MARIPOSA COUNTY’S AGRICULTURAL & WORKING LANDS CONSERVATION PLAN.

An Action Plan for investment in our agricultural & working lands for regional resilience

SECOND DRAFT | JULY 31, 2023
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MARIPOSA COUNTY'S
AGRICULTURAL &
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CONSERVATION
PLAN.

AWLCP
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This Mariposa County Agricultural & Working Lands Conservation Plan (AWLCP or Action Plan) was developed through the engagement of ranchers, farmers, local government, non-profit organizations, the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation (SSMN), conservation partners, businesses and agencies. Together, the Action Plan was developed to offer recommendations to envision a resilient future for working lands in Mariposa County. Thanks to all for stepping up and helping to move this effort forward. Please refer to Appendix D for the complete list of Core Partners and Stakeholders who gave their time and inputs to this critical project.

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FOREWORD

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We, the historical community of Mariposa County, acknowledge and honor the traditional homelands of the Southern Sierra Miwuk. In the spirit of unity, we recognize the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation as the traditional stewards of these lands and waters for over ten thousand years. We value and respect their historical as well as contemporary contributions to our community and landscape, and our enduring relationship. In good faith we endeavor to stay engaged with the indigenous people of Mariposa County in a meaningful way.
## Focus Areas & Recommended Strategies

### Quick Reference Guide

### Focus Area 1: Building Capacity, Education & Awareness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FS 1</th>
<th>Develop a Mariposa Working Lands Roundtable to improve pathways to the economic success of farmers and ranchers and enhance trust and collaboration among the agricultural community, the tribal community, County leadership and staff, and other key stakeholders.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1A</td>
<td>Develop a Roundtable Working Group to reinforce the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation’s essential role in land conservation, stewardship, and climate action efforts with capacity building support.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1B</td>
<td>Develop a Roundtable Working Group focused on building capacity to increase climate resilience.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1C</td>
<td>Develop a Roundtable Working Group focused on continuing and maintaining best practices and passing on knowledge by increasing educational and mentoring programs for new and future ranchers, farmers and producers on various topics and for diverse land types, with a focus on developing demonstration or pilot projects.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1D</td>
<td>Create a “Conservation Jobs Training” program to build capacity and catalyze job growth in the conservation sector.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1E</td>
<td>Develop school children’s foundational knowledge about agriculture and related agricultural career pathways.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1F</td>
<td>Build on the Mariposa County Creative Placemaking Strategy to support the Art, Cultural &amp; Agricultural Creative Placemaking Program that leverages design and visual/media/performing arts to explore the many historic and contemporary stories related to the cultural and agricultural legacies in Mariposa.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Focus Area 2: Working Lands Economic Resilience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FS 2</th>
<th>Adopt an ordinance (or program) to create a local food and cultural core for the town of Mariposa. This revitalization effort could connect the County’s working landscapes and agricultural enterprises to the local community and visitors in the town of Mariposa by spotlighting the County’s distinctive cultural, artistic and working lands identity.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2A</td>
<td>Develop small-scale animal processing for local livestock producers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2B</td>
<td>Promote consumer direct sales of locally-produced meats.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2C</td>
<td>Provide incentives for the establishment of a brick and mortar Butcher Shop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2D</td>
<td>Develop, implement and scale forest biomass for energy generation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2E</td>
<td>Explore the opportunities for manufacturing products using locally harvested wood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2F</td>
<td>Enhance zoning to encourage the establishment of infrastructure and support uses that facilitate the growth of the agricultural economy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2G</td>
<td>Build on the “Made in Mariposa” program and existing tourism programs and add a new “Explore Mariposa” program to support the growing awareness of the importance of working lands to the health and resiliency of the region and the State.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2H</td>
<td>Establish an agricultural branding cooperative and “community of practice” made of farmers and ranchers to create a community of collaboration that builds a Mariposa grown brand and develops a shared mission to grow value-added production, reach local and broader markets, and showcase agricultural and cultural products through local, regional, and Yosemite gateway retail outlets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2I</td>
<td>Establish a Ranch/Farm Days Program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2J</td>
<td>Establish an Annual Food-Related “Made in Mariposa” Festival.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2K</td>
<td>Establish a Native American Educational and Events Center to serve as a gathering place where Native culture is celebrated.</td>
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### Focus Area 3: Community Resilience Incentives

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FS 3.1</td>
<td>Establish a Mariposa County Working Lands Resiliency District (WLRD).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FS 3.2</td>
<td>Develop a holistic Regional Working Lands Conservation Program within the County to utilize stronger incentives to facilitate investments in strategic working lands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3A</td>
<td>Build capacity within the County to holistically support the implementation of this Action Plan and the working lands economy and investments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3B</td>
<td>Identify and secure funding for scaling carbon farming and other nature-based solutions countywide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3C</td>
<td>Continue to explore options for forest and land stewardship opportunities in collaboration with the Native American community.</td>
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</table>
ACRONYMS

BLM - Federal Bureau of Land Management
DoC - California Department of Conservation
CCC - California Conservation Corp
CDFA - California Department of Food and Agriculture
CNRA - California Natural Resources Agency
EDC - Economic Development Corporation
MAC - Mariposa Arts Council
MCFAC - Mariposa County Fire Advisory Committee
MCHS - Mariposa County High School
NPS - National Park Service
RCD - Resource Conservation District
SFC - Sierra Foothill Conservancy
SGC - Strategic Growth Council
SSMN - Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation
USDA - United States Department of Agriculture
UCCE - University of California Cooperative Extension
UC ANR - University of California Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources
YMCTB - Yosemite Mariposa County Tourism Bureau
1.1 Introduction

The Mariposa County Agricultural & Working Lands Conservation Plan (AAWLCP, Plan or Action Plan) is the result of a community-led effort to invest in working lands as a long-term cultural, social and economic resource while responding to the changing climate. This Action Plan links working lands preservation, thoughtful land use planning, agricultural enterprise and enhanced partnerships into a comprehensive “call to action” community effort.

The effort is led by a diverse group of community stakeholders, including ranchers and farmers, representatives of local government agencies, conservation partners, representatives of community-based organizations, and the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation (SSMN). It is funded by a grant from the State of California’s Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation (SALC) program.
THE FUTURE.

1.2 A VISION FOR A SHARED FUTURE - HONORING AND INVESTING IN THE WORKING LANDS OF MARIPOSA COUNTY

Mariposa County occupies over 1,400 square miles of the Sierra Nevada foothills on land traditionally occupied by the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation (SSMN). It is located at the western gateway to Yosemite National Park and occupies the southern tip of the Mother Lode, (California’s “Gold Rush Belt”), with the Town of Mariposa founded along Mariposa Creek in 1850 as a mining town. Due to the County’s proximity to Yosemite National Park and the well-known California Gold Rush legacy, these two narratives have dominated the identity of “Mariposa County”. For good reason, these two histories have been, and will continue to be, potent and important economic drivers for the region.

Working Lands Value in Mariposa County

The County’s early history in enacting one of the state’s first “right to agricultural activities” ordinances, its commitment to upholding and funding the Williamson Act program, and a General plan that elevates agriculture as an essential element to the identity of Mariposa County, provides a strong starting point for the development of this Action Plan. This Action Plan aims to amplify and provide a long range conservation vision for the ongoing critical cultural, social and economic contributions of the County’s working lands. As of 2020, the County’s leading agricultural commodity was cattle and calves, and the agricultural production gross value was over $36.7 million with 73 percent (or $27 million) in cattle and calves. Almost all of the County’s agricultural land is in grazing (over 402,000 acres), with less than one percent in farmland.¹ Cattle ranching currently anchors Mariposa County’s agricultural economic activity.

Not only do working lands provide food and working lands jobs, they provide foundational environmental, cultural and social benefits including the vast views of the foothills, clean air, water availability, climate amelioration, buffers for wildfire protection and storm protection. Together these benefits are called “ecosystem services” or “natural capital”. Each of these services is fundamental to the region’s identity, health, safety, quality of life, and economy. Currently, the “natural capital” of Mariposa’s natural and working lands is estimated to be over $7.5 billion (refer to Appendix B, Ecosystem Services Assessment, and Section 3).

¹ CA Department of Conservation, Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP)
Ecosystem services are defined as the direct and indirect contributions of ecosystems to human well-being, and have an impact on our survival and quality of life. There are four types of ecosystem services: **Provisioning**, **regulating**, **cultural** and **supporting services**:

- **Provisioning** services are characterized by the ability of humans to obtain products from ecosystems, such as food, water and resources, including wood, oil and genetic resources and medicines.
- **Regulating** services are categorized as any benefit obtained from the natural processes and functioning of ecosystems. Examples include: climate regulation, flood regulation and other natural hazard regulation, pollination, water purification and more.
- **Cultural** services include non-material benefits that people can obtain from ecosystems. These include spiritual enrichment, mental health benefits, intellectual development, recreation and aesthetic values.
- **Supporting** services are those that are necessary for the production of all other ecosystem services. Examples include biomass production, production of atmospheric oxygen, soil formation and retention, water cycling and provisioning of habitat.

**Challenges to Mariposa County’s Quality of Life**

The coming decades however bring new challenges. As economic stresses and changing climate continue to threaten Mariposa County’s working lands vitality, fundamental changes to planning policies along with new investments and programs are needed to not only protect working lands, but to ensure that a legacy of environmental stewardship and economic opportunity is passed onto the next generation. Though the County does not face the development pressures seen in many of California’s agricultural regions, the chief challenges in Mariposa are the threat of wildfires, more severe storms, hotter and drier summers, and reduced water supply. Failure to adapt to these threats has serious repercussions for the entire community, including:

- Declining income and employment from working lands,
- Loss of the ecosystem services provided by working lands,
- Increasing frequency of park closures due to climate events and the resulting loss in economic revenue to the region, and
- Loss of the quality-of-life benefits provided by working lands.

In the face of these emerging risks, adaptive strategies can ensure the continuing vitality of working lands over the coming decades. This **Action Plan** outlines a conservation vision that directs land protection and stewardship efforts for the coming decades. The approach is multi-faceted and layered in order to provide a holistic solution to the challenges that lie ahead. This approach includes strategies that:

- expand economic opportunities for farm and ranch operators;
- provide a supportive environment that encourages and facilitates new entrants into ranching and farming by investing in education, training programs and pilot projects;
- support the continuation and expansion of climate-smart land stewardship through multi-faceted conservation and educational programs; and
- provide direction for community investment and support for the continued vitality and visibility of Mariposa’s working lands.
A Vision for Mariposa County: Shared Stewardship and the Power of Collaboration

Protection of and investment in the working lands of Mariposa County and the multiple benefits they provide are essential to the continuing health, vitality and identity of Mariposa County. Through collaboration and shared stewardship, the community can continue to build on the thriving agricultural sector that provides economic opportunity, supports community well-being, and preserves the health of the natural resources for generations to come.

This Action Plan recommends strategies that aim to:

- **PROTECT**
  Protect and invest in the network of ranches, farms, and natural lands that define the County’s unique identity and provide increased resilience to a changing climate;

- **ENHANCE**
  Enhance awareness and education in the community about the benefits that working lands provide, and the importance of supporting their long-term preservation;

- **CULTIVATE**
  Cultivate a diverse and resilient agricultural sector that attracts new ranchers and farmers while embracing sustainable agricultural practices;

- **HONOR**
  Continue to honor and support the ranching and farming community, conservation partners, the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation, and organizations that together have stewarded and sustained these lands; and

- **FOCUS**
  Focus on development of community partnerships that, together, bring a unique blend of expertise and experience to meet the challenges ahead.

**WHAT DO WE MEAN BY “WORKING LANDS”?**

Working lands are the rangelands, ranches, farms and forestlands used to support livelihoods. Their value extends beyond a dollar amount. Working lands are recognized as homes to wildlife, areas that protect open space, that clean our air, provide our food and the local community with a sense of place. These “extra” conservation and cultural values are growing in importance as the wildlands that are traditionally seen as harboring these values are increasingly threatened and fragmented. Because of this, working lands are valued not only by the people who earn their livelihoods from the land, but also from communities that recognize the value of working landscapes to supply our food, protect nature, and provide numerous social and cultural benefits.

