actions that are part of an existing County program or effort that could be modified or expanded with additional resources.** Further analysis would need to be conducted on the specific resource needs, including funding needs and identification of funding source and amounts along with implementation plans.

- Regional: Increase awareness of community gardens at County Parks and explore potential expansion of community gardens to new locations (Action 1.c).
- Unincorporated Area: Support compost procurement for community and school garden projects (Action 1.d).
- Regional: Promote existing County-owned and leased land that is used for community food production. Explore and develop strategies and/or incentives for agricultural leases and community agriculture (Action 1.e).
- Regional: Develop a community food production model ordinance or policy with favorable leasing terms (Action 2.a).
- Unincorporated Area: Support and invest in local farmers by providing grants for regenerative agricultural activities, including composting, through the Sustainable Operations in Land Stewardship (SOILS) Program (Action 2.b).
- Regional: Expand farming opportunities to include in-ground crops and on-site composting at East Mesa Reentry Facility to reduce food scraps and enhance educational resources (Action 2.c).

**SUBJECT: RECEIVE THE FOOD JUSTICE COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN, DIRECT FISCAL ANALYSIS OF SELECT ACTIONS, AND RELATED CEQA EXEMPTION (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

- Regional: Support food waste prevention strategies for cooking spaces (food preservation: jamming, canning, dehydration) (Action 2.d).
- Regional: Leverage existing communications structures to host and lead a biannual Food System Initiative (FSI) collaborative meeting with departments, communities, and food system stakeholders for development of FSI priorities, information sharing, fostering meaningful relationships, and collecting input to inform an update to the County Emergency Operations Plan (Action 4.a).
- Regional: Explore funding for technical assistance and program advancements related to Board Policy B-75 value categories (Action 4.b).
- Regional: Provide technical assistance and incentivize use of CalFresh at certified farmers' markets and direct to consumer channels such as community supported agriculture and farm stands (Action 5.b).
- Regional: Support legislation and other efforts that incentivize and expand purchasing power for local produce, as well as efforts to make medically supportive food (i.e., produce prescriptions) a permanent covered benefit for Medi-Cal recipients (Action 5.c).
- Regional: Share information on existing emergency response plans involving aspects of food access and food security and collect input from community and food system stakeholders to inform an update to the County Emergency Operations Plan (Action 6.a).

**B. Community-informed actions that do not fit within current County programming and would require additional resources.** Further analysis would need to be conducted on the specific resource needs, including funding needs and identification of funding source and amounts along with implementation plans.

- Regional: Identify external funding sources and develop a grant support coalition to lead County and community grant application processes (Action 1.f).
- Regional: Conduct a comprehensive analysis of food production policies to identify potential barriers and opportunities that support food production and distribution across the region (Action 2.e).
- Regional: Increase public education and promote existing food recovery educational resources, and edible food recovery models within region (Action 3.a).
- Regional: Support edible food recovery by identifying funding for edible food recovery transportation networks and other infrastructure support such as cold storage, to increase food recovery capacity in the region and comply with Senate Bill 1383 (Action 3.b).
- Regional: Explore and develop strategies to support and build capacity of existing food hubs and incubators. (Action 3.c).

A draft list of County actions was available from November 19 to 22 to allow the community an opportunity to preview the draft actions prior to presenting to the Board. OSEJ notified everyone who provided an email and participated or provided input as part of FJCAP development process.



**SUBJECT:** RECEIVE THE FOOD JUSTICE COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN, DIRECT FISCAL ANALYSIS OF SELECT ACTIONS, AND RELATED CEQA EXEMPTION (DISTRICTS: ALL)

During this time, OSEJ received comments from four organizations relating to identifying gaps, seeking more details for implementation steps and leads.

**Actions for Board Consideration and Next Steps**

Based on the community engagement and outreach, as well as conversations and working sessions with departments, staff request that the Board receive the FJCAP and, optionally, direct staff to report back in 120 days on the resources needed to implement any actions the Board would like to explore from Category B and/or C. Staff will continue to engage with communities, organizations, and individuals to identify potential partnerships, opportunities for leveraging existing programs, and more. The list of actions is not comprehensive but rather a starting point for the County to help build momentum for collaborative change to improve food access and reduce food insecurity in the San Diego region.

**ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT**

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors find that the proposed actions are exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under Section 15378(b)(5) of the State CEQA Guidelines because the proposed action is not a project.

**LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN**

Today's proposed action to receive the Food Justice Community Action Plan supports Sustainability (Economy, Climate, Resiliency), Equity (Economic Opportunity), Empower (Workforce), Community (Engagement, Partnership), and Justice (Environmental) Strategic Initiatives in the County of San Diego's 2024-2029 Strategic Plan by taking steps to improve food access and food security.

Respectfully submitted,



DAHVIA LYNCH

Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

**ATTACHMENT(S)**

ATTACHMENT A – Food Justice Community Action Plan