



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

AGENDA ITEM

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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DATE: March 3, 2026

16

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

PROGRESS REPORT ON THE COUNTYWIDE FOOD CONTRACT (DISTRICTS: ALL)

OVERVIEW

On March 12, 2024 (9), the Board of Supervisors (Board) directed the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to issue a competitive solicitation for a Countywide food contract; track progress on Board Policy B-75 County of San Diego Sustainable, Equitable, and Local Food Sourcing (Board Policy B-75) values; return to the Board; and develop an action plan to support local businesses. The resulting Countywide food contract with Sysco, effective September 2024, was among the first to implement Board Policy B-75. Its scale makes it a key tool for advancing policy commitments and expanding local procurement in the agriculturally diverse region. Sysco's reach and infrastructure as a large food distributor ensures institutional needs are met while creating pathways for local farms to access larger markets. Focusing on the County of San Diego's (County) most frequently purchased produce items, some of which are already grown locally, provides a practical entry point and lays the foundation for systemic change.

On December 9, 2025 (31), the Board directed the CAO to set ambitious and achievable goals aligned with Board Policy B-75, address barriers, reach out to the Farm Bureau, and provide an update on progress to stakeholder engagement and technical assistance. Action has been taken to accelerate the progress of County-administered food programs by setting outcome commitments that increase incrementally over the next five years and will demonstrate increased momentum and progress in the six value categories. These goals, integrated into our operations as lasting commitments, will be achievable through reimagining requirements for our County-administered food programs to reduce challenges in making values-aligned purchases, such as evaluating ways to mitigate packaging requirements. Additionally, we have enhanced our outreach and engagement with technical assistance in partnership with the San Diego County Farm Bureau, Sysco, and other stakeholders by launching Supporting Producers through Resources, Opportunities, United partnerships and Technical assistance (SPROUT), a coordinated strategy focused on engagement, training, and resource development. Sysco will be a key partner in SPROUT, working alongside the Department of Purchasing and Contracting, the Office of Economic Development and Government Affairs, and Agriculture, Weights and Measures. The initiative will also engage internal stakeholders, including the Food System Initiative, to ensure broad collaboration and impact.

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RECOMMENDATION(S)

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Receive the progress report on Countywide food contract.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

The County of San Diego (County) serves millions of meals annually to some of the region’s most vulnerable residents. The Countywide food contract advances Board Policy B-75 by ensuring procurement benefits local producers, workers, and businesses owned and/or operated by underserved communities through the Sheriff’s Office (SDSO) and Edgemoor Distinct Part Skilled Nursing Facility (Edgemoor DPSNF) food service operations which are both County-administered. Sysco, the County’s food distributor for Edgemoor DPSNF and SDSO operations, incorporated equity informed sourcing and elevated labor standards into its supplier engagement, while County staff develop systems to track their progress. Partnerships with local organizations such as the San Diego Food Hub, a cooperative supporting over 36 local farms committed to sustainable practices are helping connect equity-focused growers and food businesses to the County’s procurement pipeline.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

This action supports the County of San Diego’s (County) Sustainability Goals by strengthening local economies, reducing the carbon footprint of food purchases, and increasing access to nutritious and sustainable food. Recent shifts toward more poultry and less red meat improved nutritional and environmental outcomes. Increased sourcing of certified organic and regenerative products further supports the County’s goals to reduce pollution, promote environmental justice, and protect community health. For example, Sysco, in collaboration with the San Diego Food Hub, expanded access to local farms using regenerative and organic farming practices.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact for today’s recommendation to receive the progress report. There may be future costs associated with achieving the commitments identified to advance progress in each of the Board Policy B-75 value categories. These costs would be included in future Operational Plans or staff would return to the Board of Supervisors for consideration and approval. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

The six value categories include locally grown and produced food. The Countywide Food Contract requires Sysco to include local suppliers in its catalog and meet commitments to increase data about local suppliers to support purchasing decisions by County food service operations. County purchases from local growers and producers have a positive impact on local businesses. Engagements with the San Diego Food Hub and FreshPoint, Sysco’s specialty produce subsidiary, continue to expand the pipeline of small, local growers. Sysco is actively connecting with local farms and producers, offering new market opportunities for businesses historically excluded from contracts of this scale.