- Climate Vulnerability Assessment of California Rangelands, USDA California Climate Hub, 2017
1.3 SETTING THE TABLE FOR LONG-TERM COMMUNITY RESILIENCE:  
THE ORGANIZATIONAL FRAMEWORK

This Action Plan looks at Mariposa County’s working lands economy from an integrated systems perspective and is organized around three focus areas of equal importance:

- **FOCUS AREA 01:** Building capacity, education & awareness
- **FOCUS AREA 02:** Working lands economic resilience
- **FOCUS AREA 03:** Community resilience incentives

These focus areas make up the foundational system of advancing the Action Plan and are intended to guide decisions and priorities.

The framework of this document is based on the idea that innovation is most likely to occur in areas where the focus areas overlap, and where ranchers, farmers, nonprofits, government agencies, tribal representatives, educational institutions, and others work together in concert. The goals of this framework are:

- **COMMON AGENDA**
  To articulate a shared community-driven vision and actions that strengthen the regional agricultural economy.

- **COLLABORATION AND COMMUNITY ACCOUNTABILITY**
  To build on a range of opportunities for increased communication and collaboration across a diversity of community members and organizations, while identifying key leadership roles and an effective organizational framework.

- **MUTUALLY REINFORCING ACTIVITIES**
  To support and build on existing agricultural and food system projects, programs and organizations and advance new ideas in a coordinated and directed fashion.
1.4 FOCUS AREAS AND MAIN OBJECTIVES

The three focus areas identify a set of objectives, recommended strategies, near-term action steps and implementing partners (refer to Chapter 4). The strategies describe programs and projects that range from short-term wins to bold, long-term efforts. It is anticipated that when this Action Plan is adopted, it positions the County and community partners to seek funding for its implementation. The focus areas and main objectives are summarized below:

Increasing capacity and integration across community partners to build awareness and educational opportunities is an essential piece of implementing this Action Plan. This means building on the County’s existing social capital to align, leverage and scale resources, particularly through partnerships. Building awareness of nature-based climate solutions and their ability to deliver environmental, economic, public health and equity improvements to the community’s working lands is critical to the success of this Action Plan. Honoring and investing in the County’s working lands reinforces the community’s cultural identity and long-term resilience.

This focus area provides a set of strategies that emphasize the need for the community to build capacity and create a shared vision that highlights the critical role that working landscapes play in a resilient future. Strategies are based on the following objectives:

+ **Catalyze collaborative and integrated partnerships and build the capacity of institutional and community structures** to support agricultural and working lands conservation, on-the-ground climate smart agricultural practices, and rural community investment with education, technical assistance, and voluntary financial incentives.

+ **Continue to build on the efforts to promote local working lands**, including elevating a culture of land stewardship, and educating consumers on the benefits of supporting local ranchers and producers and the role that agriculture and working lands play in the local economy and ecosystem.

+ **Support existing ranchers and farmers with technical assistance**, including climate-smart agriculture practices, and growing/training new and transitioning ranchers and farmers.

+ **Align, leverage and scale resources**, particularly through partnerships.

+ **Expand partnership opportunities with Native American tribes** in stewarding public and working landscapes while providing support to build capacity.

+ **Continue to develop art, design and education programs that honor the community’s deeply rooted identity** in working landscapes.

+ **Facilitate creative placekeeping** to amplify the importance of working lands to the Mariposa community and its identity.

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**AGRICULTURE IS DEEPLY WOVEN INTO THE CULTURAL FABRIC OF OUR COMMUNITY & CONTRIBUTES IN MULTIPLE WAYS TO THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNTY. I THINK IT SHOULD BE EXPANDED UPON IN TERMS OF OUTREACH AND PROMOTION!**

- Survey respondent, Fall 2022
Sustained economic opportunities are key to maintaining and enhancing the rural lifestyle rooted in ranching and the County’s unique natural resources. The County’s working landscapes also contribute to the region’s economy by attracting employers, workers and visitors alike. It is clear that land protection and conservation measures alone will not protect these landscapes and grow a vibrant regional working lands economy. Economic vitality requires enhancing economic growth and creating new streams of income for ranchers, producers and private foresters.

This focus area provides recommended agricultural economic development strategies that build upon the County’s existing working lands assets to secure the viability of agriculture into the future. Strategies are focused on the following objectives:

- Improve economic opportunities for ranchers and farmers by expanding value-added processing activities.
- Create a supportive environment that encourages and facilitates new entrants into ranching and farming by providing access to land, financing and technical assistance.
- Support the viability of agricultural operations by diversifying and expanding the income opportunities generated by ranches and farms through agritourism activities (while ensuring the safety of visitors and the operation).
- Encourage and allow the establishment of infrastructure and support uses that facilitate the growth of the working lands economy.

Healthy landscapes can sequester and store carbon, limit future greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere, protect people and nature from the impacts of the changing climate, and build resilience. Healthy working landscapes strengthen the County’s climate resiliency and build new markets and streams of income for ranchers and farmers using climate smart agricultural and forestry practices that contribute to their economic viability.

This focus area provides strategies that bolster broadscale climate resilience while recognizing land conservation and ecosystem services as assets to the community worthy of investment. Strategies are focused on the following objectives:

- Support widespread adoption of climate smart land management practices on Mariposa landscapes that enhance carbon sequestration and other ecosystem services.
- Expand long-term agricultural and working lands conservation in Mariposa County.
- Support economic, climate, and cultural resilience by protecting and enhancing agricultural and working landscapes and facilitating efficient development in existing Planned Residential Areas.
- Explore programs to monetize the ecosystem services provided by Mariposa County’s agricultural and forest lands.
- Ensure that agricultural lands at the County’s borders are protected from conversion to other uses.
1.5 IMPLEMENTATION - SOLVING FOR TOMORROW, TOGETHER

This Action Plan recommends a suite of interrelated strategies and program ideas to address the most pressing challenges facing working lands. Moving forward, it is essential that greater communication and collaboration is established between the implementing partners and community stakeholders. In addition, sustained investment in open data and open science practices are critical for informed data-based decision making, tracking progress, and to facilitate community engagement, awareness and education.

The partners who undertake this work include ranchers and farmers, agricultural organizations, community advocacy groups, agencies, government bodies, tribal representatives and conservation organizations. The Plan envisions that the Core Team will provide the initial oversight of the strategies and actions, while the community mobilizes to implement the recommended strategies in this Plan. Those organizations are:

- Mariposa County Planning, Economic Development and Department of Agriculture & Weights and Measures, Agricultural Commissioner & County Sealer’s office
- University of California Cooperative Extension Service (UCCE)
- California Cattlemen’s Association (CCA)
- Sierra Foothill Conservancy (SFC)
- Mariposa County Resource Conservation District (MCRCD)
- Mariposa County Arts Council

Establishing the Working Lands Roundtable

The creation of the Working Lands Roundtable in Foundational Strategy 1, is the first step in successful implementation of this Action Plan. The Plan envisions that the Working Lands Roundtable could work together with the Core Team to act as an organizing body to help implement, select and, prioritize the recommended strategies in this Plan. Those organizations are:

- Holistic planned grazing which uses a comprehensive approach to grazing management that takes into account the specific needs of the land, livestock and wildlife,
- Riparian management, to protect and restore riparian zones by implementing fencing, planting native vegetation, and/or managing livestock access to these areas,
- Silvopasture, which integrates trees, forages, and livestock in a mutually beneficial system, and/or
- Soil health improvement such as no-till or minimum tillage, which reduces soil disturbance and preserves the soil structure, organic matter and soil microorganisms.

The benefits of regenerative agriculture practices include:

- Increasing biodiversity in soil
- Capturing carbon in the soils to combat climate variability
- Improving water-holding capacity of soil, making it more drought- and flood- resilient
- Decreasing the use of chemical inputs and subsequent pollution, and
- Enhancing wildlife habitat

At its core, regenerative agriculture is the process of restoring degraded soils using practices (such as what is described above) based on ecological principles.

WHAT IS REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE?

Regenerative ranching and agricultural practices focus on restoring and improving the health of the land, biodiversity, and soil fertility while also ensuring sustainable and profitable livestock and farming production. Some examples of regenerative practices include:

- Holistic planned grazing which uses a comprehensive approach to grazing management that takes into account the specific needs of the land, livestock and wildlife,
- Riparian management, to protect and restore riparian zones by implementing fencing, planting native vegetation, and/or managing livestock access to these areas,
- Silvopasture, which integrates trees, forages, and livestock in a mutually beneficial system, and/or
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- Enhancing wildlife habitat

At its core, regenerative agriculture is the process of restoring degraded soils using practices (such as what is described above) based on ecological principles.
Expanding and enhancing the use of open data and open science practices as applicable;

+ Developing an organizational structure to track progress towards achieving the AWLCP goals;

+ Ensuring that the community is working in a coordinated and collaborative fashion; and

+ Staying responsive to changing circumstances, requirements and issues facing the working lands sector.

**Funding the Future - A Regional Collaboration**

Many of the over 25 recommended strategies and programs require additional long-term funding sources. Opportunities exist to attract new funding from diverse sources by using this *Action Plan*, along with other key County and regional guiding documents in making the case for State, Federal, local and/or philanthropic investments.

Each recommended strategy in this document (refer to Chapter 4.0) is followed by the most relevant potential funding sources.

Healthy landscapes can sequester and store carbon, limit future greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere, protect people and nature from the impacts of the changing climate and build resilience.
CHAPTER 02.

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT.

2.1 PLAN PURPOSE

The Plan sets out a series of strategies, tools and action steps to strengthen the working lands economy and bolster the cultural identity through conservation, land-use planning tools and policies, financial incentives, and enhanced partnerships among ranchers and farmers, and members of the general public. The Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program (SALCP) funded the Plan, since agricultural land conservation is an important part of California’s climate strategy. There is a growing consensus that providing long-term protection of working lands is essential in achieving California’s greenhouse gas reduction goals.

THE PURPOSE OF PREPARING THE PLAN IS TO:

- Provide a comprehensive roadmap for how to strengthen and protect the working lands economy into the future,
- Determine ecosystems service values for Mariposa County and explore how to build on and leverage those values;
- Analyze existing policy and planning frameworks to craft strategies and programs that can support a more integrated approach to protecting working lands, supporting climate smart agriculture, and keeping agriculture economically viable; and
- Bring together local and regional partners, Native American organizations and the agricultural sector to craft a unified policy framework for the future.

APPROXIMATELY HALF OF THE COUNTY’S POPULATION LIVES IN RURAL SETTINGS WITH THE BALANCE RESIDING IN AND AROUND VARIOUS UNINCORPORATED TOWNS AND COMMUNITIES.
MARIPOSA COUNTY OCCUPIES 1,463 SQUARE MILES, OR APPROXIMATELY 927,000 ACRES, OF THE SIERRA NEVADA FOOTHILLS ON LAND TRADITIONALLY OCCUPIED BY THE ANCESTORS OF THE SOUTHERN SIERRA MIWUK NATION
2.2 REGIONAL & LOCAL CONTEXT

Land and People

Mariposa County occupies 1,463 square miles, or approximately 927,000 acres, of the Sierra Nevada foothills on land traditionally occupied by the ancestors of the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation and sitting at the western gateway to Yosemite National Park. The County also occupies the southern tip of Mother Lode Country, the gold rush belt, which stretches through the Sierra Nevada foothills in central California.

According to the County General Plan, approximately half of the County’s population lives in rural settings with the balance residing in and around various unincorporated towns and communities. Most of the County’s population lives within the low elevation foothills and valleys of the Sierra Nevada’s west slope. The unincorporated Town of Mariposa, with approximately 2,500 people, is the County seat and largest town in the County. It is situated along Mariposa Creek which eventually flows into the San Joaquin Valley. The next largest community is Yosemite Village, headquarters for Yosemite National Park with over 1,300 full time residents, while the Lake Don Pedro subdivision is the third largest with just under 1,300 residents. Mariposa’s population has slightly declined over the last decade from 18,245 in 2010 to 17,045 in 2022 and is projected to stay steady with 17,073 people by 2060.2

The western edge of the County, characterized by gentle terrain and rolling hills blending into the San Joaquin Valley, is sparsely populated grazing land. The eastern portion of the County is part of the famed High Sierra region, with towering mountains, recreational and tourist sights, and diverse habitat. Agricultural land makes up 43 percent of the total land area of the county, and 82 percent of the land within the county that is not under the control of public agencies. Almost all of the County’s agricultural land is in grazing (over 402,000 acres), with less than one percent farmland.3 The County has seen little change in agricultural land over the last four decades, with less than a two percent loss of grazing land and less than a five percent loss of its farmland from 1984 to 2018.4

2 California Department of Finance, Reports E-1 and P-2A. 2023
3 CA Department of Conservation, Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP)
4 Ibid
The Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation

The indigenous ancestors of the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation have occupied their traditional territory in what is now Mariposa County for at least 10,000 years. The Tribe continues to maintain strong ties and relationships to their traditional territories. However, treaties from the mid 1800’s between the United States government and the Tribe to reserve tracks of land within their ancestral territory, to this day have not been ratified, leaving the Tribe landless. Since 1982, the Southern Sierra Miwuk have petitioned for federal acknowledgment, seeking self-determination, self-governance, and acknowledgment through the federal recognition process. The County of Mariposa and other public agencies and many local community organizations have supported this acknowledgement, a process which has continued into 2023. The Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation is on the contact list maintained by the California Native American Heritage Commission, which makes them eligible for various State grants and programs.

