Dear Readers,

Food is one issue around which we can all relate. Regardless of age, political affiliation, or where we reside in Mendocino County, we all eat. It is with this spirit of commonality that the Food Action Plan has been created. The Plan touches on all areas of the food system, from healthy eating to supporting our local food producers to the importance of agriculture for a healthy economy.

I’m optimistic that Mendocino County can be a leader in the transformation of our food and agriculture system and that the Food Action Plan will serve as a roadmap to guide us in that transformation. I encourage you to read the Plan and share it widely. It has been written to be meaningful to every member of our community. I’m sure that certain sections will appeal more to one segment of our population than another, but like the food system itself, each area is integral to the whole.

Throughout my years in Mendocino County, I’ve seen the dedication that producing food requires and the challenges that our farmers, ranchers, gardeners, and fisherfolk face. I also see the tremendous opportunities presented by a growing consumer demand for locally and sustainably produced food. Mendocino County is blessed with both a rich tradition in agriculture and a willingness and ability to innovate. These qualities lend themselves to high quality food production.

As a member of the Board of Supervisors, I’ve seen the challenges presented to county services by the epidemics of obesity and diabetes. These and other diet-related conditions create huge costs for our County. Fortunately, meeting these challenges also provides opportunities for our food and farming businesses.

Agriculture has been a cornerstone of Mendocino County for generations. It is a critical part of our economic, social and cultural fabric. Everyone in our community benefits from a healthy agricultural system whether they’re personally involved in that system or not. Revenues from agriculture support a wide range of businesses and healthy eating contributes to a higher quality of life for everyone.

I’m pleased to be supporting the Food Policy Council in their creation of the Food Action Plan. I urge you to read this Plan and look for ways in which you can become involved. Our future, and the future of our children, grandchildren, and those yet to come depends on our willingness and ability to work together to create a resilient and robust food system for Mendocino County.

Dan Hamburg, 5th District Supervisor
Mendocino County Board of Supervisors
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All of those community members who took time to share their stories
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## INTRODUCTION ................................................................. 10
- What is a Food Action Plan? .................................................. 10
- Learning Local Food Systems ............................................... 10
- Five Supporting Principles .................................................... 11
- Who Should Read This Plan .................................................. 11
- How Does the Plan Work? ..................................................... 11
- Starting the Conversation ...................................................... 12
- What is a Food Policy Council? .............................................. 12
- The Mendocino County Food Policy Council ............................. 13
- Other Collaborators ............................................................. 13
- What Is A Food System? ......................................................... 14
- How Does Our Food System Affect Me? .................................. 14
- What Does A Healthy Food System Look Like? ........................... 15
- What Can We Do? ............................................................... 16

## OUR HISTORY ................................................................. 18
- A Long History as a Major Food-Producing Region .................... 18
- Our Oldest Food Producers .................................................... 18
- Feeding A Growing County .................................................... 18
- A Shift in Priorities ............................................................. 19
- A New Generation ............................................................. 20
- What Will Tomorrow Bring? .................................................. 20
- Planting Seeds for the Future .................................................. 20

## OUR FARMERS AND FOOD PRODUCERS .............................. 22
- From the Ground Up: Celebrating our Farmers .......................... 22
- Today’s Farmers: Struggling to Bring Food to Our Tables ............. 22
- Tomorrow’s Farmers: In Short Supply ..................................... 23
- The Economics of Farming: Is it Worth It? ................................. 24
## Finding Our “Niche”

24

## A Bountiful County: Wild Mendocino

25

## Food Producers: Transforming and Celebrating County Food

25

## Catch-22 of the Day

25

## A Long Distance For Local Meats

26

## Starting Small

27

## An Interim Solution?

28

## Agreeing to Disagree

28

## Future Farmers?

28

## A Focus on Sustainability

29

## SHOWCASES

Greener Pastures: Ingel-Haven Ranch

30

Local Girl Makes Good Sausage, Potatoes and Eggs

32

Plowing, Payroll and Paperwork: Challenges of Today’s Farmer

34

## GOALS AND ACTIONS

36

## OUR ECONOMY

38

We Have What it Takes

38

An Economy of Kale?

38

Low Hanging Fruit

39

Paying Ourselves First

39

“Fueling” our Farm Economy

39

What We Need

39

Organics: Growing the Economy Naturally

40

Create a Marketing Plan

40

Farm2Fork: Making the Connections

41

The Potential of Agritourism

41

Education and Support

42

SHOWCASE: Bringing Local Food to the People

44

## GOALS AND ACTIONS

46
OUR HEALTH .................................................. 48
  We Are What We Eat ........................................... 48
  Unhealthy Food, Unhealthy Children .......................... 49
  Location, Location, Location? ................................. 49
  Food, Poverty and Underutilized Resources .................... 50
  Are We Prepared? ............................................... 50
  What We Can Do ............................................... 51
  CNAP Takes Action ........................................... 52

SHOWCASES
  CalFresh: Making the Match ................................... 54
  Rainbow Farm: Out of, and Into, the Mouths of Babes ....... 56

GOALS AND ACTIONS ........................................... 58

OUR LAND AND WATER ........................................ 60
  It All Starts With The Soil ..................................... 60
  Loam on the Range ............................................ 61
  An Erosion Explosion .......................................... 61
  Water, Water Everywhere? .................................... 62
  But Not a Drop for Fish ....................................... 62
  Restoring Our Rivers ........................................... 63
  A Watery Divide ................................................ 63
  Seniors Rule .................................................... 64
  Seven is Not a Lucky Number ................................. 64
  Becoming Water Wise ......................................... 65
  Saving our Groundwater: Another Challenge ................. 65
  Making the Grade? ............................................. 66
  Stay Involved .................................................. 66

SHOWCASE: Sharing the Land, Preserving our Resources .......... 68

GOALS AND ACTIONS ........................................... 71
OUR COMMUNITY ......................................................... 72
Big County, Small Population .................................................. 72
Senior “Momentum” .............................................................. 73
A Changing Cultural Matrix ..................................................... 73
Economic Realities ................................................................. 73
Keeping It Local ................................................................. 74
Letting Our Gardens Grow ......................................................... 74
Getting to Know You .............................................................. 75
SHOWCASE: Noyo Food Forest: Growing Food, Youth and Community .................................................. 76
GOALS AND ACTIONS ................................................... 79
ENDNOTES ................................................................. 80
“Eating is an agricultural act.”
– Wendell Berry, What Are People For
What is a Food Action Plan?
Food. How we grow it, process it, market it, protect it and deliver it: these are questions being addressed by local communities across the nation.

The Mendocino County Food Action Plan is a comprehensive, integrated series of goals and actions designed to address the complex issues that face all of us as we assume increasing responsibility for creation, protection and enhancement of our local food systems. The aim of the plan is to enhance individual health, economic well-being, community resiliency, and ecological sustainability.

The goals and actions in the Food Action Plan are the compilation of information gathered from a series of community stakeholder meetings and interviews. The Mendocino County Food Policy Council (FPC) oversaw the production of this plan and received invaluable support from many governmental agencies, agricultural industry professionals, public health, social service and non-profit groups who researched, compiled and reported upon many aspects of the plan prior to its publication.

The Food Action Plan aims to educate, inspire, and empower Mendocino County to become a world leader in the sustainable food movement. We are also gifted with a rich history, favorable climate, and expert human assets to assist in this endeavor. We are fortunate to have such resources in the face of significant challenges facing agriculture in the 21st century.

Learning Local Food Systems
Studying our food system involves understanding more than a handful of seemingly unrelated issues: from the struggles of young farmers trying to make a living in an increasingly challenging industry to the link between the disappearance of fresh produce from low-income population centers and the subsequent rise of obesity in our young people.

The more we learn, the more we understand. Our sustenance and our subsistence are predicated upon a coordinated, comprehensive response to the problems and opportunities we face as we learn to respond to rapidly changing societal, environmental and economic conditions. Though some global
conditions are probably beyond our ability to affect, we are well positioned to address many food-related issues that have a profound and immediate impact upon each of us.

**Five Supporting Principles**
The Mendocino County Food Action Plan contains five interconnected principles to help identify our food system’s unmet needs and address the steps necessary to support a vibrant, thriving, locally based food economy:

1. Our Farmers and Food Producers
2. Our Economy
3. Our Health
4. Our Land and Water
5. Our Community

Each of these principles is linked to goals and actions that will move us forward. These are by no means the only goals and actions for our county, but they will act as a framework upon which we can build a stronger and more sustainable future for ourselves and our children.

**Who Should Read This Plan**
The plan is designed to be read by every member of our community—parents, fishermen, senior citizens, health care practitioners, policymakers, food industry professionals and business owners. Food affects all of us, and every one of us has a role to play in helping create a more healthy, independent community. Resources and ways for you to engage directly with our food system are listed throughout the plan.

**How Does the Plan Work?**
This plan is broken into five sections, each with a set of overarching goals and specific actions. These goals and actions are the result of a large number of stakeholder meetings, community contributions, data collection, and thoughtful deliberation. The FPC has taken a lead role compiling the data and goals and actions contained in the plan. Some of the actions listed in each section are already being worked on. Some actions require the engagement of local or state governments to address and possibly modify existing regulations or laws. Other actions depict “best case scenarios” which may require significant investments of time, money and energy.

As you read the plan, you will notice several themes revisited several times. This is purposeful. Our food system is akin to the human body, where impacts to one system can dramatically affect the whole, for better or worse. We cannot look at the need for community gardens without understanding the profound issues affecting our community’s underserved individuals. We cannot address how to build a thriving local food economy without recognizing the importance of providing living wages to our farmers and food producers and our community that will be purchasing their products. Access to healthy, fresh, locally produced food seems like a simple concept, but what is required to initiate this change is a fundamental shift in how we define ourselves as a community.
The FPC’s goals in creating the plan were to build upon shared values and relationships, to identify and coordinate with food growers, purveyors and providers, to begin the process of identifying and supporting best practices in food-related initiatives and to develop recommendations which will enhance and improve food-related policies and procedures in Mendocino County. The plan is available for download and executive summaries will be distributed widely throughout the county, with periodic updates produced to help track progress on key issues.

**Starting the Conversation**

Though the growing, processing and distribution of food is of critical importance to everyone, until recently, food has not been considered a priority issue for governments and planners.

There is little, if any, coordination between the complex web of local, state and federal regulations that oversee food-related issues. Fortunately for Mendocino County, interest in improving our food system has resulted in local citizens taking the first steps toward food self-sufficiency.

In 2006–07, county food stakeholders created *The Steps Toward a Local Food Economy* and organized countywide Healthy Food Summits. These events offered our community a first-time opportunity to discuss ways to strengthen the local economy, preserve and protect agricultural land, increase the county tax base and address health challenges associated with poverty and food insecurity.

These pre-summits culminated in the 2010 Local Food Summit, which brought together approximately 145 individuals to discuss ways to increase the county’s access to, and supply of, top quality, locally grown food. Participants included representatives from the Cities of Ukiah, Willits, Fort Bragg and Point Arena, the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors, the University of California Cooperative Extension and the Mendocino Farm Bureau, along with farmers, food producers, educators, institutional food service representatives and members of the health and non-profit communities.

In 2012, strategic stakeholder sessions were held in Caspar, Willits, and Ukiah. The Mendocino County Food Policy Council took this material and added goals from the Steps Toward a Local Food Economy workshops, ideas from the Transition Town community, and feedback from stakeholder interviews to form the foundation for the Food Action Plan.

**What is a Food Policy Council?**

The first Food Policy Council was founded 25 years ago in Knoxville, Tennessee. Today, there are more than 100 councils nationwide.

Food Policy Councils coordinate and marshal resources to help facilitate improvements to the
local food system, farm economies and public health. They improve coordination between government, non-profit, private sector organizations and food-related agencies. Councils identify issues, conduct research, draft food policies and propose solutions to improve food systems. They encourage economic development and help make food systems environmentally sustainable and socially just. They ensure that food policy is democratic, and provide education and a voice for the diverse needs and perspectives of all stakeholders—from the public to policymakers.

The Mendocino County Food Policy Council
The Mendocino County Food Policy Council (FPC) was formed in 2011 as an outgrowth of the 2010 Mendocino County Healthy Food Summits. Though numerous groups and individuals have been working to improve the county’s food system, there was no lead organization available to assist with the coordination of tasks necessary to reach the goals set at the Food Summits.

The FPC’s mission is to collaborate with government, organizations, institutions, businesses and the public at large to create a sustainable local food system that reduces hunger, increases health and expands economic vitality.

Other Collaborators
Community groups and agencies including Food for All Mendocino, Mendocino County ACHIEVE (Action Communities for Health, Innovation, and Environmental change), the Mendocino County Public Health Department and North Coast Opportunities’ Community Action, including the Gardens Project, have taken leadership roles in bringing together human, governmental and material resources to help identify gaps in the food security net, working separately and collectively to fill them.

The Mendocino County Food Policy Council’s Purpose:
» Increase production, processing, distribution, affordability, sales and consumption of locally grown foods.
» Reduce hunger, particularly in communities with disproportionate burdens of poverty, obesity and chronic diseases.
» Develop and promote programs that deliver healthy, locally grown foods to county residents.
» Protect the land and water resources required for sustained local food production.
» Increase the knowledge and skills needed to grow, preserve, and prepare healthy, local foods.
» Educate the public on the economic and health benefits of eating healthy, local foods.
» Stimulate the county’s economy by keeping money circulating locally instead of leaving the area.
» Implement local policies that facilitate increased local, healthy food production, processing, sales and consumption.
» Facilitate training, retention, and recruitment of farmers that provide for the continued economic viability of local food production, processing and distribution in the county.
» Increase collaboration among groups and individuals promoting healthy, local food systems.
What Is A Food System?

A **food system** includes all processes involved in feeding people: growing, harvesting, processing, packaging, distributing, marketing, consuming, disposing and recycling. Food systems require **inputs** (soil, seeds, water, nutrients, labor, education and research). They generate **outputs** (food and waste) and are influenced by numerous external environmental, economic, political and social factors.¹

How Does Our Food System Affect Me?

Our food system affects every aspect of our lives including our economy, our environment, our physical health and our community. The types of jobs we have available, the way we use our land and water, the quality of the food we eat, and the connections with our neighbors will determine our future as a food producing region and our ability to create and support vibrant communities and healthy citizens.

How Will The Food Action Plan Help Me?

- By providing a unified vision of our goals and objectives for everyone connected to our food system
- By increasing awareness of the interconnected web of issues affecting our county’s food security
- By promoting and supporting a local economy, keeping our dollars within Mendocino County
- By educating the community, elected leaders, economic advisors and potential funders about the needs and opportunities within the food industry
- By creating more jobs in the food and agriculture industries
- By promoting the county as a “food destination,” bringing more tourism dollars to the region
- By providing options and support to our food service industry (hospitals, schools and other institutions) to expand local purchasing and provide healthy food
- By pointing out opportunities and gaps in our current food system, enabling entrepreneurial activities
- By increasing the potential for securing project funds
- By facilitating conversations among food system stakeholders in Mendocino and surrounding counties
## What Does A Healthy Food System Look Like?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>HEALTHY FOOD SYSTEM</strong></th>
<th><strong>UNHEALTHY FOOD SYSTEM</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Our Farmers &amp; Food Producers</strong></td>
<td>Small and mid-sized farmers earn a living wage, provide food and other goods to community and form a vital piece of our local economy. Farming is viewed as a respected, viable profession.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Our Economy</strong></td>
<td>Local farmers sell their products widely, providing revenue for living wage jobs. More eligible residents utilize CalFresh (Food Stamps, SNAP, EBT), yielding increased income for local grocers and farmers. Cultivating our natural resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Our Health</strong></td>
<td>Friends and neighbors are more vital and active due to healthier diets. Fewer people are diagnosed with chronic medical conditions such as obesity, heart disease and diabetes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Our Land &amp; Water</strong></td>
<td>Healthy, biodiverse farmland, freshwater and marine environments produce optimum crops that are free of unnecessary pesticides. Land use and water regulations are designed to efficiently support sustainable food production.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Our Community</strong></td>
<td>A local food system and access to community gardens create opportunities for everyone to grow their own food, create a culture of connectivity, educate future generations and increase the county’s self reliance and resiliency.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WHAT WE CAN DO:
Action Items For Improving Our Local Food System

The message of this Food Action Plan is simple. It does take a village. To meet the exceptional challenges faced by our communities, it will take commitment, compromise and compassion. Each one of us has a part to play in the shaping of our food system. Our farmers, economy, health, land and water, and community depend on you—for guidance, feedback, support, elbow grease and education. The next time you bite into a crisp, juicy apple, ask yourself a few questions. Who grew this apple? How far did it travel? Is it truly safe to eat or does it just look healthy? Did someone make a decent wage to grow it?