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

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BACKGROUND

The County of San Diego (County) is one of the region’s largest food purchasers and plays an important role in shaping the local food system. To leverage this influence, the San Diego County Board of Supervisors (Board) adopted Board Policy B-75, County of San Diego Sustainable, Equitable, and Local Food Sourcing on December 5, 2023 (26). This policy centers on six value categories: local sourcing, equity-informed sourcing, elevated labor standards, organic or regenerative certification, low-carbon intensity, and nutritional co-benefit.

Board Policy B-75 establishes the foundation for aligning the County’s purchasing power with its responsibility to provide safe, nutritious meals for individuals in its care. Guided by San Diego County Food Vision 2030, which is led by the San Diego Food System Alliance, and a landscape assessment showing the County served nearly eight million meals in 2024, the policy reflects a commitment to a healthier, more sustainable regional food system. Board Policy B-75 was developed through the Sustainable, Equitable, and Local Food Sourcing Program (Program). The Program is facilitated by Public Health Services and includes all County food service operations, including those administered by the Sheriff’s Office (SDSO) and the Edgemoor Distinct Part Skilled Nursing Facility (Edgemoor DPSNF), as active participants. Through this collaboration, the Program and Policy advance goals in the Food Justice Community Action Plan, including support for local food production.

To streamline purchasing and meet diverse food service needs, in 2017, the County established a single contract for bulk or as-needed procurement. On March 12, 2024 (9), the Board authorized the Chief Administrative Officer to issue a competitive solicitation for food, food preparation supplies and equipment; track Board Policy B-75 values; return to the Board; and develop an action plan to support local businesses. The resulting Countywide food contract with Sysco, effective September 2024, was among the first to implement Board Policy B-75. It serves SDSO and Edgemoor DPSNF, providing food and related services for individuals in County care.

County staff have provided regular updates to the Board on implementation. Following the December 9, 2025 (31) directive, this report addresses the following: progress and a continued plan for technical assistance and stakeholder engagement; assessment of local procurement barriers; and ambitious, but achievable goals for the six value categories.

Consistent with the Board’s direction from December 9, 2025 (31), the County reinforced its implementation of Board Policy B-75 by setting goals to accelerate progress in the six value categories through the Countywide food contract. These commitments were informed by practical considerations, such as packaging requirements for safety, dietary restrictions, and the need to balance shelf life with access to fresh produce, which influence purchasing decisions. Through the countywide food contract, the County can operationalize these priorities, increase local participation, and build capacity for regional producers while maintaining required quality and safety standards across County facilities. Beyond these efforts, the County is working toward becoming a national leader in food justice and sustainability. These efforts demonstrate how policy translates into action, positioning the County as a leader in advancing food justice and strengthening the regional food system.

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This report reflects collaboration across County departments leveraging shared expertise and community relationships to develop practical strategies that expand opportunities and strengthen the local food ecosystem.

San Diego Farming Region and Scope of the Countywide Food Contract

San Diego has over 4,000 farms producing diverse crops and livestock, including 830 fruit and vegetable farms and over 300 raising meat and eggs. High land and water costs push small farms toward direct-to-consumer sales, yet institutional demand remains strong. The County spends roughly \$1.6 million annually on fresh produce and serves millions of meals in Edgemoor DPSNF and SDSO’s operations.

To meet this scale, the County relies on a contract with Sysco, whose capacity ensures consistent service and compliance. This contract has an estimated annual spend of approximately \$12 million and plays a critical role in overall food service operations while also creating opportunities for local farms to access institutional markets. In addition, this contract not only sustains food operations but creates opportunities for local farms to access institutional markets. Focusing on the County’s most frequently purchased produce items is the most practical entry point as some of these products are already grown locally and may be able to support current demand. This approach makes local sourcing feasible, builds producer capacity, and leverages the County’s partnership with Sysco to strengthen the regional food system.