The indigenous people were the first stewards of the land, water, air, and natural resources. They played an important role within local ecosystems and their traditional lifeways established reciprocal relationships that allowed both land and people to thrive. Traditional gathering and best agricultural practices of the native people were very complex, having been cultivated over thousands of years of observation and experimentation, and were based on needs and usage in each family use district. Trade among the indigenous groups included Pinon Pine nuts, obsidian, Black Oak acorns, Indian hemp, Soap root, seashells, salmon and medicinal materials. Traditional basketry by the indigenous people employed methods of weaving with willow, redbud, bracken fern root, bunch grass and other native plants.\(^5\) Today, the SSMN’s Cultural Preservation Department acts to ensure the preservation and protection of the Tribe’s cultural resources and heritage while their Land Stewardship Department seeks to revitalize local Traditional Ecological Knowledge and reclaim their people’s role as First Stewards of these lands. The SSMN is an active partner in the local community and frequently collaborates with the County and local organizations to promote a resilient landscape and community.

The Working Lands Economy

The leading agricultural commodities in Mariposa County are cattle, pasture, and livestock, making these the most prominent components of private sector agriculture, which generates about $36.7 million in output per year.\(^6\) There is also a limited amount of local crops, apiary, and nursery production on small farms, together with a gross value of under $1 million annually. Forestry is an important activity on public lands, which comprises a large percentage of the total Mariposa County land area; however, traditional timber harvesting activity has contracted to just a fraction of its historical levels.

\(^5\) Mariposa County General Plan, 2006
\(^6\) Mariposa County Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Commissioner’s Crop report, 2020
The leading agricultural commodities in Mariposa County are cattle, pasture, and livestock, making these the most prominent components of private sector agriculture, generating about $36.7 million in output per year.
2.3 THE ACTION PLAN DEVELOPMENT PROCESS & RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PLANS

Development of this Action Plan included an assessment of ecosystem service values, engaging local stakeholders, examining the existing County land use policies and agricultural protection policies, evaluating best practices and successful models of agricultural preservation and seeking guidance from experts around California.

**SIX KEY PRIORITIES SHAPED THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PLAN:**

1. **UNDERSTANDING THE MULTI-FACETED ISSUES THAT COMPRISE MARIPOSA COUNTY’S AGRICULTURE AND WORKING LANDS.**

2. **UNDERSTANDING AND ASSESSING THE VALUE OF MARIPOSA’S WORKING LANDS AND MONETIZING THOSE VALUES TO ALIGN FUTURE INVESTMENTS.**

3. **EXPLORING INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS AND OPTIONS FOR SUSTAINING AND BUILDING THE VIABILITY OF FUTURE MARIPOSA COUNTY WORKING LANDS, INCLUDING EXISTING TOOLS AND INNOVATIVE INCENTIVE PROGRAMS AND DESIGNING VARIOUS OPTIONS THAT ARE RELEVANT TO MARIPOSA COUNTY WORKING LANDS.**

4. **BUILDING AWARENESS AND OWNERSHIP SO THAT STAKEHOLDERS CAN WORK TOGETHER TO IMPLEMENT THE STRATEGIES IN THIS ACTION PLAN, WHILE SETTING UP AN ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE THAT ALLOWS A MULTITUDE OF ACTORS TO ACCOMPLISH THE WORK LAID OUT IN THIS PLAN.**

5. **CRAFTING STRATEGIC ACTIONS THAT STAKEHOLDERS AND THE COMMUNITY COULD EMBRACE TO SUCCESSFULLY ACCOMPLISH THE PLAN’S VISION.**

6. **RESPONDING DIRECTLY TO STAKEHOLDER AND COMMUNITY CONCERNS.**

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**THIS ACTION PLAN RECOMMENDS A SUITE OF INTERRELATED STRATEGIES AND PROGRAM IDEAS TO ADDRESS THE MOST PRESSING CHALLENGES FACING WORKING LANDS.**
The methodology used to develop the foundational strategies and actions is described on the following pages.

Ecosystem Service Assessment

Ecosystem Services represent the goods and services nature provides to humans and society. These services comprise a wide variety of benefits and can be leveraged as nature-based solutions to address community and societal needs. As with other types of goods and services, these benefits can be quantified and valued in monetary terms. EcoMetrics conducted an ecosystem services assessment, using the “EcoMetrics” methodology to inform this Action Plan, (please refer to Appendix B). The assessment shows the value provided by the various land cover and land use types in Mariposa County and which can be used in conjunction with valuing working lands uses. This methodology identifies, quantifies, and values the various ecosystem services related to environmental, economic, and social benefits inherent in land cover, use types and enhancements to the land.

To fully measure and evaluate the benefits, the analysis incorporated scientific data on the objective social, environmental, and economic impacts of the various land cover and use types. These data are directly tied to the outcomes identified and used to quantify the value of changes. The EcoMetrics methodology presents these values in terms of financial equivalents, which allows for comparison of the cost/benefit between different land cover types and uses to inform future decision making. See findings under Section 3.0.

Economic Strategy

An Agricultural and Working Lands Economic Development Framework developed by BAE Urban Economics (BAE) informs the content of Focus Area 2 of the Action Plan: Working Lands Economic Resilience. BAE developed the agricultural economic development framework based on findings from BAE’s Economic Contributions of Agriculture study as well as other background information, and input from other consultant team members, project partners, and key stakeholders. The framework identified three primary strategy areas that will compliment the long-term conservation and enhancement of Mariposa County’s agricultural and working lands, including:

- **VALUE-ADDED PROCESSING**
- **ECOSYSTEM SERVICES**
- **AGRICULTURAL TOURISM**

The Agricultural and Working Lands Economic Development Framework is consistent with the Mariposa County General Plan, starting with General Plan guiding principles established by the Board of Supervisors, including, “The Protection of Agriculture is Critical for the County’s Future”. In addition, this framework also aligns with key elements, including the Economic Development Element and the Agriculture Element. Specifically, it supports the former by “supporting enhancement of the County’s economic sectors” and it supports the latter by “nurturing the agricultural economy throughout the county”.

Further, this framework also builds upon the 2017 Mariposa County Economic Vitality Strategy. For example, the Agricultural Tourism strategy area is consistent with the Economic Vitality Strategy’s Strategic Initiative #1: Promotion and Expansion of the Tourism Sector. The Ecosystem Services strategy area fits with the Economic Vitality Strategy’s Strategic Initiative #2: Diversification and Expansion of the Local Economy, and the Value-Added Processing strategy area fits with the Economic Vitality Strategy’s Strategic Initiative #3: Business Retention and Expansion.

BAE conducted research to identify several different types of supporting actions, or tactics, that could be adapted and implemented locally in support of each strategy area. Then BAE conducted further research to identify specific examples of either projects/programs that have been implemented in other locations or that are being implemented in Mariposa County, or examples of funding sources or tools that could potentially be utilized in Mariposa County. Findings from this process were incorporated into several of the strategies found in Section 4.0 and a full report can be found in Appendix A.
An Agricultural Education and Awareness Strategy Report (Appendix C) produced by Sustainable Agriculture Education (SAGE) informs the content of Focus Area 1 (Building Capacity, Education, and Awareness) of this Action Plan.

The first section of the Strategy Report, “Existing Conditions”, documents the myriad existing agricultural education and awareness efforts in Mariposa County and also describes additional programs wanted by stakeholders. The Report organizes existing organizations, initiatives, and programs, and summaries of the programs desired, in seven areas:

1) K-12 Food & Agriculture Engagement;
2) Agriculture & Food Education in Community Colleges & Universities;
3) Applied Research & Technical Assistance;
4) Community Agricultural Events, Education & Awareness;
5) Agri-tourism & On-Farm Education;
6) Tribal-based Education about Working Lands; and
7) Food Security & Local Agriculture Awareness.

The information for each section comes from interviews with stakeholders and local subject matter experts, as well as from secondary research. Responses to the recent Mariposa County survey (discussed below) designed to get input for the overall AWLCP, also informs each section.

The Report includes a “Precedents, Best Practices and Models” section, which builds on the Existing Conditions research, by providing examples about how such efforts can be coordinated to be greater than the sum of their parts. This section describes the collective impact model as an approach to coordinate and enhance agricultural education and awareness efforts. It also gives examples of models and best practices that highlight the role of agricultural education and awareness in advancing agricultural resilience and shared stewardship of working lands.

The final section of the Report is an “Implementation Plan for a Multifaceted Education and Awareness Strategy”. This high level implementation plan builds on the Existing Conditions findings and incorporates ideas from the Models research. It also reflects input from project partners, stakeholders and local subject matter experts, overall. As a reflection of the deep engagement of the agricultural, conservation and arts communities, the focus was broadened to encompass strategies around collective action to build working lands resilience and support land stewardship.

Protection of and investment in the working lands of Mariposa County and the multiple benefits they provide are essential to the continuing health, vitality and identity of Mariposa County.
Community and Stakeholder Engagement

The development of this Plan was supported by a Core Team composed of a group of local and regional experts that assisted in identifying relevant stakeholders, synthesizing data, and evaluating models and policy (refer to Appendix D) for Stakeholder Lists and the Outreach and Engagement Plan Draft. The Core Team consisted of representatives from the Future Farmers of America, UC Cooperative Extension, California Cattlemen’s Association, Mariposa County Resource Conservation District, Sierra Foothill Conservancy, Mariposa County Planning, Economic Development, and Agricultural Commissioner’s Departments, and the Mariposa Arts Council. In addition, representatives from the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation advised throughout the process. Throughout the development of the AWLCP, one-on-one interviews and small virtual meetings were conducted to solicit knowledge, insights, and inputs from key stakeholders to inform the strategies, actions, and partnerships needed to support the community’s agricultural and working lands conservation vision.

The broader community also had an opportunity to inform the Plan through a survey (see Appendix F for Key Findings, Trends and Quotes) conducted in partnership by the Mariposa County Arts Council and the Planning Department that was broadcasted to Mariposa County residents, asking participants to share their thoughts on the benefits and challenges of agriculture in the County. Some of these comments have been highlighted throughout this document. With 72 responses, the survey helped to inform the Plan on how the community relates to and prioritizes agriculture in relation to the economy, the environment, and community identity. Responses were sorted by theme and reviewed as a resource to help develop the Strategies in this Plan.

Existing Mariposa County Agricultural Preservation Policies and Programs

A variety of interrelated land use policies, private landowner actions, and economic forces have shaped existing land use patterns and the economic environment within Mariposa County over the decades. This section briefly summarizes the existing policy framework that was evaluated in the Mariposa County General Plan, the General Plan Implementation Strategic Work Plan, and other key County policies and documents as a basis for the development of additional agricultural land preservation policies, programs and policy updates that are included in Chapter 4.0.

Strong Policies are established in the General Plan to protect and preserve agriculture for Mariposa County’s future. Agriculture contributes to the County’s economic and social sustainability and is a major aspect of the County’s rural character” -Mariposa General Plan
Mariposa County Existing Policy Framework

In its guiding principles, the Mariposa County General Plan, adopted in 2006, presents its commitment to "The Protection of Agriculture is Critical for the County’s Future" and states that "Strong policies are established in the General Plan to protect and preserve agriculture for Mariposa County's future. Agriculture contributes to the County’s economic and social sustainability and is a major aspect of the County’s rural character."

The General Plan Land Use Element has five primary land use classifications: Residential, Agricultural/Working Landscape, Natural Resources, Planning Study Areas, and Rural Economic. The Agriculture/Working Landscape classification incorporates both the County’s traditional ranch lands and timberlands at the mid-elevations of the County west of Yosemite National Park. Additionally, there are scattered agricultural holdings and ranches within the Residential land use classification. The County’s Zoning Code maintains Agricultural Exclusive Zones (AEZ) that limits the density to 160 acres per two single family residences, and with minimum lot sizes of 160 acres. Agritourism and agriculture tourism are subject to the same development standards and regulations for the AEZ but with special development and performance standards.