If you can answer even some of these questions, you are well on the way to being an advocate for a local food system. Please take a look at this page and the Food Action Plan that follows and see what else you can do to ensure this system lasts for generations.

SUPPORT OUR FARMS AND FOOD PRODUCERS

» Buy directly from local farmers, fishers and foragers.
» Support your local farmers’ markets and CSAs.
» Buy wild-harvested seafood caught by local fishers.
» Meet your local farmers, visit their farms and let them know you appreciate their hard work.
» Support efforts for living wages for food system workers.

ENLIVEN OUR LOCAL ECONOMY

» Shop at locally owned retail grocers and restaurants serving healthy, affordable, and culturally diverse food. Ask what is local and purchase those products first. Ask your favorite stores and restaurants to take a 10% local challenge.
» Commit to purchasing at least 15% of your food from local sources and encourage your favorite stores and restaurants to do the same.
» Ask your workplace to provide local food at meetings and events.
» At supermarkets, ask where produce, meat and dairy products come from. Request that local products be purchased and showcased.
» Purchase Mendocino-branded products for gifts. Showcase our county’s bounty to your family, neighbors and employees.
» Ask neighborhood convenience stores to voluntarily remove or reduce outdoor marketing of unhealthy food like candy, chips and soda pop.
### PROTECT FARM LAND AND WATER

- Talk to local farmers and policy makers about how to protect our farms and farm land.
- Donate, loan, or lease land for the establishment of small farms or community gardens.
- Support laws that will preserve our delicate fishing habitats while allowing our fishermen/women to maintain our long tradition of providing a high-quality catch to the community.

### CREATE A FOOD-SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY

- Throw a dinner party or potluck using foods grown in Mendocino County.
- Get involved in a localization group, a Grange or other organizations supporting vibrant, local food systems.
- Organize community forums and neighborhood action around healthy food access for all residents.
- Start a local eating group at work or at a faith-based center to help you eat seasonally and healthfully.
- Encourage legislators at all levels to take leadership in developing policies supporting small farmers and local food production.
- Support expansion of community garden programs so everyone has access to garden space.
- “Plant an extra row” and grow surplus food for community food pantries.
- Bring the discussion of food sustainability to your family table.
- Volunteer at your local school garden.
- **Share this Food Action Plan with your faith community, service club, friends and colleagues.**
Our History

For approximately 3,000 years, Pomo, Yuki and other native peoples lived in relationship to the changing seasons and the corresponding ebbs and flows of food. Tribal communities subsisted by gathering and preparing acorns. Salmon were skewered and dried, and seaweed, mushrooms, wild greens and herbs were harvested. Game provided tribes with food, medicine and utilitarian items.

Feeding a Growing County
The area’s first settlers arrived in the mid-1800s and lived in isolated communities within the county’s sprawling, 3,510 square-mile boundary. Nearly every resident had a small garden.

Because of the county’s geographic constraints, food producers had difficulty getting products to larger markets. Ironically, this is a challenge still faced by farmers today.

Historic accounts list a cornucopia of products successfully farmed in the county, with most farms located on the coast until irrigation was established.

A thrashing operation in Round Valley circa 1895
inland. Potatoes were such an abundant crop in Mendocino Village there were surplus bushels exported to other cities. In 1864, the Coyote Valley Flour mill processed a daily average of four tons of wheat. In 1877, as the United States was undergoing a severe economic downturn, Mendocino County was relatively insulated from the worst effects. This editorial, from the first edition of the Ukiah City Press describes the county’s status, as compared to the challenges of other areas:

“In our county...we are blessed with an abundance to supply our needs. Grain and vegetables enough have been raised to meet all our wants, with a portion to spare other sections. Our cornfields are waving in luxuriant green; the stock-raiser looks for a handsome remuneration for his hogs and cattle; the wool yield has been most gratifying to the sheep-raiser, and every vocation promises to make plethoric pockets.”

In 1880, Anderson Valley, a community of less than 1,000 people, raised 20,000 head of cattle and 75,000 head of sheep. There were 28,000 apple trees, 2,000 acres of barley, 3,000 acres of oats, 375 beehives and 8 operating gristmills within the fledgling county.

Food production continued briskly into the next century. As recently as 1940, there were 20,000 cultivated acres between Westport and Gualala. In 1948, residents reported that all that could be seen from Cloverdale, Anderson Valley and westward to the coast were apple orchards and sheep. Up to 150,000 acres were being utilized for farming at one
d time. Mendocino County was the nation’s leader in the production of hops, Easter Lilies and berries.

## A Shift in Priorities

During the past 50 years, the acreage devoted to apples and pears in Mendocino County has declined by one-half. By 1990, there were 50 sheep ranches in Anderson Valley. Today there are less than five. Walnuts, grains and prunes, which comprised over 3,000 bearing acres as recently as 1969, are no longer listed as separate items on today’s crop reports due to their diminished production. Changing social mores and the availability of year-round, out-of-season food created a new food paradigm for America, one relying less and less on small family farms.
**A New Generation**

In the 1960s and ‘70s, the earliest “back-to-the-landers” began settling in Mendocino County. Small-scale farmers began experimenting with organic and Biodynamically® grown crops. Farmers’ markets began to sprout within the county and across the nation.

In 2004, Mendocino County residents became the first in the nation to vote to ban the growing of genetically modified crops and animals in their county. According to Laura Hamburg, one of the “Yes on H” campaign coordinators, the Measure H campaign was the most costly in the history of Mendocino County. “No on H” supporters spent over $700,000, with $600,000 donated by CropLife America. Supporters of the initiative, which sought to ban GMO-grown crops in the county spent less than $200,000 on their campaign. Despite the difference in campaign war chests, the measure passed by 57%. Since then, more than 16 states and municipalities have adopted similar ordinances.

**What Will Tomorrow Bring?**

Despite its long history as a food-producing region, Mendocino County no longer has a sustainable food system. In just a few decades, we have become dependent on outside sources to keep our pantries and our stomachs filled. The problems facing our food security are interwoven and affect each and every resident, food producer, social program, institution and governmental official in this county and beyond.

Global and environmental issues impact every aspect of how we grow, process, purchase and consume our food. The number of farmers nationwide is decreasing rapidly, and few young people can afford the astronomical costs associated with purchasing land and developing the infrastructure needed to grow crops. Inexpensive fossil fuels created the ability to produce and ship cheap, abundant food around the world and drastically changed the farming landscape. However, diminishing availability of these cheap resources necessitates a return to more local food production. Currently Mendocino County exports its products to 31 nations, while more than 90% of locally eaten food comes from outside the county. If we ask the average citizen where their food comes from, they would be hard-pressed to identify the county or even the country of origin.

**Planting Seeds for the Future**

Loss of farmlands, increased transportation costs and stringent farming regulations create significant challenges to those concerned with creating a strong local food economy. Yet amidst these obstacles, we have many strengths—increased demand for sustainably produced local products, increased institutional interest in local purchasing, and the potential for “branding” Mendocino-made products.

Our favorable climate and unique geography, our agricultural history, the balance between our population and our natural resources, our educational system and our current economic circumstances afford us the opportunity to provide county residents a much larger local percentage of our food supply. It is the aim of the Food Policy Council that the Food Action Plan and the corresponding Principles, Goals and Actions will serve as a roadmap on our long journey toward a sustainable food system.

*Back to the future: A horse-drawn straw binder used at the Finne Ranch in Redwood Valley circa 1913 is being employed today by Live Power Community Farm in Covelo.*
“Up through the 1940s, all the farms and ranches along the coast of Mendocino County were self-sustaining with their own livestock and kitchen gardens, mainly because the coast was quite isolated until after WWII. There were large, commercial farmers during that time who grew green peas with the local youth, women, and some men working to harvest the crop for packing and canning companies. There were also many dairies and ranches along the coast during those years, with local slaughterhouses and creameries. Even the lumber companies had their own ranches and farms.”

–Art Morley, 80 year resident of Mendocino County
From the Fertile Banana Belts Skirting the Mendocino Coast to the Rolling Hills of the North County, Today’s Farmers are Bringing Innovation and a Renewed Sense of Commitment to Everything They Do. Family Farms are at the Heart of Local Food Systems, and Have the Potential to Revitalize and Significantly Enhance Our Health and Our Economy. Throughout History, Farmers and Ranchers Have Learned to Respond to Cultural and Societal Shifts, Adjusting to Market Changes and Consumer Choice. There Has Never Been a Better Time to Support the Efforts of Those Who Have Dedicated Their Lives to the Provision of Sustenance for Ourselves and Our Children.

Today’s Farmers: Struggling to Bring Food to Our Tables
Farmers, Once Revered for Providing Us with Life-Sustaining Foods, are Now Becoming an Endangered Species, Locally and Across the Country. Local Farmers and Ranchers Struggle to Make Ends Meet, Competing in What is Now a Subsidized Global Economy That Prices Food Artificially Low, Making It Nearly Impossible for the Small-Scale Farmer to Compete. Nationally, Small and Mid-Sized Farms are Being Supplanted by Large-Scale Ventures That Specialize in “Monocrop” Cultivation of a Single Crop Such as Soy, Wheat or Corn. Six Percent of U.S. Farms Now Produce 75 Percent of Our Agricultural Products. Market

Our Farmers & Food Producers

John Gramke of the Mendocino Grain Project reaping the harvest. Gramke and partner Doug Mosel have successfully brought dry farming of wheat, beans and other grains to Mendocino County. With the support of the Nelson Family Farm, Gramke and Mosel have access to farmland which has been a test site for innovative farming techniques.

Declining Farm Jobs in Mendocino County

U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis. Created by: Center for Economic Development, California State University, Chico
analysts report that a single bite of food has traveled, on average, 1,500 miles before it is eaten. By contrast, the concept of local food looks at food produced several hundred miles from its final destination.

This type of high-yield farming has also created a dependency upon specialized equipment, which increases fossil fuel dependency. Depletion of the soil leads, in turn, to dependency upon pesticides and artificial fertilizers to correct problems created by unsustainable farming practices.

While farmers struggle with the demands of a subsidized global food economy, seasonal farm workers, many of whom are immigrants, perform much of the hard labor of bringing food to our tables.

The 400-mile-long Central Valley supplies one quarter of the food eaten in the United States. Huge farms in this fertile part of California (roughly the distance from Chicago to Pittsburgh) grow the majority of food sold in Mendocino County’s grocery outlets. The remainder is grown out of country and shipped to the U.S. for distribution.

Globally, farm workers do the vast majority of planting, tending, and harvesting, often for subsistence wages in substandard environments. In Mendocino County, most food producers are owner-operated, meaning they don’t employ many farm staff. However, immigrant farm workers are an important part of the Mendocino wine grape and pear economy. For a secure food future, we need to create an equitable system that is fair and healthy to all: farmers, farm workers, and those enjoying the bounty of their efforts.

**Tomorrow’s Farmers: In Short Supply**

Meanwhile, family farms are disappearing at an alarming rate. The 2007 Census of Agriculture reported a loss of 80,000 mid-sized farms since the last census in 2002 and some researchers predict mid-sized farms will disappear completely within a decade.7

Farmers are aging and retiring, and in many cases, their children are not following in their footsteps. They also face the challenge of providing affordable training to farm interns, meeting various labor standards, and providing for the labor and housing necessary to run a small farm on a limited budget.

According to Devon Jones, Executive Director of the Mendocino County Farm Bureau, the decline of farm labor jobs in Mendocino County is related to the shift from pears and other commodities to wine grapes. “The number of acres of wine grapes that have transitioned to mechanical harvest from hand picking has also increased. This reduces the amount of labor needed and is correlated to the reduced availability of labor, the cost of labor as well as the regulatory risk involved with labor,” she explains.

Conversely, growing groups of young people are experimenting with sustainable farming as a means to earn a living. But the economic barriers to entry as well as land and equipment costs make it difficult to begin farming. While some volunteer and intern positions are available, it is challenging for farmers to provide these opportunities. Farm volunteers or interns sometimes live at a subsistence level, without the benefits of wages, housing or insurance during their training period.

It is necessary to address these economic and social inequities that exist for those wishing to become farmers. Zoning laws often prohibit the housing of farm laborers near the farmland that they tend. Interns and other volunteers deserve the protection afforded by the provision of basic insurance coverage, and farmers should certainly be the recipients of wages that fairly compensate them for their efforts.
The Economics of Farming: Is it Worth It?

Even though agriculture and food processing comprise nine percent of Mendocino County's economy,8 Mendocino County farmers consistently operate at a significant loss—a staggering $18 million per year from 1993 to 2007.9

Though county farmers sold $110 million in commodities, it cost them $128 million to grow and raise them, creating an overall loss of $268 million since 1993. In 2007, 63% of our farmers and ranchers reported a net loss.10

County residents are demonstrating an increasing interest in developing strong localized economies that produce healthy food for local use. However, localization efforts are hampered by insufficient local production, which is the greatest gap in creating local food systems. According to the Mendocino County Agriculture Commissioner, only 320 of the county's two million-plus acres were under vegetable cultivation in 2009, producing just 1% of the year's agricultural value. Furthermore, the total gross agricultural value for commodities produced in 2009 showed an 18% decrease from the 2008 value.11

Despite all these challenges, we have small farms like Mendocino Organics, Live Power Community Farm and the Mendocino Grain Project—farmers who are finding innovative ways to grow their crops and their businesses.

Finding Our “Niche”

North Coast Prosperity has identified speciality agriculture, food, and beverage as 3 of 6 top areas for Mendocino County economic growth. Many communities have discovered untapped resources by supporting pilot farming projects which translated into profitable and sustainable economic drivers. The University of California Cooperative Extension is a vocal advocate for small farm specialty crops, and has successfully supported the introduction of blueberry production in farms from Santa Clara to San Diego Counties. Dozens of Asian vegetables, usually trucked from the Bay Area to all sectors of Northern California are well suited to the varied Mendocino County climates.

Many communities have found lucrative markets in other ethnic crops, including meat goats, roasted chiles and the highly lucrative Chinese Eggplant. Olives have already proven to be well suited to the warm inland areas of the county, and several local, small-scale olive oil producers are pressing and bottling their own varietal oils. Local farmers have already seen the interest in expansion of their produce line through the addition of colored carrot and beet varieties and other heirloom vegetables such as fingerling potatoes.

It is the hope of the Food Policy Council that one outcome of the Food Action Plan will be a concerted effort to investigate the many opportunities which could open up the niche market for our farming community.
**A Bountiful County: Wild Mendocino**

Along with growing local foods for local markets, Mendocino County is the bounteous repository of a variety of wild foods, including seaweed and mushrooms. According to local mushroom expert Eric Schramm, “Our county, in an average year, produces and sells 300,000 to 500,000 pounds of mushrooms.” There are 500 known edible species of mushrooms found here in the county, 100 of which, “have the texture or presentation a chef can use and 20 of them are readily identifiable.”