Accelerating Pace of Progress in the Six Value Categories

The SDSO and Edgemoor DPSNF have committed to ambitious and achievable goals that are integrated into daily operations to accelerate our pace of progress in the six value categories. To enable that progress, Sysco has made the following commitments listed below to support the County food service operations with their planning and ordering decisions.

These commitments set a clear framework for measuring progress over a five-year period with commitments incrementally improving year over year. Based on the current San Diego region agriculture and food production industries, the value categories of greatest immediate opportunity are organic and regenerative, nutritional co-benefit and local sourcing. This is reflected in the 5-year commitments with more immediate changes in those categories. Growth in the remaining value categories will continue to occur, with the pace of change guided by market availability, data-driven insights, and the County’s efforts to align menu planning and purchasing decisions with evolving food industry trends. As demand accelerates, these commitments position us to capture growth where the market is moving fastest, creating a clear path for measurable progress aligned with real marketplace trends.

To support these outcomes, Sysco has committed to including additional data capture and tracking of food suppliers to provide clearer insights into added value areas, such as tracking hyper-local products sourced within San Diego County, while aligning with Board Policy B-75, which defines local as within a 250-mile sourcing area. These metrics will show us how much of each commodity is being used by Edgemoor DPSNF and SDSO and how much is produced locally within San Diego County. Notably, the priority category for achieving organic and regenerative commitments will focus on purchasing produce, which currently accounts for \$1.6 million of the estimated \$12

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million annual Sysco contract spend. The table below highlights the commitments for Board Policy B-75 for 1-year through 5-year reporting. National averages for a program similar to the County’s are used as a frame of reference to guide these commitments. For the Low Carbon category, this metric tracks the carbon footprint based on quantities of animal products purchased. Progress means lowering pounds of CO₂ per meal, so unlike other categories, a decrease here signals positive movement. Attachment A provides a visual representation of the anticipated progress resulting from these commitments.

Metric	National Average	FY 23-24	FY 24-25	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Local Sourcing	11.50%	2.97%	2.52%	3%	5.3%	7.5%	9.8%	12%
Equity-Informed Sourcing	less than 1%	0.04%	0.06%	0.5%	1.6%	2.8%	3.9%	5%
Organic & Regenerative	0.60%	0.08%	0.08%	1%	3.3%	5.5%	7.8%	10%
Elevated Labor Standards	10.30%	36.10%	35.12%	40%	42.5%	45.0%	47.5%	50%
Nutritional Co-Benefit (Weighted)	58.00%	30.74%	38.25%	40%	45.0%	50.0%	55.0%	60%
Low Carbon Intensity (Weight of carbon per meal in lbs.)	1.90 lbs	3.20 lbs	2.99 lbs.	2.75	2.5	2.3	2.1	1.9

In addition, Sysco committed to the following to continue to advance Board Policy B-75 value categories:

- By April 2026, implement processes to identify values aligned products in all newly onboarded items. By December 2026 and annually, track the number of new values-aligned vendors onboarded to be shared with Edgemoor DPSNF and SDSO.
- Identify 25 vendors each quarter starting with the top purchased items and reach out to gather Board Policy B-75 data.
- By December 2026 and annually, identify all vendors and products with orders placed in the past 12 months through Sysco and Sysco companies (FreshPoint, etc.) within county boundaries.
- Attend quarterly meetings with the County and Farm Bureau to share updates and opportunities.

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- Submit quarterly outreach and onboarding reports for values-qualifying producers to the Contracting Officer’s Representative of the countywide food contract.
- Deliver monthly communication to Edgemoor DPSNF and SDSO highlighting values-aligned vendors, including local and seasonally fresh produce, and identifying potential local and industry updates.
- Provide the County with a summary of incentives, trainings, and resources that support values-aligned suppliers, with a focus on local suppliers, in onboarding into their system.