The General Plan Agricultural Element presents a suite of goals, policies, and implementation measures to preserve agricultural lands, maximize its economic viability, minimize conflicts between agricultural and urban land uses, and advance resource stewardship implementation. Specific goals include:

- **Goal 10-1:** Create a support staff for agriculture providing assistance and innovation for agricultural activities;
- **Goal 10-2:** Avoid loss of agriculture lands in the Agriculture/Working Landscape;
- **Goal 10-3:** Preserve agricultural economic viability to the greatest extent possible;
- **Goal 10-4:** Preserve heritage crop varieties; and
- **Goal 10-5:** Encourage the expansion of the agricultural economy.

The General Plan Strategic Implementation Work Plan further supports implementation of key policies with prioritized, actionable tasks. Important tasks to highlight include 1) a zoning ordinance update to “Clearly define uses compatible with agriculture and accommodate agritourism uses through changes to Agriculture and other zone districts”; 2) the development of an Agricultural Best Practices Program that provides information on funding sources and market support for agricultural business owners; and 3) the development of a Greenhouse Gas Reduction program that, among other priorities, considers both the emissions impacts and the sequestration benefits of forests and agriculture. As a part of the Greenhouse Gas Reduction program, the County developed the TerraCount tool which generates data to provide a baseline for County greenhouse gas (GHG) and carbon stock outputs on agricultural, forest and other working landscapes.

In addition to its General Plan policies and Zoning Code, the County has a long history of preservation of its agricultural lands. Mariposa County was one of the first in California to adopt a Right to Agricultural Activity ordinance which seeks to protect agricultural operations from nuisance complaints, thus enabling ranchers to maintain their economic and cultural viability of their operations. Since 1977, the County has administered the Williamson Act Program (California Land Conservation Act of 1965, “LCA”) which protects agricultural land by providing tax incentives to property owners who agree to keep their land in commercial agricultural production. Approximately 47 percent of privately owned land in the County—primarily in the western region—is contracted under the LCA. The contracts are voluntary agreements for a 20-year period, intended to preserve agricultural land and discourage its conversion to non-agricultural uses. The contracts automatically renew annually unless the landowner or County files for a non-renewal. In Mariposa County a majority of these lands are used for grazing for ranching operations. The County currently has 818 parcels restricted by a Williamson Act contract, totaling 212,034 acres.
The Mariposa Economic Vitality Strategy (2017), provides action steps to “Expand and promote the agriculture and agri-tourism sectors” such as exploring opportunities to expand events and festivals with organizational stakeholders, investigating agritourism best practices, adopting a farm-to-fork program (or similar), and developing an agritourism marketing campaign. The Strategy also promotes the growth of value-added processing and the packaging and distribution of locally grown agricultural products as a part of a food and beverage cluster.

Mariposa County’s Creative Placemaking Strategy (2021) recommended art and agricultural programming that leverages design and visual/media/performing arts to explore the many historic and contemporary stories related to agriculture in Mariposa. This recommendation supported the development of the Mariposa Working Lands Working Artists initiative funded by a National Endowment for the Arts Our Town grant. The work is led by the Mariposa County Arts Council and the Planning Department to work with regional social practice artists to develop creative placemaking projects that interpret, respond to, and engage with public comments received during the ongoing AWLCP planning process.

Recreation and Resiliency Master Plan (2021) advances the implementation of a variety of community objectives, especially those related to public health, economic development, creative placemaking, landscape restoration, and climate change adaptation. In the goals and strategies for natural systems, the Plan identifies a goal to “Support the continuation of Mariposa’s long history of working lands” with related strategies to promote economic viability of working agricultural lands, build educational opportunities and focusing on history and local food systems, prioritize agricultural land conservation, and increase soil health while reducing pesticide use. One key aspiration of the Master Plan is “Our Parks, Open Spaces, and working lands will be capable of responding to dynamic shocks and stressors. We aim to provide high-functioning balanced ecosystems.”
Other Relevant Efforts in Mariposa County

The development of this Plan considered other significant efforts to preserve and protect Mariposa County agricultural and working lands and their economic viability.

The Sierra Foothill Conservancy, the California Rangeland Trust, and the Sierra Nevada Conservancy are the primary organizations that assist landowners in establishing land conservation easements. The Sierra Cascade Land Trust Council (SCLTC) is a group of 19 land trusts representing the Sierra Nevada and northern California Cascades region, of which the Sierra Foothill Conservancy and the California Rangeland Trust are members. An outcome of their Sierra Cascade Strategic Conservation Action Plan is the SCLTC mapping web tool developed to support users in assessing climate mitigation, adaptation and resilience of working and natural lands, water resources, economic viability of farms and ranches, opportunities for cultural traditions, and determining priority areas that are most threatened by development.

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) is a California state agency created by legislation (AB 2600) signed into law in 2004. The mission of the SNC is to initiate, encourage, and fund efforts that improve the environmental, economic, and social well-being of the Sierra Nevada Region, its communities, and the citizens of California. Most importantly, the SNC funds the land trust efforts described in the preceding paragraph. The Strategic Lands Conserved goal in the SNC’s Strategic Plan focuses on protection of high-risk and/or high-priority lands, recognizing that these lands provide a range of benefits including working landscapes; recreation opportunities; and protection of unique cultural and natural areas, as well as key wildlife habitat. The SNC 2023 Strategic Land Conservation Directed Grant Program aims to permanently protect high-benefit lands that are threatened with conversion, represent unique natural characteristics, or are critical for resilience to climate change.
State Initiatives and Programs

It is the policy of the State of California that agriculture is a strategic resource necessary to support a sustainable food production and delivery system as well as a vibrant natural resource base in California that promotes healthy citizens, thriving communities and a healthy environment. The California State Board of Food and Agriculture developed an action guide, the **California Agricultural Vision (AgVision)** 2017, which presents a vision to support this policy: “Californians take pride in their innovative thriving California farmers and ranchers for their contributions to a healthy population and planet.” AgVision outlines recommendations for five strategic priority areas, which include water, regulatory environment, labor/human capital, resource protection and stewardship, and outreach and communications.

In October 2020, Governor Gavin Newson issued Executive Order N-82-20, known as the **30 x 30 Initiative**. This executive order sets a goal to conserve 30 percent of the state’s land and coastal waters by 2030. This guides actions to achieve that goal, prioritizing nature based solutions to fight against climate change. One of the plan’s core commitments is to protect California’s food supply, which would include supporting food sustainability programs for soil health and pollinator protection, providing training and professional development for jobs related to outdoor activities and conservation, and promoting climate smart land management.

The State’s **Natural and Working Lands Climate Smart Strategy**, which responds directly to Governor Gavin Newsom’s nature-based solutions Executive Order N-82-20 and the State’s 30x30 Initiative, identifies the State’s natural and working lands as a critical yet currently underutilized sector in the fight against climate change. The Strategy emphasizes that “Managing our lands to address climate change requires urgent and sustained action (time and effort) across all regions and sectors of California. Communities, businesses, farmers and ranchers, land managers, investors, tribal/state/local/federal governments, special districts, youth, philanthropists, scientists, planners, volunteers, and more can all play a role. The pace of implementation depends on the level of our collective commitment and availability of resources”.

The California Department of Conservation administers several programs that support many of the actions that this Initiative seeks to achieve. The **Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program (SALC)** supports California’s greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction goals by making strategic investments to protect agricultural lands from conversion to more GHG-intensive uses. The program provides three types of awards: acquisition capacity grants, planning grants (including for initial planning as well as implementation), and agricultural conservation easement grants. The goals of SALC are to: Protect agricultural lands that support infill and compact development; Contribute to carbon neutrality; Support sustainable land management; Support coordinated land use planning; and Support Executive Order N-82-20 (see the 30x30 Initiative described above). The **Multibenefit Land Repurposing Program (MLRP)** provides block grants to increase regional capacity to repurpose agricultural land to reduce reliance on groundwater while providing community health, economic well being, water supply, habitat, and climate benefits. The **Climate Smart Land Management Program** provides block grants to implement projects or develop plans and increase the capacity to support accomplishment of goals identified in the State’s Natural and Working Lands Climate Smart Strategy. The **California Farmland Conservancy Program** supports local efforts to establish agricultural conservation easements and land improvement projects for the purpose of preserving important agricultural land resources and enhancing sustainable agricultural uses. The **Working Lands and Riparian Corridors Program** provides funds specifically to resource conservation districts to restore or enhance riparian corridors on agricultural lands.
CHAPTER 03.

KEY FINDINGS.

The following section summarizes the key takeaways from the main components of the work completed that shaped the recommended focus areas and strategies.

3.1 ECOSYSTEM SERVICES ASSESSMENT

Protecting Mariposa’s working landscapes helps preserve the many important services that nature provides. These services or benefits include water supply, filtration, and storage, moderation of flood risk, air quality, and carbon sequestration – all services that can reduce public costs for water supplies, stormwater management and water treatment, and responding to the impacts of climate change. The *Ecosystem Services Assessment* (Appendix B), shows a **total value of services provided by natural lands estimated for Mariposa County at $7.5 billion**, with a range of $5.6 on the low end and $9.1 billion on the high end. In addition to the purely environmental services provided by these landscapes, such as biodiversity, water regulation, etc., over half of the value is provided by outcomes that represent the way humans interact with our environment including cultural value, aesthetic value, existence and general recreation value.

In Mariposa County, forests are the highest contributor to the total value of ecosystem services, followed by grass and shrubland, as assumed to include active grazing land.

In addition to the value of existing environmental services, additional value can be attributed to the social costs avoided by retaining all the carbon, nitrogen and phosphorus in the landscapes. This “perceived social value” in Mariposa County is $11.4 billion. These social costs are calculated using the marginal social costs of each ton of CO2 or pound of nitrogen or phosphorus that would be released into the environment if the land is degraded or lost to development. In other words, these landscapes not only create additional value, but preserving the existing values that they contribute can make the case for strategically investing in the continued conservation of established carbon and nutrient sinks in the landscape. Strategies in this *Action Plan* identify pathways for establishing innovative policy, program, and funding structures so that the County and its partners can facilitate these important investments.
3.2 ECONOMIC FINDINGS

Mariposa County’s working lands are primarily rangeland and forestland, with a limited amount of farmland; however, in recent years the County’s annual timber harvest activity has declined and the rangeland and farming activity has increased. Agricultural lands (rangelands and farmlands) occupy 43 percent of the county, and 82 percent of the land within the county that is not under the control of public agencies; thus, agricultural land plays a very important role in private economic activity in Mariposa County.

As of the 2017 Agricultural Census (the most recent) there were approximately 300 ranching and farm operations in Mariposa County, down by about 65 operations less than in 2012. More than half of these operations in the county were less than 180 acres in size. Nearly 60 percent of these operations are in beef cattle ranching and farming. The second most prominent type of operation was aquaculture and other animal production, which were primarily composed of equine and agriculture operations. There are about 300 people working in agriculture in Mariposa County, mostly owner-operators and very few wage or salaried employees.

As of 2020, Mariposa County’s top three agricultural products by value were livestock and poultry, field crops, and livestock and poultry products (e.g., wool) and they account for 98 percent of the agricultural crop value. The largest shift from 2006 to 2020 in total product value was in forest products, where the value trended downward for an overall decline of 80 percent.

The value of all agricultural production in Mariposa is approximately $36.7 million annually, an increase from approximately $19.5 million in 2000. On an inflation-adjusted basis, the value peaked in 2014 and has been slowly declining since.

These findings indicate that cattle ranching currently anchors Mariposa County’s agricultural economic activity and can be built upon to generate additional local economic activity through increasing value added processing, direct-to-consumer sales, and agricultural tourism that leverages the attractiveness of the pastoral landscapes associated with ranching. At the same time, the County’s vast amounts of public lands highlight opportunities for local stakeholders, including Native American groups, to work collaboratively in stewardship of the land and its natural resources, while bringing greater economic benefits and resilience to climate change to the local community. The Agricultural and Working Lands Economic Development Framework (Appendix A) provides numerous economic development strategies based on these findings and stakeholder input.
3.3 EDUCATION & AWARENESS

Based on the Agricultural Education and Awareness Strategy Report (refer to Appendix C) there are a myriad of existing agricultural education and awareness organizations, initiatives, and programs identified in Mariposa County. Highlights from these efforts and well as additional programs wanted by stakeholders are outlined below:

K-12 FOOD & AGRICULTURE ENGAGEMENT:
Includes curriculum-based programs, informal education and career pathways and training. These types of education are offered throughout the seven public schools administered by the Mariposa County Unified School District as well as at two charter schools, and a special needs school. Additional programs wanted include: more school field trips to ranches and farms and more hands-on projects; more programs about organic, regenerative agriculture and for education about hyper-local environmental issues; more high school vocational training opportunities; and more partnerships with local colleges and universities to educate, train and retain future generations of agriculturalists who might decide to live and work in Mariposa County.