Mendocino County boasts several successful seaweed harvesting companies that provide edible and medicinal seaweed products via direct sales and mail order. The clean ocean waters off the Mendocino Coast are a rich source of a variety of sea vegetables including Kombu, Ocean Ribbons, Wakame, Nori, Sea Palm, Fucus, Grapestone and Sea Whip Fronds. The harvesters also produce a variety of seaweed-based bath products, spice mixes, energy bars and recipe books.

Beekeepers at Lovers Lane Farms have merged their expertise producing raw honey with the production of goat milk and honey soaps, beeswax, pollination services and the raising of free range, forest-fed Tamworth and other heritage breed pork. Their latest venture is the opening of a premium coffee café and roastery located in Ukiah. Diversification may provide viable solutions for small farmers looking for reliable income sources.

**Food Producers: Transforming and Celebrating County Food**

Mendocino County has attracted many talented individuals who have devoted themselves to the creation of unique and highly marketable products, many of which are identified as originating in the county. Mustards and jams, dried herbs, specialty teas, desserts, artisanal cheeses, olive oils and numerous other products are produced and sold through storefronts, mail order and at farmers’ markets.

Beginning and experienced food producers are impacted by a complex series of municipal, county and state regulations that inhibit the ability to build up a small business. The cost of leased and purchased property in certain areas of Mendocino County remains artificially high, partially due to competition with the cannabis industry.

**Catch-22 of the Day**

Although Mendocino County borders include miles of pristine coastline, those who make their living from the sea face significant challenges which must be addressed in order to preserve the industry’s viability.

The Noyo commercial fisheries include the groundfish trawl, urchin dive, Chinook salmon troll, Dungeness crab pot, sablefish, rockfish/lingcod hook-and-line and trap fisheries. In 2010 the fleet consisted of approximately 80 vessels, five charter operations and several processing facilities which handle a combination of local and out-of-area distribution.

The 1990s saw a drastic reduction in recreational and commercial fishing opportunities. In 1988, 32.2 million pounds of fish were landed. By 2007, landings had decreased to 5.3 million pounds, with groundfish accounting for the highest dollar value and landing proportion.
Costs for fuel, gear, insurance and maintenance of equipment and vessels has risen, while prices for fish and in some cases demand has declined. Additionally, the Noyo Harbor and the Dolphin Isle areas are in great need of dredging and other improvements, particularly for those fishermen and women who depend on the harbor for supplies, services and refuge from rough seas.

The recent passage of the North Coast Marine Life Protection Act, a 2011 individual quota program for the federal groundfish trawl fishery, and potential offshore energy developments have the potential to forever alter the viability of county fishing operations. Another impact to the local commercial fishing industry was the establishment of crab pot quotas in 2011.

The salmon fishery as well as the sea urchin fishery have begun to show improvements since their heyday in the 1980s and subsequent decline. But regulations designed to protect fragile ocean ecosystems have had the unintended effect of sidelining commercial fishermen, and may also contribute to fewer tourists coming to the area due to the necessity for compliance with complex species-by-species regulations, restrictive fishing seasons, and in some years, uncertainty about whether the season will be cancelled. Fluctuating revenues make it extremely challenging for fishing operators to engage in long-term planning. As a consequence, support businesses as well as the harbor infrastructure are suffering. The fisheries community is increasingly dependent upon the recreational sector to bring in the necessary funds to support a thriving, working waterfront.14

**A Long Distance for Local Meats**
Demand for sustainably raised meat and poultry products is growing rapidly, across the country and here in Northern California. As consumers become increasingly aware of the impact of their food choices on the environment, their community and their local economy, many are choosing to purchase beef, pork, chicken, lamb and other locally-raised products from family farms and ranches they know and trust.

But local livestock producers need a facility to enable them to process their products and make them ready for sale. A meat processing facility handles the slaughter, cutting, packaging and often the distribution portions of the meat supply chain, adding value to the finished product with each step. Kathryn Quanbeck, project coordinator for the Economic Development and Financing Corporation (EDFC) Meat Processing Project explains the benefits of a Mendocino County meat processing facility.

“Most ranchers currently process their animals in Eureka, Orland or Petaluma. That means dollars leaving our economy combined with lengthy drive
times, increased fuel costs, vehicle wear and tear and the stress of transporting animals long distances. Not to mention the difficulty of getting on the schedule at nearby facilities that are booked to capacity. Not having a meat processing facility is a lost opportunity. These are jobs that could be here in Mendocino County and revenue for our community,” says Quanbeck.

**Starting Small**
There’s been talk about a local facility for many years. In 2009, the University of California Cooperative Extension, working with UC Davis researchers released a feasibility study. “It looked at the economics of building a facility in our area. The purpose of the study was to determine if we really have the necessary supply of animals and the demand for locally raised meats to warrant building a processing facility. The final outcome of that study was ‘yes, we do!’ but the study had a big vision, with farmers and ranchers from farther afield traveling to Mendocino County to use our facility. We’ve since realized that it’s better to start small,” Quanbeck continues.

How small is small? “Big slaughterhouses in the Midwest and Great Plains can process up to 4,000 head per day, sometimes more. What we’re talking about here is more like 10 to 20 head per day. Throughout this process, we’ve been very conscious of designing a facility that fits our community - a sustainable size and scale, one that utilizes environmentally friendly practices and operates with the highest animal welfare and workplace standards in mind,” says Quanbeck.

Do we have enough supply and demand in Mendocino County to keep a local facility operating and profitable? “The nearby facilities that our local ranchers currently use are quite busy and are often completely booked up in the fall, so we know there is significant demand for processing services in the region. I think we have enough supply and demand to keep a small-scale facility in business, but it will be tough for the first few years, especially during the slower winter months. As the market for local meat grows, demand for processing services grows, and the facility would become more financially stable,” Quanbeck adds.

**Mendocino County’s Farms**
- 1,136 farms. This represents a 4% decrease in farms since 2002.*
- Mendocino County has 1.4% of California farms.
- 81 (7%) of these are 1,000 acres or more.
- 569 (50%) farms are less than 50 acres.
- The most prevalent farm size is 10–49 acres, with a total of 352 farms (31% of farms).
- Average farm size is 536 acres, 171% of California’s average.
- The county has 608,674 acres of land in farms.
- 590 (52%) farms have a total of 27,120 acres of irrigated land.
- Average value of land and buildings per farm is $2.8 million. This is 142% of the state average of $2 million.15

*74% of commodity sales are winegrapes, while only 1% are vegetables. This prevalence of vineyards skews the average farm size and value of farm land upward.

**Only 1% of all of the Mendocino County produce and livestock sales in 2007 were sold to Mendocino County consumers.**
The EDFC, along with a “Meat Committee” comprised of local ranchers, cooperative extension personnel, city and county government officials, representatives from non-profits and community members continues to study the economics of a small-scale meat processing facility for Mendocino County. A grant has enabled researchers to develop plant designs, construction estimates, operating costs projections and supply and demand forecasts. The outcomes of this study will be used to inform potential owners and attract potential investors for a local processing facility.

An Interim Solution?
John Harper, University of California Cooperative Extension Livestock and Natural Resources Advisor and member of the Meat Committee, has been extensively studying the prospect of a meat processing facility in the county. He suggests a possible, more immediate solution for ranchers.

“I think we’re ideally suited to capture the larger portion of the niche meat market—grass fed, heritage breeds, the organic meat market and pasture-based hogs. We bottleneck on the cutting and wrapping. If we could open up that part of the bottleneck, more producers would be willing to participate. With a USDA-certified cut and wrap facility, you’re not bringing in live animals. It’s the same as the butchering department in big box grocers, where they take large portions of meat and further process them. I think it’s a win-win idea for the community. We have to take baby steps to become more self-sufficient,” says Harper.

Agreeing to Disagree
For everyone who is passionate about a processing facility going forward, there are others who are not supportive. “Not everyone in our county eats meat,” Quanbeck concedes. “But I believe that the importance of local, humane and sustainable processing is something we can all agree on.”

Future Farmers?
The hard facts are in. Land prices continue to rise. Farm equipment is expensive to purchase and maintain. Farmers are aging. What are the solutions?

While the past several decades have seen an aging of the farming population and a decline in interest from young people in farming as a career, there are encouraging signs that this trend is reversing.

The Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems at the University of California Santa Cruz, the Center for Land Based Learning in Winters, and Monterey’s Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA) have experienced significant growth during the past several years. The University of California Cooperative Extension’s Beginning Farmer and Rancher Program recently had twice as many applicants for their program as available positions. Students at Mendocino College’s Ag Intern program work hands-on while receiving college credit. Farmers’ Markets and Community Supported Agriculture provide opportunities for a new generation of farmers to make a living and connect with people who eat and appreciate the fruits of their labors.

More opportunities are needed to expand the pool of future farmers. The University of California Cooperative Extension and North Coast Opportunities are pursuing ways to launch incubator farms in Mendocino and Sonoma Counties. Following successful models like ALBA and The Intervale Center in Vermont, incubator farms are providing aspiring farmers access to land, shared equipment, and mentoring—increasing the possibility for future farmer success.

Farm internships create opportunities to transfer farming knowledge to the next generation. Live Power Community Farm in Covelo has a long history of intern training. There is also an internship and apprenticeship program in Willits through the Ecology Action Program. Interns benefit from the extensive knowledge of experienced farmers and also provide essential support to the farm. Replicable models such as the Rouge Farm Corps in southern Oregon offer farm interns the ability to work at one farm while receiving additional training at other regional farms.

Unlike the programs listed above, many interns and students live on marginal incomes and need sufficient income to eat and a place to sleep. In order for programs such as these to flourish, it is critical for communities to address housing and labor policies
to help support the forward momentum of a new generation of farmers.

Mendocino County Farm Bureau Executive Director Devon Jones hopes that educators will continue to value agriculture-related vocations. “The next generation is not going into farming for multiple reasons. Agriculture is hard work which is dependent on a number of uncontrollable factors and often is not lucrative. Farmers and ranchers take up the vocation because they have passion for doing so. Young people’s passions are not fostered when school districts are forced to reduce trades taught in high schools, when teachers are compelled to teach to standardized testing protocols and curricular options continue to decline. Students need to be encouraged to learn about agriculture and where their food and fiber comes from. They need to be allowed to take agricultural classes—to ‘get their hands dirty’ and be supported to pursue the many careers available in agriculture.”

A Focus on Sustainability
Mendocino County produces over 3,000 acres of organic fruits, nuts, vegetable and forage crops. The commitment to sustainable agriculture takes many forms, including thousands of acres that are farmed Biodynamically® or under conservation programs such as Fish Friendly Farming. The program includes a large acreage of wine grapes, pears and some county rangeland. Growers voluntarily participate in these programs. To become certified as a Fish Friendly Farm, farmers attend workshops covering property management and design, water and soil conservation, management of creek and riparian corridors, increasing stream flow and road maintenance. A unique plan is created, a third-party review conducted and the implementation process results in farm certification.

This commitment to sustainable agriculture enjoys strong community support with nine certified farmers’ markets and numerous Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms.16

Sustainability: What Does This Mean?
Rather than pursuing a single definition for complex terms, the Mendocino County Food Policy Council has chosen to assign a range of values embodied by the words “local” and “sustainable.” These words and phrases reflect what healthy food systems and economies can and should be.

A Local, Sustainable Food System:
» Is good for farmers, consumers and the environment
» Promotes health and well-being
» Involves collaboration
» Is affordable, inclusive and accessible to all
» Celebrates heritage and tradition
» Reduces fossil fuel dependency
» Promotes self-sufficiency
» Builds the local economy
» Educates children
» Requires community investment
» Takes care of future generations
» Provides a living wage and viable livelihood

Eric Schramm has made a successful career as one of the region's premier mushroom harvesters.
Mac Magruder, owner and operator of Ingel-Haven Ranch in Potter Valley worked on his family’s ranch from the time he was a boy. “We had about 1,000 head of sheep and mountain Bartlett pears on what should have been grazing land,” Magruder notes.

In 1976, after graduating from the University of Washington, Mac’s father fell ill, and he returned to Potter Valley to run the ranch.

The rugged hills on the family’s 2,400-acre ranch became Magruder’s teachers. He removed the pear orchards and focused on a cow/calf operation, something the land was especially suited for. Today, Magruder’s grass-fed beef, pasture-pork and grass-fed lamb is served at illustrious eating establishments including Chez Panisse and Oakland’s Oliveto’s Restaurant and Café.

Magruder has become a grass farmer, developing pastures rich with naturally growing legumes and grasses suited to grow healthy cattle. He incorporates rotational grazing into rhythms of the ranch. “We move animals, the grass comes back. It’s better for soil. That’s the way it used to be. It was a way of stewarding the land and raising healthier animals,” Magruder explains.

Magruder is passionate about the need for a local meat processing facility. “In the commercial market, meats destined for supermarkets go to Arizona and get redistributed back to stores. We need a local facility that could cater to all markets. Every county used to have processing facilities as recently as the 1950’s. We need regulations that make sense for both production and processing,” he continues.
“People raise factory-farmed pigs in Iowa and get the meat shipped and processed cheaper than I can have it processed and delivered. Even though we offer a different product for a different clientele, I can’t raise prices enough to compete against large feedlots and commercial markets. We’re affected by commodity prices which are fueled by subsidies. It’s not a real price you’re paying.”

Magruder gazes at Mendocino County hills. Where some see acres of vegetables or rows of condominiums, Mac envisions grazing animals. “I’d like to see a program for putting livestock in vineyards in a controlled manner. We should be teaching 4H kids to train working dogs which would help get animals back into rotational grazing. Instead we’re teaching young people to raise animals in confinement.”

“Even though we offer a different product for a different clientele, I can’t raise prices enough to compete against large feedlots and commercial markets. We’re affected by commodity prices which are fueled by subsidies.”

Magruder’s ideas go even further. “Turn pigs out into the pear orchards. We have a food source going to waste. Use the sugar from excess pears to make ethanol. The animal ag industry has the makings for a biodigester to create power. We have tanoak and redwood bark, and we have animals. I don’t think there are any tanneries left in the United States that use natural processes.”

Mac’s wife Kate notes the increasing level of consumer understanding about the real costs of factory-raised food and its health and environmental impacts. The family is grateful to be able to offer food raised the “right” way. “This is an exciting time at the ranch. The vision Mac has nurtured is beginning to take shape, bolstered by consumer awareness and cultural movements like Slow Food, agritourism and sustainable agriculture,” Kate concludes.

Pigs raised on Ingel-Haven ranch are a cross between wild and domestic breeds.

The Magruder Family have taken bold steps to utilize their family’s legacy by focusing on livestock production.
Jessica Taaning-Sanchez, owner of Inland Ranch Organics is a fifth-generation Mendocino County native who raises organic produce, grapes, pigs, cows and chickens on her ten-acre property. She was raised on a 2.5-acre parcel where the family produced all of their own meat and most of their vegetables. “It’s amazing what you can produce on a small parcel,” Taaning notes.

Potatoes are one of her most lucrative crops. They grow in between rows of certified organic grapes, which Taaning sells to Frey Vineyards. She grows many types of potatoes including Yukon Golds, Mountain Rose Reds, Purple, Fingerlings and German Butterball potatoes.

Taaning collects heirloom seed from local farmers. She is fairly certain that a few crops, including her Mill Creek red onion strain were probably propagated originally by farmers working at the Talmage State Hospital. “Now they are almost nonexistent. I try to plant my onions at different times so that they don’t cross-pollinate,” she explains.

Taaning makes her own compost. As she walks to her upper garden, she gives out a hearty laugh. “If I added up all the hay, grain and gardening amendments I’ve used over 26 years, I bet we’ve put over $100,000 into the soil.”

A decision was made to delve deeper into vegetable farming seven years ago. “This year it looks like we’ll finally pay back all the infrastructure dollars we put in,” she notes.

Third-year peaches are producing, lined alongside rows of pole beans, snow peas, artichokes, asparagus, pumpkins and sunchokes. “Sunchokes grow well here and it’s a vegetable most people aren’t familiar with,” says Taaning.