These commitments establish a clear, actionable roadmap for building a resilient local food system that promotes environmental stewardship and community health. While the benefits are significant, achieving these targets may require adjustments in purchasing practices and could result in additional costs. Over the next year, County staff will evaluate whether these commitments can be met within the existing budget and share findings with the Board. There may be future costs associated with achieving these commitments. These costs would be included in future Operational Plans or staff would return to the Board of Supervisors for consideration and approval.

Reimagining County Requirements

The County team conducted a comprehensive review of contractual, organizational, and systemic requirements that create barriers and challenges affecting local food procurement through Sysco. The summary table in Attachment B provides a high-level overview of each barrier and the corresponding strategies implemented to address it. This section highlights the most significant challenges and the practical steps taken to minimize the impact.

Increasing Values-Aligned Ordering Options

Limited availability of local and organic produce in Sysco’s catalog was a major challenge. To address this, the County amended its food contract in December 2025 to allow direct purchasing from FreshPoint, Sysco’s specialty produce subsidiary. This change has recently enabled Edgemoor DPSNF to transition to certified organic produce at competitive prices, with a commitment of reaching 50% organic. Similar benefits are anticipated for other departments, including the SDSO. The County will continue working with FreshPoint to expand organic options, improve labeling for locally sourced products, and monitor inventory to reduce shortages, ensuring that County facilities have reliable access to fresh, high-quality products.

Beyond produce, Edgemoor DPSNF identified opportunities to increase organic dairy and meat options in their menu. Sysco partners with one of the nation’s largest farmer-owned organic cooperatives. The co-op’s network of small family farms ensures ethical sourcing, and this agreement represents another important step toward expanding organic options. However, these options come at higher costs and often lack portion sizes compatible with current needs. County staff and Sysco are reviewing these alternatives and exploring additional organic meat suppliers for pricing and availability.

Logistical challenges remain when contracting directly with individual growers or producers. Local producers often struggle with volume and delivery requirements, while County food service operations face limits with on-site refrigeration and multiple deliveries. To overcome these issues,

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in collaboration with Sysco, the County is pursuing centralized purchasing through the San Diego Food Hub and providing technical assistance to help small local producers meet contracting standards, obtain certifications, and address insurance requirements. These efforts aim to create a more coordinated and efficient supply chain that supports local farms while meeting institutional needs.

To improve competitiveness, the County is pursuing direct contracting with local food hubs, setting local sourcing commitments for major facilities, and providing technical assistance to help farmers improve efficiency and competitiveness. These efforts are intended to support local producers in navigating challenges such as higher costs for land, water, and labor, which can make local products more expensive than those from larger farms and harder to align with the pricing structure of the county's Sysco contract.

Additionally, the County is taking proactive steps to strengthen local food supply chains. County demand for food products also often exceeds the current capacity of local farms. Large institutions such as Edgemoor DPSNF and the SDSO require high volumes and diverse products. To meet this demand, the County relies on Sysco, a major food distributor, to ensure consistent availability and food safety compliance. In addition, the County is working to strengthen local supply chains, the County is supporting local food hubs, setting local sourcing commitments for major facilities, and helping Sysco onboard additional local producers.

Continuing to Meet Safety and Operational Requirements

Meeting Sysco's business standards, especially the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification, is another challenge for local and small farms. The USDA GAP program is a voluntary audit service that verifies that farms produce, pack, handle, and store fresh produce in ways that minimize food safety hazards. The USDA GAP certification provides crucial verification for buyers, retailers, and consumers that farms are following science-based practices to reduce potential contamination and ensure food safety. The certification process, while important to reducing foodborne illnesses, can be complex and costly for small producers. To reduce this barrier, the County and Sysco are partnering with organizations such as the University of California Cooperative Extension to provide training, resources, and cost-reduction strategies.