AGRICULTURE & FOOD EDUCATION IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES:
Though there are no colleges and universities in Mariposa County, there are several nearby, including UC Merced, Merced College, and MiraCosta College in Merced County, and Fresno State and other community colleges in other nearby counties. Faculty from many of these educational institutions are regular speakers at Mariposa County events and programs, such as those organized by UCCE, the RCD and other organizations. Additional programs wanted include: more partnerships to support and educate the public about the importance of agriculture; as well as more involvement of UC Merced and Merced College in County projects.

AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE:
Technical assistance providers include UCCE, the Farm Bureau, the County Department of Agriculture, the Mariposa County Resource Conservation District (RCD), the UC Merced Small Business Development Center (SBDC) and the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). These organizations provide multiple types of technical assistance, including ongoing programs, workshops, publications, research trials and direct assistance to producers, over a wide range of agricultural, conservation, business and regulatory topics. Additional programs wanted include: more monitoring programs and a program that tracks demand for crops. Educational programs for producers were requested in several areas: the economics of getting a farm; integration of wildlife and habitat into agriculture; prescribed burns on ranches; regenerative practices; soil improvement for a drying climate; water conservation and storage; food processing and preservation; cover cropping for moisture retention and nitrogen fixing; urban forestry; and building deer deterrent garden enclosures.

COMMUNITY AGRICULTURAL EVENTS, EDUCATION & AWARENESS:
Mariposa County hosts a variety of agriculture-related events and education and awareness programs that provide opportunities for the community and visitors to explore the County’s agricultural heritage and to enjoy local agricultural products. The Mariposa County Fairgrounds and Exposition Center, located at the outskirts of the town of Mariposa, is a main center for activities and facilities. Other facilities are the Mariposa Certified Farmers Market, the Mariposa Museum and History Center, the Mariposa Arts Center and the Northern Mariposa County History Center. Additional programs wanted include: Programming that would be made possible through new infrastructure (e.g. a community agriculture hub; a “Mariposa Store”; and a local meat processing facility). Partnerships with community groups and other organizations were identified as an opportunity to increase advertising and promotional capacity for local agriculture events and awareness within the County. Additional public engagement opportunities were desired in the areas of food systems education, continuing education and storytelling. Expanding on the farm-to-table experience that some local restaurants have incorporated and also expand to include restaurants within Yosemite National Park.
AGRITOURISM AND ON-FARM EDUCATION:
Mariposa County has a strong tourism sector, with a primary focus on Yosemite. However, the Yosemite Mariposa County Tourism Bureau also invites visitors to explore the County’s ‘other areas [including] quiet low-country range lands and lakes filled with stories of the past and off-the-beaten path opportunities to interact with nature’. Among these attractions are several of the museums and cultural attractions, such as the Mariposa Museum and History Center in the Town of Mariposa. Also popular with visitors and locals alike are the many agricultural businesses that produce renowned locally-grown products and provide on-site public engagement opportunities. Another highlight is the annual fall Farm and Ranch Tour, produced by the Mariposa Agri-Nature Association. Additional programs wanted include: greater involvement of the Tourist Bureau in promoting the County’s agricultural places and experiences; as well as exploring more agritourism opportunities overall.

TRIBAL-BASED EDUCATION ABOUT WORKING LANDS:
The Monarch Butterfly Habitat Project (Walappu 'Uuchuthu - Butterfly Homeplace in Southern Sierra Miwuk language) founded by Heather Bernikoff, an Indigenous Yaqui ranch owner, and led by the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation, are key educational activities. The goal of the work, which is widely valued in the community, is to expand pollinator habitat while connecting Native youth with the land and each other. In partnership with Mariposa County RCD and the Xerces Society, the project also engages the larger local community in planting butterfly habitat including milkweed, golden yarrow, and other plants intended to support butterflies, including Monarchs, along their migration. The Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation garden and the Miwumati Healing Center are other important and valued resources, with a community garden including conventional and traditional foods. Additional programs wanted include: more integration of cultural narrative and history (including ties to Yosemite), when conversations are taking place around agriculture and working land; and more information about indigenous peoples’ use of the land, their tools and their food, fiber and medicinal plants.

Other current educational efforts of the SSMN include:
• SSMN has a certified food pantry and has a robust food security program helping all local Indigenous people within the area.
• SSMN has partnered with Mariposa RCD on culturally-informed pollinator habitat restoration.
• SSMN has active land stewardship programming to address fuel loading, forest health, native plant restoration, water quality and fish passage. The Tribe’s Cultural Fire and TEK programming seeks to revitalize ancient stewardship practices and create a space for tribal members to teach and learn from each other.
• SSMN has participated in Mariposa’s pilot Farm-to-School program, in partnership with Happy Goat Farm and other local organizations, to share about traditional foods and the cultural significance of traditional food plants. SSMN seeks to expand its initiatives to include LandBack initiatives for traditional agricultural uses, education on the loss of local elk and salmon/trout populations, increased capacity to expand stewardship and educational programming.

FOOD SECURITY AND LOCAL AGRICULTURE AWARENESS:
Food security support in Mariposa County is provided by Manna House and the Kids Market initiative at the Mariposa County Certified Farmers Market. Manna House is a volunteer-run nonprofit organization providing supplemental food assistance to Mariposans in need. It has operated for almost 40 years funded exclusively by cash donations from merchants, churches, and community members.

The Kids Market at the Mariposa County Certified Farmers Market is a monthly feature of the larger weekly Farmers Market that provides youth under 18 years of age with five dollars of “Market Bucks” to purchase local fruits, vegetables, and nuts from farmers. Its objectives are to increase food security, support access to fresh food and local produce, and incentivize families to visit the Farmers Market in the summertime.
Lastly, there are two efforts contributing to helping distribute food and supplies organized on Facebook, one is a seed and plant sharing group that has established a seed sharing cabinet in town for those people wanting to diversify their gardens and grow food. A second effort is called Food for Thought LLC - Produce Pantry, a produce pantry to help farmers get their overage product directly to the community.

Additional programs wanted include: more classes in nutrition; an education and awareness campaigns around how local agriculture is a critical part of building local food security, and of how agriculture can lead the way in sustainable land use practices; more focused programs for seniors about healthy fresh food; and stronger support for local grocery stores and restaurants selling locally raised meat, eggs, and produce.

### 3.4 WHAT WE HEARD FROM THE COMMUNITY

Based on input from monthly Core Team meetings, one-on-one interviews, small virtual meetings, and the community survey conducted in the Fall of 2022, the following key takeaways reflect insights and inputs from stakeholders that shaped and informed the recommended strategies, actions, and partnerships contained in this document.

- Agricultural and working lands provide multiple real benefits that are recognized by the community, e.g. fire prevention, carbon sequestration, water storage, habitat, scenic value, etc.
- There’s an urgency at the western boundary of the county, abutting Merced, to prevent the urban creep from the Central Valley.
- There is a risk of losing ecosystem services benefits when land is converted from agriculture to urban uses.
- Financial incentives are key and the Williamson Act must remain intact.
- Policy, education, and incentives are needed to protect land and the ecosystem services they provide.
- Opportunities for new economic activity in land stewardship, including recycling of outputs (e.g. biomass) as well as ecosystem services and their monetization are the greatest untapped resource.
- Opportunities for workforce development in forestry management and timber are untapped.
- There is an influx of newcomers who buy land that need education on land stewardship.
- An agritourism campaign is needed that balances agriculture with tourism; it could involve education and demonstrate Mariposa County as a working “family farm/ranch” community and leverage the food movement around indigenous foods and products (“cultural agricultural products”).
- The potential conversion of rangeland to nut crops is a key concern of the community, which could dramatically shift land prices and impact water availability and quality if conversion was to occur.
- Cattle prices, drought, and lack of processing facilities are impacting local beef production.
- A major issue for the tribal community is the need for more land to carry out their mission and a “space” to teach their youth, showcase their traditional food ways and stewardship ethic. Currently, the tribal community does not have any land.
- The Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation has been pursuing federal recognition for the last 40 years and implementation of many of their stewardship and cultural awareness programs would be more viable if they were afforded the same rights and opportunities as recognized tribes.

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**WE ARE A RURAL COUNTY WITH ALL OF THOSE RURAL VALUES AND TRADITIONS, PARTICULARLY THOSE OF COMMUNITY. RANCHING AND FARMING ARE WOVEN INTO THE FABRIC OF MARIPOSA’S IDENTITY, NOW AND IN THE FUTURE.**

- Survey Respondent, Fall 2022
CHAPTER 04

STRATEGIES AND IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS.

This Action Plan identifies three focus areas that provide a framework to create greater economic, climate, and cultural resilience for working lands in Mariposa County. Recommended strategies, near-term action steps and implementing partners are described in this Section as well as case studies, resources and potential funding opportunities. The strategies describe programs and projects that range from short-term wins to bold, long-term efforts. To achieve the collective vision for the region’s future, a concerted effort by many agencies and partners working together to address challenges and seize opportunities is needed. The recommended strategies and actions are grouped within three focus areas (refer also to Section 1.3):

FOCUS AREA 01: BUILDING CAPACITY, EDUCATION & AWARENESS

FOCUS AREA 02: WORKING LANDS ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

FOCUS AREA 03: COMMUNITY RESILIENCE INCENTIVES

"WE FEED THE WORLD AND MAINTAIN HABITAT AND ECOSYSTEMS FOR THE COMMUNITY AND WORLD TO ENJOY. IT IS OUR HERITAGE AND RESPONSIBILITY THAT WE TAKE PRIDE IN TRYING TO BE BETTER TODAY THAN WE WERE YESTERDAY."

Survey respondent, Fall 2022
Increasing capacity across community partners to build awareness and educational opportunities is an essential piece of implementing this Action Plan. This focus area provides a set of strategies that emphasize the need for the community to build capacity and create a shared vision that highlights the critical role that working landscapes play in a resilient future.

**FOUNDA TIONAL STRATEGY 1**

*Develop a Mariposa Working Lands Roundtable to improve pathways to the economic success of ranchers and farmers, and enhance trust and collaboration among the agricultural community, the tribal community, County leadership and staff, and other key stakeholders.*

Organized by the UCCE as an open forum format, the roundtable would involve dialogue and learning sessions with a range of stakeholders to foster broader awareness, insight and foresight, and build relationships and alignment between the agricultural and broader community. The roundtable approach would allow for more regular interaction that keeps stakeholders engaged on implementation of the *Working Landscape Conservation Plan (Plan)* and other efforts aimed to revitalize Mariposa County. The Roundtable would:

- Build the social capital and community support for climate resiliency projects,
- Take advantage of the skills, knowledge, and capacity of the wide range of agencies, organizations, private businesses, private landowners, ranchers, farmers, agricultural and community organizations, and tribes in Mariposa County.
- The Roundtable would convene working groups to foster collaboration and implementation around common interests.
- The Roundtable would regularly report on the progress and findings of projects to facilitate a unified understanding, peer learning and promote collaboration, and eliminate duplicative efforts.