The most labor-intensive part of being an organic farmer is the weeding and soil amendments, Taaning notes, as she walks by cucumber vines, summer and winter squash, pulling a weed here and there as she inspects her crops.

Taaning raises hogs in large, concrete pens. Currently she raises market pigs, sows, boars and younger pigs available for 4-H and FFA members who continue to raise them for showing and sale at the Redwood Empire Fair. She works closely with Redwood Meats slaughterhouse in Humboldt County. Staff have supported her in the creation of her own sausage blends made from 100% organic herbs and spices. Round Man’s in Fort Bragg provides her with an all-organic, non-nitrate smoke process. She estimates that processing for two sows, including butchering, smoking, cutting and wrapping costs about $1,200, not including the price of the animal. “It’s like having a good, high-interest savings account,” she explains. “If there were ever to be a slaughterhouse in our county, they would have to provide the kind of excellent, individualized service I get from my folks in Eureka,” Taaning notes.
Taaning added a silo to the farm to help with grain costs. “This is the only way I can afford to buy organic grain. I have a special blend made for all our livestock.” Taaning is committed to using all-organic grain because she sees cost benefits that outweigh the higher price point. “Northern Dairy farmers are getting significantly more milk production since they switched to organic grains. These aren’t all-organic types of farmers. They’ve made the switch because the results are in the increased revenue,” she explains.

“My hat’s off to anyone in the local food movement. There needs to be more of this so that we are promoting healthy living.”

Taaning has what she calls a “bartnership” with the Ukiah Brewing Company, which provides her with their spent brewing barley, which she uses to feed to her animals. “The Brewing Company has really helped me with this project,” she notes.

She plants rows of garlic in her lower garden, where temperatures tend to be cooler. The genetics were originally provided by Irene Engber of Irene’s Garden Produce, a small farm in Laytonville, and are highly suited to Tanning’s Redwood Valley climate.

Taaning’s chicken coops are filled with about 200 Red Star, Black Star, Wyandotte, Delaware and Aracana chickens. She rotates her breeds, keeping track of their age. “We have 150 layers and about 50 young ones coming up. About every three years I give away the layers to people who don’t need heavy producers. Some will live until they’re old ladies and others will end up in the stew pot. We get about two yards of incredible mulch out of the combined animal pens every two weeks,” she explains. “An old German farmer once told me, ‘You’re as rich as your manure pile is high,’” she smiles.

Taaning gives a spritz to several dozen young artichoke plants she started from seed. “With the cooler summers we’ve been having, I’ll be planting more things like this.”

“My hat’s off to anyone in the local food movement,” Taaning notes. “The Farmers’ Markets are a great, grass-roots, wholesome project. I’m very happy that we now accept WIC and EBT cards. There needs to be more of this so that we are promoting healthy living. I’ve got a great life,” she notes—giving enormous credit to her husband Joe Sanchez who has built all of the infrastructure around the farm, and to her brother Mike, who assists Taaning at several of the seven farmers’ markets they attend weekly.
Tyler Nelson’s family purchased their ranch south of Ukiah 60 years ago. The prunes and sheep that were once on the property have been replaced by 200 acres of wine grapes, some grown organically, along with Bartlett pears, olives and Christmas trees. Nelson serves on the boards of the Mendocino County Resource Conservation District and the Mendocino County Farm Bureau.

Two tributaries to the Russian River flow through the Nelson Ranch, providing spawning and rearing habitat for steelhead trout. In 2004 and 2005, the Nelson family and the Fish Friendly Farming program, in collaboration with the federal Natural Resource Conservation Service, re-vegetated Kneeland and McNab Creeks with native riparian trees and shrubs.

The Nelsons’ experience growing new crops and incorporating new farming modalities exemplifies the complex issues faced by county farmers.

Rules of the Game
Although farmers must “make hay while the sun shines,” today’s agricultural stewards have an additional job as time-sensitive as harvesting fruit at the precise moment of ripeness. Administrative tasks pull farmers out of the fields and into the office to attend to the voluminous “crop” of paperwork that defines modern farming.

“I have notebook after notebook filled with paperwork I have to keep track of,” says Nelson, adding that it is not unusual to have to address the same issues for duplicate agencies due to overlapping laws and regulations.

A recently adopted workplace safety law requires farmers to provide specific amounts of shade, water and heat safety training for supervisors and staff. “The actual concepts and the elements I’m having to satisfy are extremely important. But the amount of paperwork I had to fill out to demonstrate that we are complying with the law is unbelievable,” says Nelson.

Even simple improvements to the farm become surprisingly costly, as Nelson points out. “We’re putting six lights into a new facility. We had to pay $250 to draft and submit a written plan. Various taxes and permits are not large sums individually, but when you pay $100 for this permit and $200 for that permit, it adds up very quickly,” he continues.

Size Matters and Looks Can Kill
“I’d love to sell our pears locally and drop off boxes at Safeway or the school district. When
you don’t have a processing facility to box them the way the customer wants, it impedes the idea of local sales. The school district needs small pears. Safeway wants large ones. Each customer has specific needs that I would have to address.”

“A cosmetic blemish on a pear decreases the value by 75 percent, even though the blemish does not affect the taste.”

“If customers see a little browning on a pear, they won’t buy it. A cosmetic blemish on a pear decreases the value by 75 percent, even though the blemish does not affect the taste. Small pears taste good. Big pears taste good. But consumers have preconceived ideas about size and appearance which affect the market,” he notes.

The Right Tool and the Right People for the Job
For Nelson, sustainability requires a diverse infrastructure, collaboration between farmers and an engaged work force willing to accept the physical rigors of farm life.

“Our 300 olive trees are finally to the fruiting age. Olivino in Hopland has a processing plant for olive oil. We can take our hand-picked olives to a local processing facility and sell the oil in our tasting room.”

An earlier experiment growing canola was not as successful. “We had this product, but didn’t have the facilities to process it. We ended up with 6 tons of canola that was never utilized.”

Nelson found an innovative solution to assist in the conversion from conventional to organic farming. “We decided to experiment with organic grape growing, and we had to clear weeds from underneath the vines. The piece of equipment we needed to do this cost $25,000. I found a beat-up old model and purchased it with another small farmer, and we shuttle it between the two farms.”

“My concern as a producer is economy of scale. If I’m a small farmer growing an acre of lettuce, I can’t afford to buy that $80,000 piece of equipment I need to process it. When we’re talking about smaller production units and doing things by hand, the labor costs are extraordinary.”

“Years ago, my dad had the foresight to plan for mechanization. We made a humongous investment in a grape harvester. Everything in the vineyard had to be standardized for the harvester—the height of the wire, the size of vine. It’s paid big dividends, because the labor force is not there anymore. There are very, very few people willing to work as hard as it takes to produce any sort of crop.”

“With any of the new ideas we try, we have to have the equipment, labor and the infrastructure to make it cost effective. The critical questions that our community needs to consider: How are we going to farm our crops? Who is going to do the work and how is it going to get done?”

Think Sustainable, Not Just Local
“For smaller operations, selling at Farmers’ Markets is great. We support 30 families, which we couldn’t do if we only sold to Farmers’ Markets. To make the ranch economically viable, I need to get my product to larger markets.”

“I wish we could encourage our bigger stores to commit 2% of their products to local goods. If the school district adopted a 10% mandate to buy local, it could really help farmers. Let’s get rid of the pizza one day per week and buy pears locally,” Nelson smiles.
# Our Farmers & Food Producers: Goals & Actions

## Goal 1: Support Our Farmers and Local Food Producers

1.1 Facilitate and support a regional farmer/producer network promoting farming as a respected vocation. Connect novice and seasoned farmers.

1.2 Create a community based agriculture information clearinghouse for farms, labor, land, markets, investment opportunities, grants, and other funding opportunities.

1.3 Provide staff support to assist farmers and producers with financial and office activities.

1.4 Provide business development and marketing training for local food producers.

1.5 Facilitate agritourism opportunities.

1.6 Promote and support the development of niche crops and products.

1.7 Develop training and resources for producers to expand year round food production.

## Goal 2: Create Opportunities and Ensure Justice for Local Agricultural and Food Industry Workers

2.1 Establish institutional support for farm and food system workers.

2.2 Support quality housing opportunities for farm and food system workers through “host housing” and portable housing units.

2.3 Urge policy makers to establish equitable farm worker policies and regulations.

2.4 Create job-training programs for food production and food processing positions.

2.5 Advocate for livable wages for agricultural workers and food producers.

2.6 Establish uniform farm intern recruitment policies and provide interns with appropriate benefits (i.e. worker’s compensation, liability, etc.)

2.7 Modify land use plans to allow for the creation of additional housing for farm workers in proximity to farming activities.

## Goal 3: Attract, Train, and Empower New Local Food Producers

3.1 Research best practices of farm incubator programs.

3.2 Facilitate land leases by farmer-owner/consultants to farm apprentices.

3.3 Encourage Youth Food/Farming Entrepreneurship.

3.4 Expand agricultural and related vocational programs in local educational institutions.

3.5 Support WWOOFers, AmeriCorps members, recent graduates, farm internship programs and ROP students to diversify and increase the local farm labor pool.
“We are fortunate to have remained economically viable for the last 30 years in Mendocino County by using a low carbon footprint and biodynamic farming practices. We have been able to bring together 200 households who annually finance the operating costs of the farm and share in all the food that is produced, creating a real and stable economic alternative to the often injurious effects and vicissitudes of market agriculture. In the future, we hope that more and more people will partner directly with local farms to obtain a staple part of their food supply through this associative, rather than market economic relationship, thus recreating conscious, viable local food production.”

–Stephen Decater
Biodynamic Horse Farmer, Live Power Farm in Covelo
We Have What It Takes

History tells us that Mendocino County has the capacity to have a sustainable food system.

Mendocino County is in an excellent position to expand the scale of its local food production and distribution. The county’s agricultural focus, temperate climate, tourism economy and extended growing season create optimum conditions for increased economic growth and sustainable jobs based on a coordinated local food system.

An Economy of Kale?

The county’s many microclimates and variations in temperature allow for the production of a wide variety of fruits, vegetables, nuts, seafood and ocean products, meats, eggs, and mushrooms. Currently many value-added products including salsa, jam, sausage, juice, cheese (chevre and feta), olive oil, vinegar, hard cider, apple cider, applesauce, pie, tomato sauce, beeswax, honey, teas, fruit leather, dried fruit, and corn salad are locally produced. Other crops such as citrus are grown in the county, but not at a commercial scale.

The majority of Mendocino County’s agricultural economy is currently fueled by winegrape growing ($78 million). In 2007, 9% of Mendocino County’s economy was comprised of agricultural and food producing activities. In 2009, major commodities included pears and other fruits ($13 million), field crops ($9.5 million), livestock ($7.2 million), livestock and poultry products ($5.9 million) and nursery products such as mushrooms, bedding plants and nursery stock ($2.9 million). Sales of livestock and related products fell 51%, from 1969 to 2007.

Surprisingly, vegetables, including potatoes, squash, peas, etc., generated just $1.0 million in sales.

Looking at these statistics, it is not surprising that few people see growing food crops as an economically viable vocation. “Everyone wants to talk about food but no one wants to be a farmer, especially when the returns aren’t very good. I’m an economist. If I had ten...
acres of land, I'd be growing grapes,” states John Kuhry, CEO of the Economic and Financing Development Corporation.

**Low Hanging Fruit**
Aside from the larger scale winegrape and orchard producers, most of our local food production is being sold through direct sales (farmers markets, Community Supported Agriculture and direct sales to local businesses). Supermarkets and restaurants generally import food grown in other areas, resulting in a disconnect between producers, buyers, and consumers. While the proportion of local food purchased in Mendocino County is still small, many of our locally owned retail grocers, restaurants, and institutions are making efforts to increase their purchases from small-scale food producers. In fact, the majority of food products in the county are produced by small-scale farmers and entrepreneurs.

If the community can capitalize on the existing agricultural base, add to it, build a stronger agricultural infrastructure, bring outside dollars in and localize consumption, the potential exists to create a viable agricultural economy supplying the population, and a population willing to support the true cost of local food production.

**Invest In Ourselves First**
One of the primary tenets taught to beginning investors is to “pay yourself first”—setting aside funds to build savings. This simple premise can be applied to supporting our local economy, according to John Kuhry of the Economic Development and Financing Corporation (EDFC). The most steadily increasing cost of production is hired labor.

The economic challenges facing a fledgling local food system are daunting, but the first and foremost hurdle is deceptively simple: to engage as many community members as possible in using their dollars to support a local food economy—paying ourselves first.

“When you look at the whole economic question, there needs to be a large movement to localize purchasing. Consumers and institutions must make a voluntary decision to support the local model. How do you get the middle class to support Community Supported Agriculture—an ideal target market? There’s a cultural shift that has to happen. At the middle class level, I have to make the conscious decision to pay a few cents more for that organic tomato,” says Kuhry. “If everyone who had disposable income purchased locally, and if institutions participated, we’d make the shift.”

**“Fueling” our Farm Economy**
Just like their counterparts in the last century, farmers have built-in challenges getting their produce out of the county to larger markets. Limited local demand for local foods cannot sustain county farmers, but fuel costs and logistical demands make it extremely challenging for most farmers to make a profit selling at markets in the Bay Area and beyond, especially for food producers selling perishable products. Most small producers must truck their wares long distances to and from markets several times weekly. The complex task of creating a coordinated distribution network is essential for the creation of a healthy food system.

Mendocino County consumers spend $210 million annually on food produced outside of the county. This sum represents a huge market opportunity for local food producers.
**What We Need**

Mendocino County food producers can be supported by increasing local demand for local products and creating policies and strategies that make it easier to get the food that is produced to wider markets. Food and farm entrepreneurs will benefit greatly from increased access to training, marketing assistance and capital. The infrastructure that supported farmers of the past is almost invisible, with little remaining beyond a few picturesque barns and repurposed hop kilns. Opportunities are lost due to the inability for food producers to rapidly process crops for shipping, store surplus grain or expand production on a successful line of jams and jellies. The lack of reliable, countywide high-speed Internet access is an increasing impediment to rural farmers who need to be aware of changing regulations, industry and market trends or require broadband access to showcase their products to the public.

**Organics:**
**Growing the Economy Naturally**

Despite economic challenges nationwide, consumer interest in local, organic and sustainably produced foods continues to increase. National sales of organic foods have almost reached the $25 billion mark.\(^{19}\) Sales of local food throughout the US were expected to reach $7 billion by 2011. From 2010 to 2011, organic acreage in the county increased from 3,484 acres to 5,812 acres. This does not include acreage devoted to wine grapes. As Mendocino County continues to grow more organic products, the region will continue to be identified as a leader in the organic food movement. More and more county restaurants proudly display the names of farms providing food for their menus, and though not every farmer grows organically, savvy consumers know that a local apple, whether conventionally or organically grown, can be sourced directly back to the grower, providing direct product responsibility for the customer and direct feedback to the farmer.

Sean White, general manager of the Russian River Flood Control and Water Improvement District says, “The reason that some farmers are switching to organic methods is not necessarily because people are pious or loving. It’s because the crops increase in value. Everything is about marketing niches. We’ve been able to reduce those inputs because at the end of the day, the end product is more valuable. If you’re not making a profit, you won’t have farms. You’ll have Rohnert Park. It’s insane how easy it is to screw this up.” White cautions.

**A Growing Market For Sustainable, Local Food**

In 2008, the National Restaurant Association reported that 62 percent of restaurant patrons chose restaurants based on their commitment to the environment, and 40 percent of fine-dining patrons indicated that they would like to see more local foods on menus.