Additionally, Sysco's insurance requirements often create challenges for local and small producers. These standards are designed to protect all parties involved; however, they can be difficult for smaller producers because of the high cost and complexity of securing the required coverage. Sysco addresses this challenge by offering reduced insurance limit requirements for local and small producers, absorbing additional risk and related costs to make compliance more achievable and financially feasible. Together, these efforts are reducing barriers for small farms and improving their ability to participate in institutional markets.

Alternatives to Packaging Requirements

Packaging requirements were initially seen as a barrier. These safety standards, common in detention facilities, are designed to prevent packaging from being repurposed into weapons. After review, the County confirmed that all food items are re-packaged in-house by SDSO staff allowing

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suppliers to ship products in original packaging. However, certain items such as kosher bread still require specialized packaging. Kosher bread needs to be packaged in single servings and sealed to maintain kosher standards and avoid cross-contamination. Sysco continues to work with bakeries in the San Diego region to meet these needs and explore alternative bread options to expand local choices while supporting local businesses.

Producer Engagement in Longer-Range Menu Planning

Uncertainty around demand also discourages participating, limiting producers’ ability to plan or invest. To create predictability, the County is implementing intentional menu planning, collaborating with Sysco to share purchasing needs early, and exploring multi-year agreements with local producers. These strategies aim to provide stability, foster long-term partnerships, and position local producers to compete in institutional markets.

Enhancing Outreach and Engagement

The County shared resources on supporting small farm businesses through the Office of Economic Development and Government Affairs’ (EDGA). Information on the Support, Training, and Education for Procurement (STEP) program of the Business Engagement & Strategic Training (BEST) Initiative, which offers free workshops and one-on-one support for small businesses learning to navigate County contracts, was shared broadly to farms by EDGA through Sysco and the Farm Bureau, as they are key partners in reaching farms. Additionally, food service operations and partnerships with large distributors like Sysco require strict compliance and multiple certifications. To help meet these requirements, the Department of Purchasing and Contracting’s (DPC) will publish information on grant opportunities that fund infrastructure upgrades and other resources needed to obtain certifications to its website. These opportunities and resources will be added as they become available.

Building on these efforts and recognizing the complexity of compliance requirements, the County obtained reference materials to help farmers navigate certification and workshops to support safety compliance through the University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE), an expert and member of the local agricultural community, the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA), and the USDA. The County shared the information with the San Diego County Farm Bureau and the San Diego Food Hub and posted it on the DPC website. The County will make these resources easily accessible and link them across relevant department websites to ensure farmers can find the information they need.

Sysco actions

On December 16, 2025, Sysco joined the County team for a monthly meeting with the San Diego County Farm Bureau, facilitated by the Department of Agriculture, Weights and Measures. This meeting was an important step in continuing momentum and demonstrating Sysco’s shared commitment. The group discussed how farms can do business with Sysco, what local farms can provide, opportunities for partnership, and the support farms may need to work with larger distributors. To build on this initial engagement, Sysco met with the Farm Bureau Board of Directors in February 2026 and discussed long-term collaboration and ways to strengthen connections between local farms and larger distribution networks, with the commitment of moving the region’s food system toward greater growth and sustainability over time.

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Sysco has actively engaged local producers to identify alternatives to items in its catalog, reaching out to avocado growers, bakeries, egg suppliers, and other specialty providers. Through partnerships with the San Diego County Farm Bureau and San Diego Food Hub, these efforts span networks representing over 1,200 farms. Outreach methods include email, phone calls, and in-person meetings to maximize accessibility and dialogue. During these engagements, Sysco shared product specifications, pricing, and volume estimates to help producers understand potential opportunities. Two suppliers have shown strong interest: a local egg producer who is now fully onboarded; and a local 16-acre organic farm, who is currently in discussions with Sysco to provide fresh fruits and vegetables. Participation from this local organic farm could expand local sourcing of organic produce.

While responses from other producers have been limited, Sysco continues follow-ups and remains committed to growing its catalog with additional local suppliers. These efforts underscore Sysco's dedication to building relationships and making local partnerships viable.