**ACTIONS:**

- Convene stakeholders around the *Mariposa County Working Landscape Conservation Plan* to develop priority actions, align implementation leads and partners, and begin next steps to implement the Plan.
- Organize working groups to address specific strategies as listed below in Strategies 1A-1C:
  - **1A:** Roundtable Working Group to reinforce the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation’s essential role in land conservation, stewardship, and climate action efforts with capacity building support.
  - **1B:** Roundtable Working Group focused on building capacity to increase climate resilience.
  - **1C:** Roundtable Working Group focused on increasing educational and mentoring programs for ranchers, farmers and producers.
- Foster dialogue with allied initiatives such as Capay Valley Vision for shared learning and F3- Fresno to Merced Future of Food partners to identify opportunities for collaboration, shared learning and agriculture-related economic development partnership.
**IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS:** UCCE, County (Planning, Economic Development, Ag Commissioner), EDC, SSMN, Other community organizations and agencies

**FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES:** Strategic Growth Council, *Regional Climate Collaboratives (RCC) Program*

**CASE STUDIES & RESOURCES:** Capay Valley Vision; Ventura Ag Futures Alliance; Rural Urban Connection program at Ventura County UCCE; Valley Vision’s Food and Agriculture Program; F3- Fresno to Merced Future of Food

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**SUPPORTIVE STRATEGIES**

**+ STRATEGY 1A**

*Develop a Roundtable Working Group to reinforce the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation’s essential role in land conservation, stewardship, and climate action efforts with capacity building support.*

Preserving and protecting traditional cultural resources and landscapes of the SSMN is a critical component of the Plan but the financial and human resources and expertise must be supported. To protect, preserve, and promote their traditions, the SSMN would benefit from increased capacity to grow opportunities to educate SSMN youth, expand traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) practices, showcase traditional food ways, demonstrate land stewardship ethics to the broader community, and expand existing organizational capacity and coordination with other organizations and agencies to develop land conservation projects. The work that the Tribe does on its homelands invariably contributes to the resiliency of the overall shared landscapes and communities.

**ACTIONS:**

- Explore opportunities to take advantage of State and federal funding that exists for tribes to:
  - 1) build capacity to develop land acquisition and stewardship projects and plans,
  - 2) finance acquisition projects,
  - 3) strengthen capacity to implement climate smart landscape management, and
  - 4) educate tribal youth on conservation and TEK practices, focused on building conservation jobs.

- Regularly convene community partners to inform and educate them on the SSMN’s efforts toward self-determination, self-governance, and acknowledgment through the federal recognition process. Develop platforms for expanding the breadth of awareness from state and local agencies, and community and regional organizations, and Mariposa County visitors.

**IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS:** SSMN, County Planning, UCCE

**FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES:** DoC, *SALC Capacity Grants*; CNRA, *Tribal Nature-Based Solutions Program*; DoC, *Climate Smart Land Management Program*; Tribal Youth Nature-Based Solutions Conservation Corps

**CASE STUDIES & RESOURCES:** Hoopa Valley Tribe Agricultural Conservation and Resiliency Plan and General Plan
**STRATEGY 1B**

Develop a Roundtable Working Group focused on building capacity and facilitating collaborative implementation to increase climate resilience.

Leverage the skills, knowledge, and capacity of the wide range of agencies, organizations, private businesses, private landowners, agricultural and community organizations and tribes in Mariposa County to take action on a regional scale to build climate resilience. Many are already working on a particular climate hazard and promoting coordination and building capacity among these organizations can help build trust, increase competencies, and ultimately share the benefits and responsibilities of implementing this Action Plan.

**ACTIONS:**

- Explore the Climate Smart Land Management Program grant to fund capacity building, establishment and implementation of pilot/demonstration projects, and education and outreach for developing a pipeline of climate smart landscape management projects.
- Collaborate with the County on the development of a Climate Smart Working Lands Investment Plan to guide WLMD investments (see Foundational Strategy 3).
- Explore innovative solutions to support succession planning and secure equitable land tenure and resources to grow a new generation of farmers and ranchers.

**IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS:** County Planning, UCCE, Sierra Foothills Conservancy, Mariposa RCD, SSMN, MCFAC, Fire Safe Council, Sierra Nevada Conservancy

**FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES:** DoC, Climate Smart Land Management Program; UC ANR Climate Smart Ag Technical Assistance; Restore California

**CASE STUDIES & RESOURCES:** See CA FarmLink case studies on various approaches; American Farmland Trust’s Farmland Access Fund; Farmer Veteran Coalition; CAFF, FarmLink, Center for Land Based Learning

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**STRATEGY 1C**

Develop a Roundtable Working Group focused on continuing and maintaining best practices and passing on knowledge by increasing educational and mentoring programs for new and future ranchers, farmers and producers on various topics and for diverse land types, with a focus on developing demonstration or pilot projects. These topics/projects could include:

- The economics of starting a farm;
- best practices and lessons learned regarding agri-tourism;
- the continued integration of wildlife and habitat protection into agricultural practices;
- prescribed burns on agricultural lands;
- regenerative ranching and farming resources and practices;
- soil improvement for a drying climate;
- water conservation resources and storage techniques; and
- urban forestry

**IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS:** UCCE, RCD, NRCS, FFA, Happy Goat Farm

**CASE STUDIES & RESOURCES:** California Farm Demonstration Network; Resilerator Program, Noble Research Institute; USDA California Climate Hub
STRATEGY 1D

Create a “Conservation Jobs Training” program to build capacity and catalyze job growth in the conservation sector.

Empower citizens of Mariposa (youth in particular) through technical assistance, education, outreach, and training pathways into conservation jobs that drive Mariposa’s stewardship economy. Identify pathways to support job training for systematically excluded community representatives. Engage the High School’s career pathways program, and FFA and 4-H chapters in creating vocational training opportunities and awareness about jobs in the conservation and climate-smart agriculture sectors. Develop partnerships with nearby community colleges and universities to strengthen exposure to career pathways as well as continuing education for adults to expand knowledge and practice of conservation and agriculture. This could also include training on financing agricultural operations and/or how to apply for grants.

**ACTIONS:**

- Convene partners to prioritize needs, set goals, and explore funding opportunities for implementing partners and building capacity.
- Coordinate with the development of The Hatchery project so that tenants of the project can collaborate on and participate in a “Conservation Jobs Training” program that catalyzes job growth in the conservation sector, including vegetation management, landscape restoration, environmental education, and outdoor recreation.

**IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS:** UCCE (4-H), RCD, SSMN, Motherlode Job Training, FFA, Mariposa High School, County Building Capacity, Education & Awareness

**FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES:** SGC, Regional Climate Collaboratives (RCC) Program, DoC, Climate Smart Land Management Program, California Conservation Corp, Tribal Youth Nature-Based Solutions Conservation Corps

**CASE STUDIES & RESOURCES:** Grizzly Corps, 100Jobs, Climate Corps AmeriCorps, UC Merced Agricultural and Grassland management programs

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STRATEGY 1E

Develop school childrens’ foundational knowledge about agriculture and related agricultural career pathways.

Build on and enhance existing formal and informal programs at the County’s school by supporting school gardens, exchange visits with local farms, farm to school programs, curriculum around climate-smart agriculture, and activities that engage local conservation agriculture professionals.

**ACTIONS:**

- Convene partners to prioritize needs, set goals, and explore funding opportunities for implementing partners.
- Identify partners and resources to support more school field trips to farms, more hands-on projects at schools and an ongoing Farm to School program.
- Strengthen curriculum offerings that address organic, regenerative agriculture and present information about local environmental issues.
- Coordinate with Strategy 2C and develop curriculum for training the next generation on butchery.
- Increase high school vocational training opportunities around a range of agriculture and working lands stewardship careers, in partnership the RCD, local colleges, and the Sierra Foothills Conservancy.
- Identify professional development opportunities for teachers.
- Develop irrigation water solutions for schools with very limited water supply for their school gardens.

**IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS:** School District, SFC, 4-H, FFA, MCHS, Happy Goat Farm, Master Gardener Program

**FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES:** Farm to School Programs,

**CASE STUDIES & RESOURCES:** Center for Ecoliteracy, Center for Land-Based Learning
“THE HATCHERY” VISION

Named both for the site’s historic use as a fish hatchery and for the proposed development’s role in nurturing and supporting the growth of local businesses, The Hatchery is imagined as an innovation hub for existing and emergent local businesses and nonprofits that are aligned with the wider Mariposa Creek Parkway vision. In addition to anchoring and activating the Phase IV segment of the Mariposa Creek Parkway, The Hatchery would offer a creative and flexible work environment for organizations and entrepreneurs engaged in forest management, environmental restoration, land use planning, green building and construction, renewable energy, and environmental education work in Mariposa County.

The Hatchery would be situated in close proximity to existing and future mixed-income multi-family communities as well as a burgeoning network of multi-use recreational trails. Coupled with innovative architecture and site design strategies, The Hatchery will support the growth of existing and emergent businesses in key industries, empowering local employers to create sustainable, high-quality jobs whose outputs would result in safer, more balanced landscapes and ecosystems—i.e., economic vitality through ecological resilience.

In addition to subsidized rents and shared resources, The Hatchery will provide a vibrant environment where qualified businesses can share ideas, develop partnerships, and collaborate to pursue growth strategies that benefit all participants. For example, Hatchery organizations could partner to pursue major state and federal funding to continue and expand efforts.

**STRATEGY 1F**

**Build on the Mariposa County Creative Placemaking Strategy to support the Art, Cultural & Agricultural Creative Placemaking Program that leverages design and visual/media/performing arts to explore the many historic and contemporary stories related to the cultural and agricultural legacies in Mariposa.**

Such a program could also serve as an educational tool to highlight the impact and historical significance of agriculture in the County for visitors.

**ACTIONS:**

- Convene partners to prioritize needs, set goals, and explore funding opportunities for implementing partners.
- Inventory potential activities to be explored such as: The creation of wayside signage along main roads (e.g., Hwy 49, Hwy 140); interactive digital maps that highlight current and historical agricultural landmarks; programs that connect placemaking with land stewardship; and artistic, culinary, intellectual, recreational and community oriented experiences that connect people with the land and share nuanced stories of the County’s agricultural heritage.
- Participate in the Mariposa Working Lands Roundtable to elevate awareness of the Program and recruit other organizations to participate and shape the content of the Program, including coordination with other AWLCP Strategies.
- Develop a Year 1 Pilot workplan and timeline and seek funding to implement.

**IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS:** Mariposa Arts Council, County Planning and Economic Development, YMCTB, SSMN

**FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES:** California Arts Council, National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH)

**CASE STUDIES & RESOURCES:** Working Lands, Working Artists, a project from the Mariposa County Creative Placemaking Strategy, Center for Community Progress
Increasing capacity across community partners to build awareness and educational opportunities is an essential piece of implementing this Action Plan.
Sustained economic opportunities are key to maintaining and enhancing the rural lifestyle rooted in farming, ranching, and the County’s unique natural resources. The County’s beautiful working landscapes also contribute to the region’s economy by attracting employers, workers and visitors alike. This focus area provides comprehensive agricultural economic development strategies that build upon the County’s existing working lands assets to secure the viability of the agricultural economy into the future.

FOUNDATIONAL STRATEGY 2

Adopt an ordinance (or a program) to create a local food and cultural core for the town of Mariposa. This revitalization effort could connect the County’s working landscapes and agricultural enterprises to the local community and visitors in the town of Mariposa by spotlighting the County’s distinctive cultural, artistic and working lands identity.

The Food & Cultural Core could enable the expansion of “farm-to-table” and “Made in Mariposa” businesses through articulated transformational strategies that strengthen the downtown’s economy and vibrancy by providing opportunities for:

+ development and incubation,
+ increased opportunities for distribution,
+ value-added processing,
+ farm to consumer retail and food service businesses, and
+ increased visibility of Made in Mariposa products.

Through targeted streamlining, financial incentives and development of a specialized marketing and branding effort, the evolution of a Food & Cultural Core could amplify and honor Mariposa County’s unique cultural and agricultural legacies while acting as an economic development strategy. See also Strategies 2C and 2G that are integral parts of this Foundational Strategy.

ACTIONS:

■ Identify and convene partners to prioritize needs, set a vision for the district, and explore case studies on the establishment of similar districts. Continue to work with this group to develop ordinance or program language and follow on strategies.

■ Compile and develop local and regional market data to inform ordinance or program structure and transformational strategies based on a full understanding of market demand and capacity. This would include identifying “opportunity” sites in the downtown core. Strategies that the ordinance or program could support and catalyze, include:

  + Economic vitality: A focus on capital, incentives, and other economic and financial tools to assist new and existing businesses while catalyzing property development and/or investment,
  + Design: Support and incentives for creating and/or enhancing physical and visual assets in the downtown core, and
  + Promotion: Establishment of the downtown core as the “center” of the community and hub of cultural and economic activity, while showcasing Mariposa’s unique characteristics that are tied to its working lands identity.