A 2006 survey of US consumers found that respondents preferred local products benefitting the local economy. Additionally, they were willing to pay higher prices for foods grown in their state and believed that meat, produce and dairy products are influenced by the region they are grown in and the natural resource characteristics of that region.
consistent message about the superiority, quality and availability of Mendocino County-made products, we will not create a “brand” which consumers can identify with. A retail food study conducted in Fort Bragg concluded that, “Every package sent out has the potential to promote the brand. Labels educate consumers about the area and help bring people to them. Mendocino has cachet. This is a very large need and a good opportunity.”

Farm2Fork: Making the Connections
Local institutions and retail food establishments represent a significant market force that could provide local food producers with a year-round, consistent market for their goods. However, today’s framework of institutional buying calls for large volume, standardized packaging, and single source ordering and distribution. This presents a challenge for most of our county’s current producers.

Small-scale, highly diversified production and the lack of a coordinated local distribution system frustrate buyers who are eager to incorporate local products into menus and keep their shelves stocked with fresh product. Menus are generally built upon year-round product availability and do not reflect seasonal fluctuations inherent in local production. Shrinking budgets, especially for schools, senior centers and hospitals, favor an industrial, “heat and serve” approach in an attempt to curb rising labor costs associated with meals cooked from scratch. These challenges make it more expedient to buy from distributors who import cheap food and export valuable dollars out of Mendocino County.

As awareness grows about the importance of fostering good nutrition through school meals, and as individual consumers demand higher-quality food from grocers and restaurateurs, the institutional market in Mendocino County is beginning to open up to local producers. Initiatives such as NCO Community Action’s Farm2Fork program connect local farmers with institutional buyers—facilitating local purchasing by helping smooth the logistical kinks in the current system.

Susan Lightfoot, Farm2Fork Coordinator, believes we are on the right track. “Our schools, hospitals, restaurants, grocery stores and caterers believe in the importance of buying locally, but we have to make it easier for them to do it. These buyers don’t have time to seek out multiple producers to fill their ordering needs. I help them make connections and act as a liaison between the field and the plate.”

The program has seen success in its first year. Ukiah, Anderson Valley, Fort Bragg and Willits Unified School Districts are buying fresh product directly from a number of local producers, shifting their menus to align with the county’s seasonal abundance. “We need to continue to provide training, equipment and technical support to schools and other institutions to build this market for our local farmers and ensure our children see the bounty of the county on the lunch line,” Lightfoot concludes.

The Potential of Agritourism
In 2007, 21 farms reported income of $1.7 million from agritourism and related activities, dramatically higher than the $193,000 earned in 2002. Twenty-eight farms earned income from tourism in 2002, so fewer farms earned considerably more income. There is a golden opportunity for Mendocino County farms to capitalize upon the steady stream of tourists coming to the region for wine tasting and sightseeing, by creating opportunities for tourists to visit and purchase products from our farms and food producers. Lake County has created an agritourism website which guides the visitor to everything from farmers’ markets and flower farms to pumpkin patches and

On-site farm events such as this celebration at Ingel-Haven Ranch, can provide farmers with an opportunity to educate the public and showcase their land and their vocation.
petting zoos. An effort of this kind, with support from County tourism, promotional organizations and local Chambers of Commerce, has the potential to increase the bottom line for many farm-based businesses in Mendocino County.

**Education and Support**

Increasing the availability and affordability of locally produced foods is very possible in Mendocino County. This will take a combination of public education campaigns and increased engagement and support services for local farmers.22

Restaurants, public agencies, schools and hospitals must be inspired and educated to understand their pivotal role in helping to create and support a vibrant food system. Consumers need to understand the hidden costs of big-box bargains and the long-term consequences associated with a dwindling supply of local farmers. Retailers are in a position to enjoy the benefits of supporting their food-producing neighbors by profiting from the sales of local goods. And tomorrow’s farmers need tools to respond to a changing economy: better access to and utilization of technology, private/public agency support, political advocacy and a public which places a high value on the importance of what farmers bring to the table.

**Cannabis Counties: Singular Challenges and Opportunities**

Like it or not, our county is growing more than tomatoes.

Land and water use, diversion of our farm labor pool, and the price of land are just a few of the agricultural issues profoundly affected by the Mendocino County cannabis economy. It is critical that we acknowledge the formidable challenges that cannabis brings to our community, while at the same time recognizing its economic potential and the need for comprehensive local oversight, within the context of adherence to local, state and federal regulations.

As we watch states like Washington and Colorado transition to what could be the beginning of the end of cannabis prohibition, it would be prudent for our community to consider the implications of these changes. If California and the nation continue the trend toward legalization, this could dramatically and rapidly alter the economic, environmental and social fabric of Mendocino County life. The long-range consequences to our community are largely unknown, but it is important to remember to include our farmers, land use and agricultural experts in discussions involving the regulation and growing of cannabis in our county.

**Creating Our Infrastructure**

The following items were identified during the Steps Toward A Local Food Economy workshops and other forums as necessary components for the creation of a viable, thriving county food system.

- Fuel-efficient delivery fleet
- Tool banks and lending libraries
- Gleaners network
- Local food websites
- Juice presses
- Food distribution centers
- Seed banks
- Grain storage, processing and flour mills
- Commercial kitchens
- Inventory of existing resources
- CSA centers
- Food producer networks
- Marketing co-op for producers
- Olive presses
- Meat processing facility

**OUR ECONOMY**
“Mendo Lake Credit Union sees great benefits in a thriving local food economy. Many of our credit union members are farm workers who depend on local production for their livelihood - many more are participants in the local CSA and Farmers Market programs – enjoying the end product. In our ‘small community’ economy, the boost that local food production provides is invaluable to our economic health - not to mention the nutritional value that the actual produce provides for the residents of the area. It’s a win-win for everyone!”

–Richard Cooper, Mendo Lake Credit Union
When Scott and Holly Cratty purchased a Ukiah “mini-mart,” they restored the business to a new version of the old fashioned corner store. Their store, the Westside Renaissance Market, is Ukiah’s go-to place for local food. Cratty also manages the Ukiah Farmers’ Market.

A Convenience Store With A Mission
Twenty years ago, neighborhood markets were ubiquitous. “The old Westside Market was the last survivor,” Cratty explains.

“We renamed the store Westside Renaissance Market because Renaissance connotes being in the present and looking thoughtfully into the past, making sure we carry over the good parts,” he smiles.

The market is a place for local producers to showcase their wares. Cratty knows every farmer and locally based food producer personally. The market stocks grocery items, beer, wine, artisan cheeses, local meats and prepared foods, from chicken tikka masala to fresh blackberry pie. Cratty estimates over 70 family businesses have recently derived income from the market. Though the focus is local, Cratty stocks conventional items like soda and Snickers bars. “We stock Coke and Pepsi next to organic sodas, so people have the opportunity to select for themselves. If it’s just the choir we preach to, things will never change.”

A Growing Market for Local Food
The Ukiah Farmers’ Market has been operating for 35 years. “We’re in our fifth year-round season. Farmers learned the ropes of winter farming, and now we have multiple county farms selling year-round lettuce and gorgeous tomatoes in January. It’s very inspiring.”

For every promotional dollar spent by farmers’ markets, large grocers spend thousands. There is a persistent myth/misconception by the public that farmers’ markets are more expensive, which we have shown is not true when comparing like items and when shopping for items that are in season.

“If we believe quality, the environment and working conditions matter, we need to know the true history of what we buy.”

A “Convenient” Truth
According to the World Bank, Americans spend less than 7% of their per capita income on food—the lowest percentage of any country recording that data. “Cheap food is subsidized. If we paid the true social costs for shipped bananas or corn syrup, that would dramatically shift the ground,” says Cratty.

“Convenience is our biggest enemy. Spending money at the easiest, most convenient location means our dollars instantly leave
our community. If we are to create a local food system, people need to ‘inconvenience’ themselves—cook with in-season, available food.”

“It’s a sacrifice to go to the Farmers’ Market on a rainy Saturday morning,” Cratty explains. But once consumers reap the benefits of buying locally, they are more willing to make the trip, despite the inconvenience.

“Part of sustainability is awareness of what happens to our food when no one is looking.”

What We See is Not What We Get

“If you saw the real story of how foods get to a store—the working conditions, how crops are sprayed, processed, and stored in a sack in dingy conditions...if we had a clue where food came from, we’d never buy it. Low-priced items are low-priced because corporations pay lower wages. When we purchase that item, it encourages companies to cut more corners. If we believe quality, the environment and working conditions matter, we need to know the true history of what we buy. Part of sustainability is awareness of what happens to our food when no one is looking. At the Farmers’ Market, we look into the eyes of the people who grow our food. Once people know the real story, their reasons for shopping locally shift radically.”

Creating Community—One Bite at a Time

Cratty regularly makes community presentations about local food. “Everyone understands the message. After the presentation, some begin to shop at the Saturday market. People learn sustainability.

They move from middle of the grocery aisles to the produce department and then to the organic section. Then they become brave enough to visit the Co-op, and the next steps are to start shopping at the farmers’ market and, if possible, to join a CSA. Unfortunately, stagnating economies encourage people to migrate back to box stores—the more ‘convenient’ option.”

“Our challenge is getting this message into mainstream conversations so it is regularly reinforced. Then people begin to make small shifts in their purchasing, get involved with the food community and reconnect to food, and to each other.”

Cratty focuses on providing consumers with as many locally grown and/or produced products as possible. Cratty is proud to partner with Fort-Bragg based Thanksgiving Coffee Company, arguably the nation’s first sustainably-based coffee importer and roaster.
## Our Economy: Goals & Actions

### Goal 4: Encourage Institutions to Support Our Regional Food System

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<td>4.1</td>
<td>Develop programs that facilitate and support local food purchasing and utilization.</td>
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<td>4.2</td>
<td>Advocate for increased federal and state meal reimbursement rates.</td>
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<td>4.3</td>
<td>Reinstitute fully functional institutional kitchens.</td>
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<td>4.4</td>
<td>Educate and empower institutional decision-makers.</td>
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<td>4.5</td>
<td>Revise institutional purchasing policies to incorporate geographical preference, prioritizing the purchase of regional foods.</td>
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<td>4.6</td>
<td>Encourage institutional development of composting and zero waste programs.</td>
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### Goal 5: Develop the Regional Food Economy and Infrastructure

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<td>5.1</td>
<td>Create a collaborative task force to recommend policy changes and economic development priorities that support small food businesses.</td>
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<td>5.2</td>
<td>Create community-driven, inclusionary procedures that include input from agriculture-related institutions (University of California Cooperative Extension, Farm Bureau, Granges, etc.) to develop, plan and implement local food policy.</td>
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<td>5.3</td>
<td>Develop information and education producers about cooperative ownership models and cooperative networks. (CSA Co-Op, Co-Op Processing Facilities, etc.)</td>
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<td>5.4</td>
<td>Assess the status and availability of existing food processing facilities and small business incubators. Support the development of new businesses as needed.</td>
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<td>5.5</td>
<td>Promote government and private investment in the local food and agriculture sectors.</td>
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<td>5.6</td>
<td>Increase the use of renewable energy and fuel efficient vehicles and equipment for production and distribution.</td>
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<td>5.7</td>
<td>Coordinate county food distribution to more effectively utilize new and existing resources such as distributors, food banks (back hauling), and local retailers.</td>
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<td>5.8</td>
<td>Establish and maintain policies and ordinances that create access and support for urban food production.</td>
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<td>5.9</td>
<td>Support the creation of a grain storage and processing facility.</td>
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<td>5.10</td>
<td>Support the creation of an appropriately sized and located multi-species meat processing facility.</td>
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<td>5.11</td>
<td>Establish a vehicle for local investment in farms and food system projects.</td>
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Goal 6: Increase Consumption of Local and Regional Food. Improve Financial Viability of Local Food Producers

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<td>6.1</td>
<td>Support the development and marketing of Mendocino-branded foods and related value added products.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Collaborate with Chambers of Commerce and other organizations to produce a “Buy 10% Local” and “I Buy Local Food” advertising and promotional campaigns.</td>
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<td>6.3</td>
<td>Improve public awareness of the value of local food and the true costs of food production.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>Ensure regulatory support for food production and distribution.</td>
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<td>6.5</td>
<td>Develop market support for local farmers and producers.</td>
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<td>6.6</td>
<td>Create and utilize a web based virtual food marketplace that includes real time product availability.</td>
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<td>6.7</td>
<td>Establish a centralized system that identifies retail outlets for local products.</td>
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<td>6.8</td>
<td>Provide support and education to boost attendance and sales at farmers’ markets, CSAs, and local food outlets.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>Increase sales of local seasonal food at local businesses (restaurants, grocers, retailers).</td>
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We Are What We Eat

A lack of food security, limited access to nutrition education and fresh, local produce are key factors affecting our community’s health.

Mendocino County residents are barraged with advertisements promoting unhealthy food choices. Children, the unwitting victims of intensive marketing, are indoctrinated at an early age to prefer pre-packaged, artificially-sweetened, refined food products over fresh fruits and vegetables. Our institutions are often forced to choose the bottom line over the health of those they serve—the frail elderly, children and hospitalized individuals who are at greatest risk and deserve the highest level of nutrition. One of the overall goals of the Food Action Plan is to bring good food into the mainstream by creating a culture which values and understands what good food is.

Children mimic what they see, which is why there has been a vigorous effort to establish school gardens in Head Starts and elementary schools throughout the county. The gardens, combined with cooking classes for parents and the daily exposure to the rhythms of gardening begin the process of teaching children about what healthy food is—how it is grown, how it smells and how it tastes. Visitors to the South Ukiah Head Start will notice young children playing in the garden, stopping to munch on a piece of parsley or help their teacher harvest tomatoes. Inside the classroom, a delicious soup is being prepared using a basket of vegetables harvested just minutes before. When young children have access to fresh food, they learn healthy habits that will last a lifetime.

According to the California Health Interview Survey (CHIS) 2007, 59% of Mendocino County adults and teens are overweight or obese—a problem which can lead to heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, bone problems, depression, diabetes and some cancers.

The costs of obesity in Mendocino County were approximately $23.7 million in 2006 due to...
direct health care costs, worker’s compensation, absenteeism and presenteeism (not being productive at work).  

**Unhealthy Food, Unhealthy Children**

A survey conducted by Children Now indicates that 31% of Mendocino County children are overweight. School physical fitness testing found only 25% of 5th graders, 31% of 7th graders, and 39% of 9th graders capable of meeting all tested fitness criteria (aerobic capacity, body composition, abdominal strength, trunk extensor strength, upper body strength, and flexibility). Poverty and food insecurity are often associated with increased obesity, partially because cheaper and more readily available food is often highly processed, of lower quality and less nutritious, containing cheap sugars like high fructose corn syrup and a preponderance of refined flours and preservatives. Among children, 14% reported drinking two or more sodas or other sugary drinks the previous day. Half reported eating fast foods at least once during the previous week.

**Location, Location, Location?**

The Community Health Services research project on the Retail Food Environment in Mendocino County found that the ratio of less healthy food establishments (convenience stores and fast food restaurants) to more healthy food establishments (grocery stores and farmers’ markets) was more than 2 to 1, indicating that some county residents may have a difficult time accessing healthy foods.

The City of Willits has the dubious distinction of having the county’s highest density of fast food restaurants and convenience stores. Residents in these neighborhoods are more likely to be overweight or obese and have higher rates of diabetes.

In rural Mendocino County, particularly in smaller communities, the predominance of retail establishments offering processed, precooked foods often results in unhealthy diets higher in fats and sugars and lower in fresh fruits and vegetables. Without education and easy access to healthy food alternatives, the most vulnerable among us often have the most difficult time transitioning from a fast-food diet to a healthier regimen.

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**59% of Mendocino County adults and teens are overweight or obese**

**31% of Mendocino County children are overweight**

**Percent of adolescents age 12–19 years who are obese: 18.4%**

**Percent of children age 6–11 years who are obese: 18.0%**

**Percent of children age 2–5 years who are obese: 12.1%**

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**The higher the average daily intake of fruits and vegetables, the lower the chances of developing cardiovascular disease.**

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**The prevalence of fast food establishments in Mendocino County cities provides families with convenience, but at what cost to their long-term health?**
**Food, Poverty and Underutilized Resources**

Those living near and below the poverty line face daily challenges of “food insecurity.” Community kitchens and food banks struggle to meet the needs of a growing hungry population and are burdened with what non-profits call “donor fatigue.”