Plan for continued engagement and technical assistance

Building on recent progress, the County and Sysco will launch Supporting Producers through Resources, Opportunities, United partnerships and Technical assistance (SPROUT) - a coordinated strategy focused on engagement, training, and resource development to help local farms succeed. The following paragraphs provide an overview of SPROUT.

Engagement

Sysco will participate in the Food Justice Community Action Plan (FJCAP) community workshop in March 2026. The FJCAP is a multi-departmental County action plan to improve food access and reduce food insecurity in the San Diego region. It is coordinated through the County Food System Initiative (FSI), established June 21, 2016 (27), to promote coordination across County departments, develop partnerships and programs to strengthen the food system, and ensure ongoing integration and collaboration throughout the County organization. DPC has joined FSI and will be participating in regular meetings and related events. The upcoming in-person meeting will provide a forum for residents to share ideas and experiences that advance the 11 Board-selected actions from December 11, 2024 (11). This meeting will feature a resource table with details on Sysco's partnership opportunities and clear guidance on how local producers can navigate the process of doing business with them. Additionally, the County will maintain its monthly engagement meetings with the San Diego County Farm Bureau, with Sysco as appropriate to support ongoing collaboration.

Sysco is deepening its commitment to local food initiatives by strengthening partnerships within the regional food system. It will continue direct engagement with local farmers to expand its network of values-aligned producers that meet one or more Board Policy B-75 categories. In collaboration with the San Diego Food Hub, Sysco will support onboarding additional farms, creating new opportunities for regional growers. By prioritizing these partnerships, Sysco works to build a more resilient and inclusive food supply chain, one that promotes economic growth for local producers and ensures businesses and consumers have access to products that reflect shared values.

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Training

As part of its commitment to supporting local producers and food service operators, the County will host a virtual grant-writing workshop in April 2026, with a recorded session available online for later viewing. The County is leveraging existing partnerships with UCCE to deliver workshops on produce safety topics, beginning in June 2026.

Access to learning resources

In collaboration with Sysco, the County will develop resource guides to help producers navigate the process of doing business with Sysco and meet food service requirements. These guides will begin rolling out on DPC’s website by July 2026. The website will feature comprehensive resources, including Board Policy B-75 information; a schedule of upcoming training opportunities, recordings of past trainings; grant funding opportunities and other assistance programs for farmers and food service operators; documents related to doing business with Sysco; and updates on the Countywide food contract. Some of this information is already available, and the site will be updated regularly as new resources are added.

Looking beyond the County food system

The value categories outlined in Board Policy B-75 are a model that can potentially extend beyond the County and influence purchasing practices across the region. Through the countywide food contract with Sysco, local producers who meet the established standards and align with these value categories are not only supplying the County, but also entering Sysco’s broader network. This visibility opens doors to other buyers and creates opportunities for additional business across the region.

As more producers align with these value categories, they carry those practices into other markets, helping spread the County’s approach and strengthen the regional food economy. This effort supports small businesses, builds capacity, and creates pathways for growth that extend well beyond County borders.

Next Steps

In line with the Board’s March 12, 2024 (9) direction, County staff will return on December 8, 2026 to provide a comprehensive update on the Countywide Food Contract with Sysco and its alignment with Board Policy B-75. This update will cover progress toward the value category commitments outlined in today’s update, the implementation of SPROUT, and actions taken to support local businesses.

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LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

This initiative aligns with the County of San Diego’s 2026-2031 Strategic Plan by advancing sustainability, equity, and economic development. Incorporating Board Policy B-75 into food procurement strengthens the local food system, promotes economic resilience, and enhances community well-being through increased access to healthy, locally sourced foods. These efforts contribute to a sustainable, equitable, and community-focused food procurement strategy that benefits San Diego County residents.

Respectfully submitted,



EBONY N. SHELTON
Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENT(S)

Attachment A – Graphs of Board Policy B-75 Commitments

Attachment B – Local Procurement Barriers and Practical Solutions for Progress