■ Engage stakeholders in sustained and inclusive community engagement to create a strong foundation for a sustainable revitalization effort based on highlighting the food and culture of Mariposa, including cultivating partnerships, community involvement, and resources for the district.
**IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS:** County Planning and Economic Development, Mariposa County Chamber of Commerce, YMCTB

**ORGANIZATIONAL PARTNERS:** MiM, SSMN, Sierra Foothill Conservancy, Mariposa County Arts Council, Rotary Club, local food and beverage merchants

**FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES:** County; USDA’s **Local Food Promotion Program (LFPP)** and/or Farmers Market promotion program; SBA Loans

**CASE STUDIES & RESOURCES:** Burlington; VT Agricultural Processing and Energy District; EPA Local Food, Local Places Toolkit; La Cucina (low-income food business entrepreneur incubator)

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**SUPPORTIVE STRATEGIES**

**VALUE ADDED PROCESSING: STRATEGY 2A**

*Develop small-scale animal processing for local livestock producers.*

Mobile meat processing units can address the challenges of economies of scale and can serve multiple small operations. Local animal processing at a scale that would be associated with a mobile-processing unit or other type of processing operation that is geared towards smaller local producers will typically lack the economies of scale that will make locally-processed meat products directly cost-competitive with conventionally-processed and marketed meat products, such as what is typically sold in supermarkets.

**ACTIONS:**

- Convene partners to prioritize needs, set goals, explore case studies on meat processing feasibility studies and implemented projects, and identify funding for a needs assessment.
- Conduct a feasibility study and needs assessment to understand the demand for and scale of a potential future regional meat processing facility and the key considerations in starting up such a facility, including:
  - best practices in addressing food safety and quality assurance,
  - optimal locations for such a facility in the region,
  - the regulatory and permitting framework governing such facilities,
  - financial considerations, and
  - the availability of a skilled workforce and needed training programs (see also Strategy 1D).

**IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS:** SFC, County Agricultural Commissioner, County Economic Development, County Environmental Health, USDA Food Safety, Erickson Ranch and Hornitos Beef and other community ranchers and meat producers

**FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES:** USDA’s, **Value-Added Producer Grants (VAPG)**; Mariposa County Business Assistance/Microenterprise Loan Program (CDBG); U.S. EDA funding through Central Sierra Economic Development District, **CDFA Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program**

**CASE STUDIES & RESOURCES:** Meat Processing Feasibility Studies (case studies); Mobile Poultry Processing Unit; Niche Meat Processing Assistance Network, A New Era for Meat Processing in California? Challenges and Opportunities
**VALUE ADDED PROCESSING: STRATEGY 2B**

**Promote consumer direct sales of locally-produced meats.**

Beyond local meat processing, consumer direct sales of locally produced meats is an opportunity to capture the retail margins from the food production value chain within the local area. This also creates the opportunity for producers to interact directly with their consumers to educate them about their products and create stronger customer relationships. Mariposa County could look to support cooperation between local ranchers and butchers/processors to create a network strong enough to support a distribution website such as this.

**ACTIONS:**

- Convene a working group to prioritize needs, set goals, and explore case studies.
- Conduct a market study to understand demand, opportunities and regional need.
- Conduct a review and assessment of the regulatory and permitting framework associated with consumer direct sales.

**IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS:** County Economic Development, County Environmental Health, USDA Food Safety, Erickson Ranch and Hornitos Beef and other community ranchers and meat producers

**FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES:** USDA’s, Value-Added Producer Grants (VAPG), USDA Local Foods Promotion Program; Mariposa County Business Assistance/Microenterprise Loan Program (CDBG)

**CASE STUDIES & RESOURCES:** Hornitos Beef, Buy Ranch Direct

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**VALUE ADDED PROCESSING: STRATEGY 2C**

**Provide incentives for the establishment of a brick and mortar Butcher Shop.**

A traditional butcher shop that sells meats from a variety of local producers is another opportunity to capture more of the meat supply chain value within the local community. This strategy is directly connected to Foundational Strategy 2 regarding the establishment of a Food and Cultural Core for Mariposa and 2G and 2H regarding the establishment of a local food branding. A butcher shop that provides cut and wrap services on a local scale and has a retail storefront and an online marketplace could be beneficial to the downtown core and Mariposa County as a whole in addressing issues with accessing processing. Relying on a local butcher or butchers could enable Mariposa County to capture not only the value created from meat processing, but also the value created from distribution and sales.

**ACTIONS:**

- Conduct a review and assessment of the regulatory and permitting framework associated with establishing a local butcher shop.
- Identify the barriers within USDA regulations on the establishment of a local butcher shop
- Identify types of economic development incentives that the County of Mariposa can offer to recruit a butcher shop.
- Identify potential partners/operators and optimal location.
- Coordinate with Strategy 1D in identifying and developing workforce training programs to meet the need for agricultural jobs.

**IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS:** County Economic Development, County Environmental Health, USDA Food Safety, YMCTB, Erickson Ranch and Hornitos Beef and other community ranchers and meat producers
**FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES:** USDA’s, *Value-Added Producer Grants (VAPG)*; Mariposa County Business Assistance/Microenterprise Loan Program (CDBG); *CDFA, Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program*

**CASE STUDIES & RESOURCES:** *Ranchers Customer Butchering*

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**VALUE ADDED PROCESSING: STRATEGY 2D**

*Develop, implement and scale forest biomass for energy generation.*

Building on the experience from the Mariposa Biomass Project, determine the scaling potential for additional biomass energy production. Given the amount of forest land in Mariposa County, combined with the need for better forest management practices that will, among other actions, remove excess fuels from fire-prone areas, the use of forest biomass for energy generation represents an attractive economic development activity. Using local forest biomass for energy generation helps to reduce wildfire hazards, but can also create local economic activity by converting the forest-thinning by-products to a marketable product (electricity).

**ACTIONS:**

- Assess successes and challenges of the Mariposa Biomass Project and determine feasibility for a second facility with the potential for developing a micro grid for Mariposa County.

**IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS:** Mariposa RCD, UCCE Woody Biomass Advisor

**FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES:** Private equity, grants, loans, tax credit investor equity

**CASE STUDIES & RESOURCES:** *Mariposa Biomass Project; Tuolumne Biomass LLC, North Fork Bioenergy Plan*

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**VALUE ADDED PROCESSING: STRATEGY 2E**

*Explore the opportunities for manufacturing products using locally harvested wood.*

Smaller scale, sustainable harvesting of local trees/biomass could be an opportunity to supply materials for new forest products in a way that helps the State meet its climate goals. Although the volume would likely only be a small fraction of historic timber harvest, the value added through local manufacturing could be substantial. Financing from this program could be used to help finance projects such as the Mariposa Biomass Project and other local projects that would utilize biomass to create other marketable products, helping to achieve fuels reduction/forest resiliency goals as well as create new economic activity, including, but not limited to: (A) Clean energy production, except combustion biomass conversion; (B) Advanced construction materials; (C) Forestry equipment needed to achieve the state’s goals for forest and vegetation management treatments; Public art that highlights the working landscapes of Mariposa County.

**IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS:** County Economic Development, RCD, MCFAC, MFSC, SSMN, UCCE Woody Biomass Advisor, US Forest Service

**FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES:** CA Forest Sector Economic Stimulus component of Wildfire and Forest Resilience Early Action Package for 2020-2021 (SB 85); *Mariposa County Business Assistance/Microenterprise Loan Program* (CDBG; U.S. EDA funding via Central Sierra Economic Development District; CDBG funding via CA HCD Small Cities economic development program

**CASE STUDIES & RESOURCES:** *Fabric Workshop Mass Timber Products and Services Company*
**VALUE ADDED PROCESSING: STRATEGY 2F**

*Enhance zoning to encourage the establishment of infrastructure and support uses that facilitate the growth of the agricultural economy.*

As the County pursues a zoning ordinance update, ensure that it clearly defines uses compatible with agriculture and accommodates value-added processing facilities and agritourism uses through changes to Agriculture and other compatible zone districts. This strategy implements General Plan Implementation Measure 10-5a.

**ACTION:**
- Research existing ordinances and regulations to identify specific provisions that could be updated to enhance or expand utilization of agricultural lands.
- Utilize the Ag Roundtable in Foundational Strategy 1 to develop the goals of the potential updates and explore, together, the modifications to achieve those goals. This work also informs the Food and Cultural Core establishment in Foundational Strategy 2.
- Consider specific zoning tools and/or the establishment of different sub-areas to incentivize, catalyze and diversify the working lands economy. Potential tools include:
  - **Cluster Subdivision Requirements:** Ensure that clustering of homes is reinforced in subdivisions so that the retention of large contiguous lands for farming and ranching are retained.
  - **Agricultural Industry Zones:** Identify and recognize suitable “opportunity” areas to bolster the development of agricultural “infrastructure” such as areas ideal for agricultural packing, warehousing, processing and/or distribution of agricultural products.
  - **Expanding uses and or reforms to regulations and development standards compatible with agriculture:** Explore tools, uses or incentives that could give farmers and ranchers more flexibility in utilizing their land.
  - **Agritourism:** Explore uses and/or specific areas where agricultural tourism activities could make sense while ensuring the safety of ongoing agricultural activities. (See also Strategy 2G).
- Assess zoning, local permitting and related ordinances to identify barriers to efficient and effective planning and implementation of establishing infrastructure and/or climate-beneficial agricultural practices.

**IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS:** County Planning, SFC

**CASE STUDIES & RESOURCES:** Clarksburg Agricultural District Overlay Zone, Yolo County
BRANDING & AGRITOURISM: STRATEGY 2G

Build on the “Made in Mariposa” program and existing tourism programs and add a new “Explore Mariposa” program to support the growing awareness of the importance of working lands to the health and resiliency of the region and the State.

Build on parallel strategies described in this document to create a positive feedback loop between land use policy, stewardship programs, and economic development efforts. On-farm education, agritourism and the establishment of a “Food and Cultural Core” in downtown Mariposa are all key pieces to the success of building a successful and visible brand.

ACTIONS:

■ Conduct outreach to farms and ranches that currently have, or would like to have, agritourism offerings, to address needs and challenges (e.g. regulatory and liability considerations) and to assist with promotional opportunities such as through the Yosemite Mariposa County Tourism Bureau (YMCTB). Collaborate with the YMCTB, to develop a more robust listing of agriculture-related activities and venues to promote these offerings.

■ Coordinate with Strategy 1F, to support an Art, Cultural & Agricultural Creative Placemaking Program.

■ Explore the feasibility of creating a community agriculture hub in the town of Mariposa with a garden, mill, processing tools, kitchen, and education and agri-tourism opportunities for a range of audiences, including ranchers, farmers, home gardeners, visitors, seniors and visitors. Coordinate with Foundational Strategies 1 and 2.

■ Strengthen ‘locally-grown food’ promotion and awareness by working with Made in Mariposa to increase presence of this sector on their website, and by raising the profile of local grocery stores and restaurants that feature locally raised meat, eggs, and produce.

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS: Arts Council, YMCTB

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES: CDFA Community Resilience Centers program (if renewed)

CASE STUDIES & RESOURCES: Locally Grown Sonoma, Discover Coyote Valley

SUSTAINED ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES ARE KEY TO MAINTAINING AND ENHANCING THE RURAL LIFESTYLE ROOTED IN RANCHING, FARMING, AND THE COUNTY’S UNIQUE NATURAL RESOURCES."

Survey respondent, Fall 2022
**BRANDING & AGRITOURISM: STRATEGY 2H**

Establish an agricultural branding cooperative and “community of practice” made of farmers and ranchers to create a community of collaboration that builds a Mariposa grown brand and develops a shared mission to grow value-added production, reach local and broader markets, and showcase agricultural and cultural products through local, regional, and Yosemite gateway retail outlets.

**ACTIONS:**
- Convene partners to prioritize needs, set goals, explore branding concepts for Mariposa agricultural producers. Coordinate with Foundational Strategies 1 and 2.
- Build on the Made in Mariposa effort to support meat producing members to establish a logo for locally produced meat.

**IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS:** UCCE, County, YMCTB, Farm Bureau

**FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES:** USDA’s Regional Food System Partnerships (RFSP)

**CASE STUDIES & RESOURCES:** Capay Valley Vision, Chamber of Commerce, Farm Bureau

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**BRANDING & AGRITOURISM: STRATEGY 2I**

Establish a Ranch/Farm Days Program.

Special events that are hosted on farms and ranches, County fairgrounds and/or rural towns can attract visitors from surrounding urban areas who are interested in visiting working farms and ranches, or who are attracted to a venue, to learn about the agricultural products of the area and agricultural practices. These types of events may be held at multiple times of the year and/or be focused on hosting specific groups, such as schoolchildren.