In 2007, 2 of 5 low-income county residents could not afford enough food, and 63% of adults were considered overweight or obese. Mendocino County is sixth in the state for high rates of food insecurity, with 10% of adults living in food insecure households in 2005, compared to 8.4% across the state.27

With county unemployment at 9.3% as of February 2013 and minimum wage being $8 per hour, many county residents find themselves unable to adequately feed their families each month. Many of these families look to the CalFresh program to fill that gap.

Enrollment in Mendocino County’s CalFresh Program (formerly the Food Stamp or SNAP-Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) rose by 66%, increasing from 3,100 to 5,927 households from 2008 to 2011. This represents 8,315 individuals and 17% of county households.28

Yet despite the increasing numbers of enrollees, according to the California Department of Social Services, only 60% of Mendocino County residents eligible for CalFresh were participating in the program—meaning approximately 7,650 CalFresh-eligible residents are not enrolled. This level of low participation affects the health and well being of hundreds of families and thousands of children, frail, elderly, and disabled adults. Increasing enrollment by residents who are eligible for CalFresh would have immediate impact on the county’s economy by bringing federal tax dollars to local farms and food related businesses.

Countywide, 68% of students were enrolled in Free and Reduced Price Meal Programs during the 2010–2011 school year, with participation ranging from a low of 33% in the village of Mendocino to 100% participation in Round Valley.29 But again, according to a report prepared by California Food Policy Advocates, 31% of children eligible for Free and Reduced Price Meal programs are not currently enrolled.30

**Are We Prepared?**

Just a generation ago, most families prepared for hard times by putting up a few jars of fruit or donating to their church’s emergency food pantry. Depression-era families knew what hunger felt like, but today many people have never known the ravages of hunger. How much food exists in our county, on any given day? Do we have the capacity to feed ourselves during times of crisis?
Informal surveys have been conducted to attempt to gauge our county’s food inventory. Because of limited sales of local produce and the dependence upon trucked-in foods filling county supermarkets, it is estimated that county grocery shelves would be empty in less than a week if deliveries were disrupted due to an emergency or road closures. Though county food banks and other large institutions keep limited inventories of food on hand, there is little doubt that access to food could be challenging in a crisis. It is imperative that citizens and communities address issues relating to emergency food preparedness before an emergency occurs.

Willits residents have taken a bold, creative step forward towards preparing their community for emergencies. Willits Economic Localization worked with North Coast Opportunities to purchase five four-ton grain silos for the storage of rice, grains and beans. Flour is also being milled on site. NCO secured funds from the California Endowment and the Department of Community Services and Development for the project. The Little Lake Grange now operates the program and offers the products for sale while encouraging family preparedness at the same time.

When the five silos are filled, the entire zip code can be fed for approximately one month—an essential component of community emergency planning and readiness.

**What We Can Do**

Contributors to this section of the Food Action Plan have outlined several areas of focus to address countywide food and health issues. A multi-pronged educational outreach effort is essential, as well as a commitment to provide economically disadvantaged communities with increased access to fresh, local food. Unlike previous generations, many families do not cook on a regular basis, and when they do, “cooking” might entail popping a frozen entrée into a microwave or opening a box of pasta and artificially colored cheese. When families visit a farmers’ market for the first time, some may notice vegetables they cannot identify and do not know how to prepare. Along with growing food, a healthy local food system must provide parallel education regarding food preparation, storage, preservation and safety.

Further goals include enrolling all eligible applicants in food assistance programs, curtailing marketing of unhealthy foods and supporting individuals and institutions in their transition toward healthier food choices.

Introducing young children to growing, harvesting and preparing their own food provides the foundation for a lifetime of healthy eating.

Ukiah Unified School District food service staff are incorporating innovative techniques to bring fresh, nutritious foods into school cafeterias.
CNAP Takes Action
The County Nutrition Action Plan (CNAP) is an outgrowth of the Food Action Plan, and is already addressing some of the plan’s health-related goals. Funding for CNAP is provided by the Network for a Healthy California, which disburses moneys to the Mendocino County Health Department for coordination of CNAP goals and activities.

One of the primary focuses of the CNAP is to improve food access for Mendocino County’s low-income citizens through increased enrollment in programs such as CalFresh, WIC and Free and Reduced Price Meals for students. The CNAP team is working toward increased program coordination so that CalFresh enrollees are informed of other food programs they qualify for. For schools, the group will be working on reducing unhealthy snack choices in school vending machines, continuing the Harvest of the Month program, linking farmers to school cafeterias, promoting school breakfasts and advocating a longer time for eating them.

Other CNAP goals include:

» Increasing promotion of CalFresh “EBT cards accepted here” at farmers’ markets.

» Providing nutrition education and cooking classes for CalFresh participants and food bank clients.

» Offering Commodity Supplemental Food Program sign-ups at health clinics.

» Implementing low-cost purchasing agreements between local farmers and food banks.

» Connecting senior meal program providers with local farmers.

» Facilitating countywide communication between food bank directors.

» Advertising the availability of summer meal programs and expanding meal sites to include family resource centers and low-income housing areas.

» Providing family day care providers with resources on starting vegetable gardens.

Incorporating locally-raised fruits and vegetables into institutional menus is one way to boost the local food economy.
“Children are healthier when their communities provide healthy food. Research shows that we humans tend to consume what is affordable and convenient—whether that is fast food and convenience food or fresh local produce. When neighborhoods don’t have an abundance of healthy food options, people simply can’t feed their families the way they want to, and their health suffers. But we have lots of capable people in Mendocino County that are bringing more balance to our food environment by making it easier to have farmers’ markets, community gardens, and mobile fruit and veggie carts, restricting new fast food in oversaturated areas, and bringing healthier options to corner and convenience stores.”

–Linda Helland
County of Mendocino Public Health Branch
Health and Human Services Agency
Recipients of CalFresh (also known as Food Stamps) have an innovative way to stretch their dollars, support local food and improve their health, according to Megan Van Sant, Program Administrator for the Mendocino County Health and Human Services Agency’s program, Food For All Mendocino. Food for All is a coalition of groups whose goal is to reduce hunger and increase access to healthy food.

“Every single week we serve a couple of people who come to the market for the first time. Without the match program, a good number of these people wouldn’t have anything fresh on their table by the end of the month.”

“CalFresh participants access the double-match farmers’ market program by swiping their Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards at farmers’ market information booths throughout the county,” explains Van Sant. Recipients spend $15 of their CalFresh dollars at farmers’ markets each week, but the beauty of the program is that they receive double that amount—$30 in shopping tokens for their $15 CalFresh dollars.

The program pairs federal CalFresh “Food Stamp” money with the donation of local dollars, helping realize the goal of encouraging the consumption of fresh, wholesome foods. Van Sant emphasizes CalFresh dollars are 100 percent federal monies—tax dollars that are generated locally and rightfully returned to the community.

“Our goal is to increase earnings for our farmers, introduce new shoppers to the Farmers’ Market, increase access to local, healthy food and make sure our tax dollars come back to our local community. It’s a triple benefit to farmers, our local economy and to our clients who can now afford healthy food,” says Van Sant.

“Everyone who uses the program will attest that it’s the coolest program ever,” says Scott Cratty, Ukiah Farmers’ Market Manager. “This year we scraped together enough funds to have the match program all year.”

“Every single week we serve a couple of people who come to the market for the first time,” says Cratty. “Without the match program, a good number of these people wouldn’t have anything fresh on their table by the end of the month.”
The 2012 Ukiah CalFresh double match program ran from March through December and drew 272 unique CalFresh customers to the Ukiah market alone. “Once it reached its stride about mid-season, CalFresh use came close to and sometimes exceeded 10% of the total money spent with our local farms and ranches at the market,” says Cratty.

“It’s a triple benefit to farmers, our local economy and to our clients who can now afford healthy food.”

The Ukiah Farmers’ Market began accepting EBT cards in 2008. “In 2011 we did our first matching program with $6,000 from the Community Foundation and the Rodrique Family Fund. Those matching funds lasted 19 weeks. In 2012 we used $10,952 in matching funds supplied by a combination of sources including The United Way, the Rodrique Family

CalFresh spending was growing slowly before the double-match program, but has exploded since its inception. “Each EBT dollar pulled into the farmers’ market puts it in a local pocket where the local multiplier kicks in. It helps build local food production, provides healthier fresher foods for struggling community members and pulls dollars away from the commodity food businesses,” Cratty concludes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EBT Dollars Spent at Ukiah Farmers’ Market</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
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<td>2009</td>
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<td>2010</td>
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<td>2011</td>
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<td>2012</td>
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“Senior Discounts”
Another innovative program pairs Farmers’ Market coupons with an additional at-risk population—low-income seniors. The Area Agency of Aging distributes Senior Farmers’ Market coupons to a number of local senior agencies each year. The USDA funds the program and provides the coupons, which are distributed by senior centers and sometimes available at Farmers’ Markets. The coupons provide eligible seniors with $20 in coupons that can be redeemed for assorted fruits and vegetables. The coupons are usually distributed in June and can be used until November.
The Redwood’s Rainbow Farm at Fort Bragg’s Redwood Elementary School is part of a county-wide, coordinated, garden-based nutrition education program. Countless numbers of children have benefitted from this program, which for many students marked their first exposure to a living food system.

Nutritionists, educators and health professionals regularly expound upon the benefits of gardening and incorporation of fresh fruits and vegetables into children’s diets. But perhaps children themselves are the most compelling spokespeople.

Kayla and Sunny Anderson attended Redwood Elementary School nearly a decade ago. “Kayla was enrolled in 2003. We had a garden in our backyard, but no fruits or vegetables at that point. Sunny was enrolled a few years later. They were introduced to the Rainbow Farm at that time,” explains their mother Karen Anderson. Kayla holds up a tattered paper cookbook with her crayoned rainbow on the cover. “It’s almost ten years old,” Kayla smiles. “When we worked in the garden we would help plant or help with the sales. There was a huge wall of raspberries that everyone loved to pick. Our garden coordinator, Julie Castillo taught us about eating healthy and trying to limit junk food,” says Kayla.

“We had a mini-farm with rabbits, chickens. Garden time was the highlight of our day,” says Sunny. “We’d study a fruit or veggie of the month. I remember eating jicama, broccoli flowers and peppers for the first time. I used to hate peppers. Now I have peppers in my salad every night,” Sunny continues.

“As a mom, I’ve always tried to get the girls to eat fruits and vegetables. It was great to have a teacher reinforce that - encouraging kids to try a squash, try a pea.” Every year the Rainbow Farm sells Sugar Snap peas. “Sunny brought some home. To this day, this is one of our traditions. We buy six plants, put them in our garden and eat them all season,” says Karen. “I love going out every day and eating them,” says Sunny.

Karen Anderson is a teacher’s aide. “I’m shocked so many children only eat junk food -
cookies, white bread and juice boxes - no fruit, no veggies, nothing healthy. I understand it’s convenient, but it’s such a disservice to our children. They’re not able to learn as well. They’re not outside playing in their backyards. We’re blessed to have Julie, a school garden and exposure to sunlight, fresh air and fresh food. It’s great for kids to go home and tell their parents, ‘Guess what? I ate carrots from the garden today,’” Karen concludes.

“Some kids have never touched soil, weeded or touched a bug. Initially, a couple students would have nothing to do with the garden. Now they love the garden and they’re happy to be here.”

Abilene Kamstra is a Redwood Elementary School first grader. Her mother Pam volunteers in the garden. “I’ve noticed some kids have never touched soil, weeded or touched a bug. Initially, a couple students would have nothing to do with the garden. Now they love the garden and they’re happy to be here,” Pam notes.

“We’re growing zucchini. We’re starting cucumbers and we’re growing fava beans for our cover crop because Julie reminded us we should do that. That’s what we’re doing until our cover crop is done,” says Abilene.

“We helped harvest the corn last year and we made pancakes from our wheat and our pumpkins. A few days ago we got to try something that looked like an onion but it wasn’t. It was a jicama. It tasted really good,” Abilene continues.

“I help mom put the cucumbers in the garden,” says Abilene’s 4-year-old brother Erik. “I put the wire under the dirt so the gophers don’t jump into the garden,” he explains.

“I like when Julie teaches kids how easy it is to grow food,” says Pam. “They don’t understand where their food came from. I think it’s every child’s right and heritage to know how the soil works and how to grow food. We should know what fresh food tastes like. I can’t believe how lucky we are to have this program—to see the joy in children’s eyes and watch them learn and have fun,” Pam concludes.

“On our next harvest day, I’m going to find some new potatoes. It’s like food treasure,” says Abilene.
# Our Health: Goals & Actions

## Goal 7: Increase Equitable Access to Healthy, Affordable, Safe, Culturally Appropriate Foods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7.1</th>
<th>Support food banks’ ability to obtain more locally produced food.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>Provide financial assistance so all community members can purchase more local foods from farmers’ markets, Community Supported Agriculture farms, and other local outlets.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>Develop ongoing funding stream for incentive programs, including Food Stamp Match, at local food outlets county wide.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>Ensure a greater range of multi-cultural foods at food assistance programs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>Develop policies, programs and infrastructure that increase access to healthy food in food insecure communities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>Align local food security activities with larger efforts.</td>
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<td>7.7</td>
<td>Survey and inventory local emergency food supplies and connect emergency services providers with local food producers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>Increase access to healthy food in all neighborhoods.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>Ensure that local, affordable food is available year round for all county residents.</td>
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## Goal 8: Increase Awareness and Utilization of Food and Nutrition Assistance Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>8.1</th>
<th>Increase enrollment in food and nutrition assistance programs.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>Institutionalize the use of Electronic Benefits Transfer Cards (EBT) by retailers, CSAs and farmers’ markets.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>Develop social marketing campaign to increase awareness of the benefits of food and nutrition assistance programs.</td>
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## Goal 9: Create Environments that Support Health and Quality of Life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>9.1</th>
<th>Incorporate data and knowledge of healthy food environments in local food system planning.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>Increase awareness of healthy food choices and curtail advertising of unhealthy foods.</td>
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<td>9.3</td>
<td>Establish and maintain city and county zoning policies to ban or limit fast food outlets.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>Ensure access to healthy choices in vending machines.</td>
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<td>9.5</td>
<td>Implement school, non-profit, private, local government and community wellness policies.</td>
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Goal 10: Promote Individual and Community Health by Encouraging Healthy Food Choices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>10.1</th>
<th>Increase and facilitate community-wide local food, health advocacy and education efforts and events.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>Develop/increase cooking classes, demos, and recipes to educate public about nutrition, healthy cooking and utilization of local food.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>Incorporate nutrition education in school classrooms and cafeterias.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>Design a Healthy Foods promotional campaign. Incorporate social marketing elements.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Michael and Nadine Boer, whose family has been farming in the Ukiah Valley since the 1880s, grow dozens of varieties of heirloom pumpkins and squash, and open their farm to the public and schools every autumn. Over 3,000 children visit the farm and have an opportunity to select their own pumpkins.
As the fundamental building blocks to our food system, the preservation of our soil and water is an indispensable responsibility for everyone connected to the food system. History has shown that mistreating our natural resources can result in long-term, and in some cases, irreparable damage to the land and water that nourishes us.

Whether through lack of knowledge, changing economic priorities or nature’s unpredictability, Mendocino County soils and waters are compromised. Fortunately, there are a number of dedicated individuals and organizations that recognize and actively address the critical need to protect our water quality and safeguard our precious topsoil.

**It All Starts With The Soil**

Soil is akin to the earth’s living “skin.” It forms in response to a dynamic and often invisible interplay of biology, geology and climate that transforms rock into a viable growing medium, occuring on a time scale of thousands of years. Yet despite the perception that vast swaths of arable land cover our planet, only ten percent of the earth’s land is suitable for growing crops.  

The health and persistence of soil is affected by temperature, precipitation, vegetation, animals, microorganisms, drainage and aeration. Minerals and organic matter, essential for productive farming, are constantly leached away by rainfall. Responsible soil maintenance and soil building is a necessity for preservation of our farmlands.

Soil erosion is the enemy of every farmer. What takes generations to build can be destroyed in hours—during a single storm event or over the course of many years. The human factor in the delicate interplay of soil creation is now understood to have a profound impact upon soil health, with erosion significantly exacerbating the speed and intensity of soil degradation.
Soils are divided into distinct classes, with the higher numerals indicating a greater number of limitations and fewer options for use for farming.

- Class I Soils—Few limitations that restrict usage.
- Class II Soils—Moderate limitations that reduce the choice of crops or that require moderate conservation practices.
- Class III Soils—Severe limitations that reduce the choice of crops, require special conservation practices, or both.

The classifications continue with increasingly restrictive use potentials, with Class VIII soils having limitations that nearly preclude their use for commercial crop production.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture defines prime farmland as soils best suited to food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops—soils that favor the economic production of sustained high crop yields. With an adequate moisture supply and a sufficiently long growing season, prime farmland needs little augmentation and is suitable for accepted farming methods resulting in the least environmental damage.33

Although its land mass is vast, the amount of prime farmland and high-grade agricultural soil in Mendocino County is relatively small due to steep terrain and the region's geologic makeup. Virtually all of the county's bottomland is currently being farmed, which makes the protection of our prime farmland a critical goal for this Food Action Plan.

**Loam on the Range**

Rangelands in Mendocino County are utilized by ranchers who transport animals in the fall and winter to take advantage of the annual vegetation produced by seasonal rains, particularly in the western sections of the county. Stocker cattle are brought in the late fall or winter. By spring, the nutritional value of available vegetation decreases, and cattle are moved to better pastures or shipped to feedlots for finishing. Coastal grasslands feature perennial plants within forested areas.

Like most of the US, overgrazing and conversion to cropland has permanently changed county native vegetation habitats. Modern ranchers understand that the goal for good range management is to keep the grazing area in a similar state of growth as the neighboring natural plant community. Though better management practices are being employed by today's ranchers, there is still room for improvement, which would translate into increased food for livestock, a higher predominance of native grasses, and cleaner watersheds.

**An Erosion Explosion**

Mandy of Mendocino County's soils are highly erodible. Many factors contribute to this condition...
including rainfall intensity, steepness and length of slope, vegetative cover, and soil management practices. The management and placement of organic matter into soils is one way for farmers to effectively reduce erosion. No-till or conservation tillage is another tool that some farmers employ to prevent soil loss, as well as limiting soil disturbances, particularly when soil is heavy with water. Cover-cropping and utilizing perennial crops also helps to keep topsoil where it is most needed, with annual cover crops planted in the fall and winter providing significant erosion protection during the rainy season.

Pastures require other specialized activities to retain soil tilth and extend pasture life. Irrigation water must be managed and a program of rotational grazing, fertilization, harrowing to scatter animal droppings and mowing help to maintain uniform pasture growth.

Storm runoff management and targeted planting where road cuts, fills, pond embankments and stream corridors are also essential tasks for today’s landowners. Terracing, diversions, underground outlets and grassed waterways are necessary in sloping croplands to prevent gullying and erosion.

It takes about 500 years to build just one inch of topsoil. Tomorrow’s farmers must learn from the mishaps of their forbears, who “modernized” their farming methods with mono-cropping and increased usage of pesticides and fertilizers. Today we understand that “old fashioned” crop rotation and the planting of cover crops for soil renewal are essential for optimum soil health. The land is a resource our community cannot afford to squander.

**Water, Water Everywhere?**

Mendocino County watersheds provide water for drinking, recreation, and agriculture. They are a bountiful source of biological diversity that offers habitat for threatened and endangered species including salmon and trout.

The three most significant hydrologic units in the county are the Eel, Russian, and Coastal River Basins. The Russian River Basin is the most important for agriculture, spanning 1,500 square miles, 500 of which are in Mendocino County.

According to Dennis Slota, Mendocino County Water Agency hydrologist, every watershed in Mendocino County is significantly impaired. “We don’t meet water quality standards for temperature and sediment. In some water bodies both are impaired. In others, sediment is the only issue,” Slota explains. For the Russian River Basin, our largest watershed, both temperature and sediment pose significant issues.

**Our Rivers and Our Fish**

The Environmental Protection Agency and the Clean Water Act set the parameters for determining watershed health. The presence of pesticides or fertilizers in our watersheds poses obvious risks. But high water temperatures and the presence of too much sediment in the water are also major polluters and pose deadly threats to what was once a thriving salmonid fish population. “The Navarro River, as late as the 1970’s was a world class fishery. Today, the Navarro is closed to fishing,” Slota notes.

The Russian River riparian corridor used to be a mile wide. Now, in many places it is one tree wide. Historically, logging and agriculture negatively
affected streams through their practices. “We’ve lost the microclimates that we once had. You can feel a 15-to-20-degree difference when you enter the shade of a mature riparian corridor,” notes Slota.

The disappearance of deep pools in rivers and streams has resulted in tragic losses to the fisheries. Salmonids are very temperature sensitive. Sedimentation has decimated their spawning habitats because they need clean gravel for their eggs to mature and hatch, which is why the Endangered Species Act has regulations regarding the county’s watersheds.

“If we have a light rain in January, who has greatest need? Ag or fish?” asks Susan Warner, retired directory of the California North Coast Water Quality Control Board. “Right now, because of the Coho salmon, the fishery controls the situation. This affects all the watersheds in Mendocino County.”

**Restoring Our Rivers**

To bring a watershed back to a healthy state is intensive and expensive. A detailed analysis of the watershed’s history and documentation of pollution sources in conducted, resulting in a formula which calculates Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL). “A water source can only handle a certain percentage of pollutants,” says Slota. Currently, the Eel, Russian, Albion and Navarro watersheds are at risk. All need extensive and costly restoration.

The only water body in the county subject to an implementation plan is the Garcia watershed, which was enacted in 1998. “With that TMDL, land owners and the county’s Department of Transportation were required to reduce sedimentation. Abandoned roads and insufficient culverts were identified. The Transportation Department, ranchers and farmers were required to take action to reduce erosion and sedimentation,” says Slota.

“The University of California Cooperative Extension offered courses on inventorying sediment on your property. They showed how to document restoration, offered ways to reduce sedimentation and recommended pulling cattle out of riparian zones. Our county road system has much better practices now. Culverts are larger and designed to last 100 years. They’re less susceptible to failure and designed specifically to support fishery restoration,” Slota concludes.

**A Watery Divide**

The Army Corps of Engineers, the Sonoma County Water Agency and the Russian River Flood Control and Water Improvement District share a portion of the 8,000 acre-feet of water stored in Lake Mendocino. As a result of helping fund construction of the dam, the three agencies are entitled to a portion of the water which is distributed to cities, water utilities and farmers.
In Mendocino County water from Lake Mendocino supports municipal users in the Greater Ukiah Valley, Redwood Valley and Hopland as well as numerous agricultural operations along the river. These competing uses provide a challenging balancing act between the need for residential, farming and in-stream flow required to support native fish.

**Seniors Rule**

California water law dictates that water is distributed first to the holders of the oldest water rights. Sean White, general manager of the Russian River Flood Control and Water Improvement District explains the mechanics of water rights.

"Let’s say we’re in a drought and our water is akin to a pizza. During the drought, not everyone gets an equal slice of the pie. The oldest kid in the family gets the biggest slice of the pie," White explains.

"Some farmers and cities have rights that are senior to the district. Other farmers and municipalities are junior to the district. In general, that combination of rights is enough to meet the immediate needs of the valley. But just like everything, there are asterisks. When and where water can be used—these stipulations are added to your rights."

**Seven is Not a Lucky Number**

Currently the Ukiah Valley has seven separate water districts. According to White, this causes unnecessary problems. He likens the issue to a group of neighbors who own one tool each.

"Individually, these tools are not nearly as useful as when they are used conjunctively. I have an amazing butter knife and my neighbor has a hammer. My construction would be terrible, but I can make great toast. If we could exchange, we’d both have great construction and great toast," White smiles.

"Currently we only have a knife or a hammer. Even if one district has surplus water, a drier area can’t take advantage of it. It’s a classic example of regional squabbling leading to inefficiencies. In the aggregate, we have a good toolbox, but currently we are a series of communities with one tool apiece. We’re not maximizing what we own because we’re not working together. There is a relatively decent amount of water here. There’s not enough to turn it into a large residential area, but for basic agriculture, we’re not in bad shape. Even so, Redwood Valley is water-poor, but we’re not allowed to give water to them," White continues.

Many out-of-area water districts started out as separate towns with separate districts, but as they grew, they consolidated, producing numerous community benefits. "Those districts now have the whole toolbox at their disposal," White continues.

“If you have a water right, someone’s always trying to steal it. Outside the county, those same forces apply because water doesn’t end at the county line. We squabble amongst ourselves, and then become vulnerable to state and county agendas. Historically, this problem has been recognized by the Grand Jury. Someday, by heck or high water, we’ll get this done," White continues.

Many Mendocino County farmers and landowners are taking the lead in creating environmentally sustainable habitats on their property.
“We need to seriously consolidate and combine our resources, so everyone can benefit from the water we have,” says White.

**Becoming Water Wise**

White notes that the city of Ukiah is the largest discharger of waste into the entire Russian River Watershed. “Santa Rosa reuses every drop of water. So do Healdsburg and the Sonoma County Water Agency. We need to look at the smartest way to allocate our water resources for the smartest purposes,” he continues.

“The great news is that we have a giant, untapped water supply that we can put to use. The City of Ukiah has an ultra high water treatment plant. We’re looking to adopt a water recycling master plan to help secure funds to utilize it.” White uses frost protection to make his point. “It is ridiculous to release anything else when we could be using repotable water,” he notes.

Ukiah’s Golf Course uses an astounding 1,000,000 gallons per day. “The golf course, sports field and school parks could be irrigated with recycled water. Communities throughout California have been working on these issues. Instead of taking more from a river or reservoir, let’s use resources that we are currently throwing away,” White adds.

“I think we have all the components to implement responsible and very sustainable water use. With everyone moving independently, it’s harder than it needs to be. But we’ll get there,” White concludes.

**Saving our Groundwater: Another Challenge**

Our groundwater is also threatened. Rainfall is the only thing that replaces groundwater, and in some parts of the county water is being used faster than it can be replaced. This could irreparably damage our aquifers and effect our freshwater stores for generations to come.

“As you get into feeder streams and places like the Navarro River Watershed, you tend to have more interactions, more people pumping groundwater hydraulically connected to a stream. The more water pumped, the drier the streams get in summer. It’s a push-pull situation: the needs of farmers and the needs of the stream,” notes Susan Warner.

The real world impact of groundwater depletion is not a distant reality. One need look only as far away as Sonoma County to see communities whose wells are drying up and farms are being fallowed because of lack of water. In addition to the immediate impacts of water scarcity, ground water overdraft also reduces the ability of an aquifer to absorb and retain water as soils are compacted due to water displacement. This creates a vicious cycle that reduces the ability of the system to recover, even when pumping is reduced.

Currently, the town of Mendocino is the only area in the County with a groundwater management plan, which monitors the health of the aquifer and the level of individual consumption. While there has been a strong historical bias against regulating wells in California, there is a growing awareness about the need for reasonable and intelligent management of this critical water source.

Dennis Slota is concerned about storm water management.

“We need to keep water on site instead of shipping it off. Our drainage policy has been get it into the culvert and into the ocean.” What used to feed streams was groundwater recharge, when cold water would keep streams alive, providing them with water during the summer. “We pave, pipe and ship water to the ocean, which takes just a few days, rather than allowing it to be stored in the ground for several months.

Tree roots are exposed along stream banks because of the greater volume of water discharged. The stream “reacts” by increasing its capacity, eroding the stream bottom and increasing its velocity and volume. The stream’s response is to incise, which lowers the water table and ultimately kills the streams during the summer. This is why we see so many dead streams in urban areas,” Slota concludes.

Low Impact development and other storm water management protocols aim to reverse this trend. Through the use of swales, permeable pavement,
and groundwater recharge basins, intelligent land use practices can slow, spread, and sink runoff, rather than diverting it to watercourses. These practices not only reduce runoff, but they also result in increased groundwater recharge and extend the active period of seasonal streams.

**Making the Grade?**

For decades, Mendocino County citizens have struggled to determine if a grading ordinance was necessary.

“Twenty years ago, it was the sole mitigation in our General Plan. It still has not occurred, and today we are the only county in the State that does not have a grading ordinance,” says Susan Warner.

“When you farm, you’re going to have land disturbances, no matter how beneficent you are. Simply removing a cover crop and exposing soil to the rain can cause problems. All the watercourses in the county can be impaired because of sediment issues. Sedimentation affects our fishery tremendously. With a grading ordinance, our county determines how steep the land you can drive a tractor on, how much of a buffer zone you need around a watercourse or how close farmers can plant toward a creek,” Warner explains.

She has a cautionary word for county residents. “If Mendocino doesn’t establish a grading ordinance, the push is coming from Feds to the state to control what happens on Ag land. A grading ordinance is probably one of the more direct legal actions that a county can have. More controls are coming, which will be dictated by Feds if local government chooses not to play a role.”

**Stay Involved**

Because of the controversy surrounding a grading ordinance and many other land use and water issues, there is really only one thing for food producers to do: get involved and stay involved. “We can be proactive or we can wait until a regulator comes knocking. Most farmers would rather do that. The further away you get from local oversight, the less flexibility we have to do something different. If a local farmer has a local way to solve a problem, it becomes harder to implement that solution if you are chained to a federal dictate,” Warner notes.

“You can’t compartmentalize agriculture. A one-size-fits-all approach is not good. For those who want to see a thriving local food economy, there needs to be an exemption process for small farmers who cannot afford to do what a vineyard owner can,” says Warner.

Warner hopes that local leadership will draft a general type of permit which can obtain the blessing of county government while complying with the Federal law. “Regulations will come. Being involved with shaping them is important,” she continues.

The soil, water, and all that nature provides form the foundation for a healthy food system. It is imperative to protect the county’s biodiversity and natural resources, including the land, water, soil and air in our farming practices and throughout our food system.
“An important key to our local and national economy and security lies in the viability of our small local farms and our ability to sustainably produce healthy food for future generations. We must do a better job of creating and enforcing planning policies to maintain and protect of our land, water and natural resource base which have been the foundation for life here in Mendocino County and are critical to the long-term health and productivity of our local agriculture.”

—Alan Falleri
Mendocino County native and life-long resident, and a former planner with the County of Mendocino and the City of Willits
Our Land and Water

Farmers are land stewards, responsible for the maintenance and preservation, not only of crops but also the water running through their property and the species that depend on the land for survival. Protecting land is complex and extremely costly—beyond the means of most farm families.

During the Great Depression, the Federal government began to understand the implications of the staggering loss of irreplaceable topsoil. In response, the Soil Conservation Service was created, providing farmers with regional agricultural support staff. Counties quickly formed Soil Conservation Districts, which enabled local landowners to recommend to the Service how to best direct their time, money and energy. This led to the inception of Resource Conservation Districts—designed to assist with the improvement and preservation of farmlands.

“The Mendocino County Resource Conservation District is an arm of the USDA and our partnering sister agency—the Natural Resource Conservation Service,” explains executive director Pam Olave. The all-volunteer board is comprised primarily of landowners and managers, water specialists, small and large farmers, foresters and retired public lands employees. “We’re an unfunded state agency without a tax base, often serving as the liaison between the regulatory agency and the landowners to help them become compliant. Most of our funds are generated working for landowners.”

The agency works with private and public landowners to help them meet regulatory compliance and improve water quality, quantity and fisheries. Some of the MCRCD’s services include assessing and managing large-scale, integrated watersheds, erosion control, habitat restoration and outreach services as well as road and stream assessment for individual landowners. When suitable projects are identified, the MCRCD works with landowners from start to finish, assisting with fund procurement, permitting and implementation, ensuring that every project meets regulatory approval.

Rural ranch and road subdivisions are a primary focus. Farm roads are often constructed near creeks—the reason riparian areas are seriously impacted. “In every watershed plan, the major source of control sediment is rural ranch roads. Roads get built and upgraded, and oftentimes landowners aren’t thinking about future erosion problems. We help disconnect roads from streams,” Olave explains. The agency has assisted with nearly 200 miles of

The Mendocino County Resource Conservation District helps landowners solve issues related to sedimentation, runoff and erosion.
road improvement in the county, mostly on private lands, focusing on sediment reduction. Additionally, the agency has developed erosion control plans for rural roads on approximately 14,000 acres and implemented road sediment reduction treatments on more than 10,000 acres.

Federal and state funding, including Environmental Quality Incentive Program funds and agency support are available for qualifying projects. “There are many programs—organic programs, salmonid initiatives to restore fisheries, pond building and off-storage incentives which can help landowners. We look for ways to offset the landowner costs. Typically, we can use NRCS federal match moneys to offset costs, and between the two agencies, landowner costs may be significantly mitigated. We develop farm plans, address the overall property condition and make recommendations,” says Olave.

The MCRCs and the NRCS spent a decade on studies and plans for the Garcia River watershed. “We’ve applied for a fourth grant through the State Water Resources Control Board which would implement erosion control plans for major landowners along the watershed.”

Landowners on Feliz Creek were dealing with a failing dam and contacted the NRCS. “We worked with landowners, procured funding and removed the dam. The landowner is so happy it’s gone, and the fish now have an 11 additional miles of habitat,” says Olave.

A wet crossing on a county creek had become impassable, with neighbors stranded on either side. “We procured grant funding and installed a bridge. The Department of Fish and Game later discovered steelhead above the crossing which had not been there before. The neighbors got a bridge, the fish have more habitat and landowner maintenance is reduced.”

Olave notes that 2014 State agricultural waivers are expected to impact farmers. “We anticipate that farmers will be required to have a farm plan, part of which will address property erosion.” There will be three tiers, and for farmers choosing not to participate, fees will be levied. “We’re working with our Agricultural Commissioner’s Office and a local committee to address the impacts foreseen by the implementation of the waivers. Nothing is cast in stone,” says Olave.

Olave encourages landowners to contact her agency, but cautions no one can make miracles happen. “If landowners have a good project, the stars have to align in order to qualify for project funding. But we always seek an avenue if there is a true need.”

“Many county residents are trying to take care of the land so it takes care of you,” Olave notes. “There is a lot of excellent education available. Nothing happens without the support of the landowners signing on, and they really have.”
**Goal 11: Protect and Enhance Our Agricultural Resources**

| 11.1 | Support food-producing lands and community gardens by identifying and enacting relevant city and county codes, zoning policies and land use agreements. |
| 11.2 | Transform and diversify untended or underutilized acreage (i.e. vineyards, orchards) into food-producing land. |
| 11.3 | Develop incentives for food producing lands. |
| 11.4 | Advocate for the continuation and refunding of the Williamson Act. |
| 11.5 | Facilitate the development of agricultural land trusts, conservation easements and non-profit land purchases. |
| 11.6 | Create polices that secure land for small to mid scale diverse agricultural production. |
| 11.7 | Create educational programs regarding land use policy, BLM leases, conservation easements, and development right transfer. |
| 11.8 | Develop indigenous foods and medicines. |
| 11.9 | Support laws prohibiting the cultivation of Genetically Modified Organisms. |
| 11.10 | Ensure continuing supplies of agricultural water. |
| 11.11 | Foster an equitable balance between the water needs of residential and agricultural users. |
| 11.12 | Support programs that encourage efficient use of irrigation water. |
| 11.13 | Balance the needs of frost protection water deliveries and instream flows necessary for healthy fisheries. |
| 11.14 | Encourage the increased use of reclaimed water. |
| 11.15 | Encourage land use practices that reduce erosion, storm water run off and increase groundwater recharge. |
“I think we have all the components to implement responsible and very sustainable water use. With everyone moving independently, it’s harder than it needs to be. But we’ll get there.”

–Sean White
General manager of the Russian River Flood Control and Water Improvement District
Visitors driving north on US 101 toward Ukiah view a sign promoting three of Mendocino County’s assets: “Wilderness, Waves and Wineries.”

Not so very long ago, the inclusion of another “W” word, wheat, would have informed a traveler they were entering an agricultural sweet spot—a sustainable food system providing residents with a year-round bounty of grains, fruits, vegetables and animal products. Perhaps, through our collective efforts, the next generation of Mendocino County farmers will reclaim their position as stewards of a major food-producing region, and farming will have regained its prominence as one of our most fundamental and significant community contributions.

Our relationship to food is more than personal. It defines how we live and what our larger priorities are as a community. A 2004 national study stating that the current generation of America’s children may not live as long as their parents is a sobering reminder that our food choices have drastic and even deadly consequences.

In order to “grow” a sustainable local food system, we must address issues of geography and demographics. We must continue to build our concentric rings of community support and engagement so that the importance of healthy food and its significance to our health and economy is more than just an intellectual concept.

**Big County, Small Population**

Although Mendocino County is the 15th largest of California’s 58 counties, its 87,841 residents represent less than one-quarter of one percent (0.24%) of the state’s population. Mendocino County is larger in size than the states of Delaware and Rhode Island combined but has a population density of only 2 persons per square mile.

Our isolated communities make access to...
commercially grown seasonal and local foods increasingly difficult for those living outside of the county’s major population centers. Food producers must have enough guaranteed income to justify the increasing costs of transporting food from one end of the county to another. The farther away one lives from an incorporated city, the less likely that local foods will be readily available (unless you grow your own).

**Senior “Momentum”**
Mendocino County has an older population than the state of California, with a median age of 43.3 for women and 40 for males (compared with 35.2 statewide). Seventy-eight percent of county residents are aged 18 or older. The 2010 census found the greatest population growth in the county’s 55–64 age group, which increased by 64% between censuses.37

This pattern is expected to continue. By 2015, the number of people between ages 30 and 59 is projected to be 36%, while the population of all seniors (age 60+) will be more than 25% (1 in 4) of the total population.38

For seniors, many who live on fixed incomes, even a weekly trip to a farmers’ market may not be practical or possible. Those living in assisted living facilities have even fewer opportunities to purchase locally produced foods. Without community connectivity, young farmers are deprived of the wisdom and experience of our elders, many of whom spent decades growing and preserving their own food.

**A Changing Cultural Matrix**
Ethnically, Mendocino County is 68.6% White/non-Hispanic, 22.2% Hispanic, 5.7% Native American, and 3.5% multi-racial or other ethnicities.39 The county’s increasing diversity is reflected in the 2010 class of kindergarten students, which was 41.3% Hispanic and 7% Native American.

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**Comparison of 2009 Poverty Levels: Mendocino County and California**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Mendocino Co.</th>
<th>California</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General population</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children under age 18 years</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children under 5 years</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families with female head of household with children &lt; 5</td>
<td>54.6%</td>
<td>36.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People age 65 and older</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: US Census Bureau: State and County QuickFacts.*
Family income data for 2009 shows 21% of Mendocino County families living on incomes of $25,000 or less, compared with 15% statewide. Low-income and below-poverty residents have enormous challenges finding jobs that pay sufficient salaries to feed their families, resulting in having to choose between paying rent or buying food. This places increased pressures upon an already burdened network of organizations, churches and social service agencies tasked with the critical work of providing food assistance for those who need it.

Each of us has something unique and valuable to offer our community, whether it is a few dollars, a basket of surplus tomatoes or a few hours per month serving on a committee or task force. We must “feed” our community in order to create the conditions so that we can feed ourselves, now and in the future.

**Keeping It Local**
Mendocino County is home to a number of faith groups, service clubs and fraternal organizations, all of which support the concept of a self-reliant economy that offers health, security, and “social capital”—the community connections that count most in our daily lives: good will, fellowship, sympathy, and social interactions. These groups form the backbone of what can become a larger and more organized local food movement. Some communities choose to create “departments of food,” hiring staff and creating an agency tasked with seeking funding, creating food policy and connecting food system stakeholders. Our county is currently utilizing groups of volunteers and a few anchor agencies to engage the community and encourage dialogue. Regardless of the structure, a local food system is just that: local people, imbued with the history, understanding, motivation and vision who come together to protect, preserve and enhance our relationship to food.

Localization efforts are not new. This is an ancient concept that has been nearly lost in the last 150 years of increased industrialization and globalization. Localization advocates believe that increased local food production will become essential as energy supplies shrink and the need to cut back on greenhouse gas emissions increases. Many localization groups encourage growing one’s own food, saving seeds, preserving surplus harvests from one season to the next and creating means of exchange that will support farmers. Though some of these concepts are relatively new, localization efforts are taking place throughout the world, and at the heart of these efforts is a deep respect for the power inherent in cohesive, engaged communities.

**Letting Our Gardens Grow**
One of our county’s most visible and successful responses to the need for a localized food system has been the establishment of dozens of school and community gardens. In 1999, a grant was awarded to Mendocino County Schools for the creation of “A Garden in Every School” program. Through the receipt of this and several other grants over a period of years, students throughout the county became the early leaders in the local food movement. The Garden-Enhanced Nutrition Education Program exposes 7,500 Mendocino County students to gardens at 35 school sites.

Since their inception in 2007, the Gardens Project of NCO Community Action has helped to create over 26 gardens and coordinate a support network for over 65 school and community gardens. The Gardens Project has acted as coordinating entity, providing Head Start students at the Mendocino County Office of Education Youth Garden grow food for over 140 individuals and sell produce to MCOE staff.
programs, schools, faith communities, senior housing residents and apartment dwellers with the training and tools to conceptualize, establish, plant, irrigate, harvest and maintain their own gardens. In 2012, over 27,000 pounds of food valued at over $51,000 were produced in Gardens Project gardens.

NCO Community Action supports the provision of a nutritious food supply to individuals, children, and families in physically engaging, community-supported environments and provides life-long, transferable, and self-sustaining training in food production, cooking, coordinating surplus food sales and reducing household food costs.

**Getting to Know You**

Gardens are about relationships. Plants are in constant communication with the soil, water, nutrients, neighboring plants, the weather and the sun. One of the most significant and stunning successes of community gardens has been the development of human relationships—apartment-dwelling neighbors who never knew each other until they spent time weeding their plot, or a compost company so committed to community gardens that they continue to donate tons of rich, dark organic material for the establishment of a new garden. Landowners have stepped out of their comfort zones and found ways to allow the community to improve the owner’s land and their own lives by allowing a garden to develop. Children learn the deep messages the earth has to offer, simply by taking part in the planting of seeds and following them to harvest.

*California Conservation Corps (CCC) members have worked with the Gardens Project to help with the installation of community gardens throughout the region. At the Jack Simpson School View Apartments in Ukiah, CCC members created specially-designed, raised garden beds for the senior residents. This enables any senior living in the complex, including those with mobility impairments, to enjoy and reap the benefits of a personal garden plot.*
Something good is growing at the Noyo Food Forest’s Learning Garden, says Executive Director Linda Pack. “Our goal is to provide the Fort Bragg area with organic food, be a model for students and improve the lives of our community.”

Students, under the tutelage of Farm Manager Gowan Batist operate a 3-acre farm, sell at the Farmers’ Market and handle commercial restaurant accounts. “They come away with a comprehensive education about how to be a small farmer, about what’s going on in the larger world of agriculture—what industrial farming is,” says Batist.

“Not only are we growing food; we’re growing a lot of really good food, and kids are eating it and loving it. This is a viable way to get nutrition and education to our kids and our community. If we had 20 farms like this we could do without delivery trucks,” says Pack.

Noyo Food Forest provides high-quality produce to restaurants, the Mendocino Coast hospital, the Fort Bragg Food Bank and district schools. “Students learn back-of-the-house restaurant procedures, customer interaction and math skills. This makes it real, for the farm and the end user,” says Pack.

The BEANS (Better Eating, Activity Nutrition for Students) program, in partnership with North Coast Opportunities Community Action, teaches teens nutrition and good eating habits. “Graduates” receive a stipend, become peer educators, teach nutrition concepts to younger kids and provide education and recipes for
adults at the Fort Bragg Senior Center. “When you give teens jobs, you’re teaching the value of labor and community contribution,” Pack continues.

“Small farms are infinitely more productive than large farms. We grow an enormous and affordable amount of food on three acres. We do on-site, closed loop recycling and we’re making compost with North Coast Brewery’s grain and hops,” Batist explains.

“This generation has a different world to contend with, and they know it. They’re seeking to be sustainable. Students talk about what their grandparents used to do in their gardens, and they’re trying to figure out how to do it again.”

Batist also provides realism to her student-farmers. “I don’t know anyone in agriculture who is making anything close to a living wage. I work seven days per week providing a needed service. People think local agriculture is fun, and it is, but someone’s got to get up every day and make it happen. As much as we are in a resurgence and wonderful things happening, farmers find it difficult to do this for the long term and survive,” says Batist.

Pack focuses upon harnessing the energy of their apprentice farmers. “Young people have enthusiasm and deep, broad concerns about their future. Previous generations skated on the largesse of being born during a time of tremendous plenty, living off the fat of the land. This generation has a different world to contend with, and they know it. They’re seeking to be sustainable. Students talk about what their grandparents used to do in their gardens, and they’re trying to figure out how to do it again,” says Pack. “I want this generation of young people to be taking the bit and running with it. That will be how we maintain ourselves.”

“Every day, 1,200 kids are eating food from this garden.”

Pack is optimistic about the future. “Last year we sold more than 1,000 pounds of food to the Fort Bragg School District, and another ton to local agencies. Seventy percent of the kids in our school district qualify for free lunches. That means every day, 1,200 kids are eating food from this garden. That doesn’t count our deliveries to restaurants, the hospital and food bank. That’s a lot of progress, for a group of students, a farm manager and a small community.”

“My name is Maria Ortega. I live at the Thunderbird Apartments in South Ukiah. I want to share with you that I am so very happy having my own little garden. It is my favorite place to be. It has provided so many benefits for myself and my family. I garden organically and adore all of my plants. This year was better than last with much better quality. I am learning so much about agriculture thanks to all of those that have made this garden possible for so many families to receive these great benefits. Next year I will have a garden with hibiscus. Thank you.”

–Maria Ortega, community gardener
Goal 12: Increase Community Resiliency through Organization and Self Determination

12.1 Develop, promote, and celebrate local, seasonal food through community events.

12.2 Develop, plan, and implement local food policy through community-driven, inclusionary planning including agricultural institutions (University of California Cooperative Extension, Farm Bureau, Granges, Food Policy Council, etc.).

12.3 Promote programs and community organizations countywide that facilitate the development of community gardens through education and access to land and resources.

12.4 Promote policies and agreements that support increased access to land for the establishment of community and school gardens and farms.

12.5 Provide liability insurance to community gardens through the creation or identification of a suitable non-profit organization.

12.6 Maintain county-wide school gardens with an integrated, food-related curriculum.

12.7 Inventory and create community access to food production and processing equipment (i.e. tool banks, juice and oil presses, commercial kitchens).

12.8 Develop and promote a community-based gleaners network.
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• California Center for Rural Policy; Investigating Very Low Food Security in the Redwood Coast Region; Kali Patterson and Jessica Van Arsdale, MD, MPH

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