**ACTIONS:**
- Convene partners to prioritize needs, set goals, explore event ideas and potential locations.
- Explore opportunities to revitalize and modernize the Mariposa County Fairgrounds to make it a fresh focal point and multi-functional resource for events at the County, including a Ranch/Farm days program.
- Consider multiple signature event venues for the program, including the Fairgrounds, specific ranches or farms, downtown Mariposa and/or the town of Hornitos.
- Coordinate with Strategy 1F to support the Art, Cultural & Agricultural Creative Placemaking Program.

**IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS:** Merced-Mariposa Cattlemen’s Association, Mariposa County Farm Bureau, Mariposa Agrinature Association, Friends of the Fairgrounds, Erickson Ranch and Hornitos Beef and other community

**FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES:** Sponsorship fees, admission fees; CDFA 2022 Community Resilience Centers Program (assuming a future round of funding)

**CASE STUDIES & RESOURCES:** Day On the Farm, Santa Cruz County
BRANDING & AGRITOURISM: STRATEGY 2J

Establish an annual food-related “Made in Mariposa” festival in downtown Mariposa.

Food-related festivals can include educational components such as those associated with Ranch/Farm Days, but they place a greater focus on a signature local crop or product and enhancing the local identity as a producer of that crop, by showcasing local foods products related to a single crop. This can include building on the “Taste of Mariposa” event, on-site dining, cooking contests and demonstrations, and sales of products to go, in addition to educational activities. In the Mariposa County context, this could involve locally-produced meats or another locally produced crop. These events are typically held annually, so that the event can build a following of both vendors/exhibitors as well as visitors.

ACTIONS:
- Convene partners to prioritize needs, set goals, explore festival ideas.
- Consider multiple signature event venues for the festival, including ranches or farms, downtown Mariposa and/or the town of Hornitos or similar areas.
- Coordinate with Strategy 1F to support the Art, Cultural & Agricultural Creative Placemaking Program.

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS: Made in Mariposa Association, Mariposa County Economic Development, EDC, County Chamber of Commerce, Yosemite/Mariposa County Tourism Bureau

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES: Vending fees, sponsorship fees, admission fees

CASE STUDIES & RESOURCES: Madera Pomegranate, Fruit, and Nut Festival

BRANDING & AGRITOURISM: STRATEGY 2K

Establish a Native American Educational and Events Center to serve as a gathering place where Native culture is celebrated.

Educational and cultural activities are an opportunity to attract visitors to Mariposa County. This type of activity can leverage Mariposa County’s working lands by focusing on the traditional practices of Native Americans and their relationship with the land via events to educate and build awareness of the County’s Native American heritage, historic land stewardship practices, and traditional foods from the local area. The Center could consist of a museum and/or gallery space, a collection of Native cultural products and artifacts, a library, archives, a “land-to-table” teaching kitchen/restaurant, cultural programming and events, a native plant demonstration garden, and an education department for both sustaining generational knowledge and building meaningful and appropriate connections to indigenous knowledge and experiences. A component of the Center’s educational programming could focus on traditional Native land stewardship practices and traditions of gathering, hunting, and fishing.

ACTIONS:
- Convene implementing partners to prioritize needs, define the center’s purpose, set goals, identify potential funding opportunities, acquisition strategies, as well as optimum locations for the center.
- Explore potential sites within the town of Mariposa, including the Frost Shop site, where visibility and accessibility is high and where it can take advantage of and contribute to the vitality and identity of the downtown Core.
- Research successful models that integrate education, cultural preservation, and community outreach to celebrate and promote Native American history, culture and traditions such as the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center in Albuquerque (see below for link).
- Develop a comprehensive program and fundraising strategy that draws from successful models as well as stakeholder outreach with the implementing partners.

**IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS:** SSMN, County Planning and Economic Development, MAC, YMCTB, SFC

**FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES:** USDA, *Rural Placemaking Innovation Challenge (RPIC)*; California Cultural and Historical Endowment; Office of Indian Economic Development, Santa Fe Natural Tobacco Company Foundation; U.S. Dept of Interior Office of Indian Affairs: Tribal Tourism Grant Program

**CASE STUDIES & RESOURCES:** [Indian Pueblo Cultural Center](http://www.ipcc.org), [American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association (AIANTA)](https://www.aianta.org)

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**INDIAN PUEBLO CULTURAL CENTER (IPCC), ALBUQUERQUE, NM**

The Indian Pueblo Cultural Center (IPCC) Campus serves as a gathering place where Pueblo Culture is celebrated through creative and cultural experiences, while providing economic opportunities to Pueblo and local communities. It is located at the heart of nearly 80 acres of land owned by the 19 Pueblos and governed by the 19 Pueblos District. The IPCC first opened its doors to the public in 1976, seeking to do justice to the history and accomplishments of the Pueblo people of New Mexico. Since then it has been a place that facilitates understanding of and learning about the Pueblo culture, landscape, legacy, and story of continuance for both Pueblo and non-Pueblo audiences, where Pueblo people can tell their story through permanent and rotating exhibits, ongoing cultural and educational events, a cultural dance program, and an on-site restaurant.
Healthy landscapes can sequester and store carbon, limit future greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere, protect people and nature from the impacts of the changing climate, and build resilience. This focus area provides strategies that bolster broadscale climate resilience while recognizing land conservation and ecosystem services as assets to the community worthy of investment.

**FOUNDBATIONAL STRATEGY 3.1**

*Establish a Mariposa County Working Lands Resiliency District (WLRD).*

Pursuant to [California Senate Bill 852](https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billtext.xhtml?bill_id=20212022%2Fba00852), mobilize a bold response focused on protecting, supporting and investing in the County’s working landscapes. The District’s mission would be to work closely with the agricultural and working lands community to identify strategic investments to minimize the impacts of climate events, to encourage equitable public investment and to increase awareness of the important benefits working lands provide to Mariposa County residents and visitors. The WLRD would develop a financing mechanism and mobilize investments in:

1. **Education and awareness** around funding for emergency response, recovery, and prevention;
2. **Protecting carbon stocks** through land conservation and climate smart agricultural practices;
3. **Increase investment opportunities** for current low-income/indebted, BIPOC, or other systemically excluded community representative ranchers and farmers that are contributing to climate resilient working lands, and
4. **Scaling up and improving community** infrastructure to sustain and withstand the effects of catastrophic climate events.

**ACTIONS:**

- Determine the financing mechanism(s), such as issuance of bonds serviced by property tax increment revenues, etc.
- Convene agricultural and other stakeholders as a “scoping group” to develop criteria for investment activities, e.g. implementation of conservation practices and wildfire risk reduction measures, conservation easements, recreation and resiliency projects, outreach and technical assistance, etc.
- Develop and adopt a Climate Smart Working Lands Investment Plan to guide investments of the WLRD, aimed at projects that reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and increase carbon sequestration. Build on the initial Ecosystem Services Assessment of the AAWLCP to develop an overall funding approach that ensures that the most impactful actions will be funded and implemented.

**IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS:** Lead: County, Partners: SFC, UCCE, Sierra Nevada Conservancy

**FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES:** SGC, [Regional Climate Collaboratives (RCC) Program](https://www.regionalclimatecollaboratives.org/)

**CASE STUDIES & RESOURCES:** [SB 852, establishing Climate Resiliency Districts](https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billtext.xhtml?bill_id=20212022%2Fba00852); [Sonoma County Regional Climate Protection Authority, (RCPA)](https://www.sonomaclimate.org/); [Santa Clara County Agricultural Resilience Incentives program](https://www.sccag.org/programs/agricultural-resilience-incentives-program)
FOUNDATIONAL STRATEGY 3.2

Develop a holistic Regional Working Lands Conservation Program within the County to utilize stronger incentives to facilitate investments in strategic working lands.

This program could include:

- standing up an Agricultural Easement Program (ACE), which could in part be funded by the WLRD and mitigation fees (refer to Foundational Strategy 3.1);
- developing a County agricultural mitigation program in conjunction with the ACE program that requires a mitigation fee for development that converts agricultural land to other incompatible uses;
- exploring opportunities to strengthen the Mariposa County Williamson Act Program and increase participation in the Program, and
- developing a lobbying campaign to reinstate and secure State subvention payments for Williamson Act payments.

ACTIONS:

- Secure grant funding to support ACE program development.
- Develop an acquisition and stewardship plan for future voluntary participation of landowners. Key factors include:
  - The County, Sierra Foothill Conservancy, and other organizational stakeholders to collaborate in the planning process.
  - Building on the Ecosystem Services Assessment and Terra Count, develop and adopt a preferred acquisition strategy, using refined mapping to identify strategic properties that maximize carbon and other environmental co-benefits, and which are essential to sustain the local agricultural economy.
  - Building on the Recreation and Resiliency Plan, supplement the preferred acquisition strategy based on the potential of agriculture and working lands to support the development of trails in the western part of the county (and potentially connect to other locations in the county).

FUNDING CLIMATE-SMART FARMING AND RANCHING PRACTICES - THE AGRICULTURAL RESILIENCE INCENTIVE GRANT PROGRAM

The County of Santa Clara Board of Supervisors established the Agricultural Resilience Incentive (ARI) Grant Program in 2019 with the purpose of providing voluntary financial incentives to farmers and ranchers who are stewarding agricultural lands in the County for enhanced natural resource management and climate change resilience and mitigation.

The ARI grant program serves as a catalyst for regional efforts to increase the beneficial ecosystem services provided by agriculture and specifically to advance climate change goals by improving soil health and sequestering atmospheric carbon. In doing so, the program also aims to increase the resilience of the agricultural community.

The voluntary financial incentives made available through the ARI grant program enable farmers and ranchers to adopt or experiment with improved agricultural resource management practices and, in exchange, the County and its residents benefit from cost-effective resource management that can reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve agricultural resilience, and deter sprawl development. Over time these soil health practices will accrue value to the agricultural operation as well, improving water and nutrient management, among other benefits.
• Exploring other innovative types of easements being used in other communities that provide additional resources for utilizing beneficial environmental and social practices. Consideration could also include how to give priority to small ranchers and farmers as well as invest in models to increase diversity of working lands ownership.

• Identify and implement a sustainable financial/funding model, including SALC grant funding, agricultural mitigation fees (Land Use Policy AG-1.1) and/or real estate transaction fees or other fees or assessments. Determine how the development of a WLRD could fund easement projects (see Foundational Strategy 3.1).

• Establish the administrative structure for the ACE program, including the feasibility of developing a central ACE Program administrator.

■ Develop an outreach program and related materials to educate landowners about the benefits of conservation easements.

■ Develop a County agricultural mitigation program that works in conjunction with an ACE program that develops a compensatory mitigation standard for projects that convert agricultural land to non-agricultural uses.

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS: County (Planning, Agricultural Advisory Committee, Mariposa Board of Supervisors), SFC

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES: SALC Planning Grant

CASE STUDIES & RESOURCES: San Diego PACE Program; Conserving California’s Harvest, A Model Mitigation Program and Ordinance for Local Governments

HORNITOS RANCH CONSERVATION EASEMENT

One of Sierra Foothill Conservancy’s most recent conservation easement acquisition projects, the 6,972-acre Hornitos Ranch, presents a model for how community partnerships and working lands conservation supports long-term community resiliency. This iconic ranch located in western Mariposa county is the centerpiece of SFC’s Merced River Conservation Corridor. This focus area aims to connect and protect private working landscapes, with public land, to create a 20,000 acre corridor for wildlife in the Merced River watershed, while conserving valuable historic and cultural resources, along with critical wildlife habitat and water resources. The Hornitos Ranch is adjacent to the Merced River and Lake McSwain Public Recreation Area, boasts over three miles of Merced riverbank, 31 miles of streams, nine miles of wildlife corridor, 42 acres of riparian habitat, 146 acres of U.S. Fish and Wildlife designated critical habitat for vernal pool species, 5,084 acres of blue oak savannah and 1,700 acres of annual grassland. The Hornitos Ranch Conservation Easement addresses statewide conservation goals by preventing fragmentation of working landscapes, future pollution and degradation of air, water and natural resources. The conservation easement held by SFC will permanently ensure the reliability of local water supplies and protect 11 square miles of adaptation corridor for native species in the face of a changing climate.

SFC’s partners include landowner Hornitos Land Company, LLC, and the partners who funded the purchase of the conservation easement, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the California Department of Conservation, the Wildlife Conservation Board and the California Wildlife Foundation.
**SUPPORTIVE STRATEGIES**

**STRATEGY 3A**

*Build capacity within the County to holistically support the implementation of this Action Plan and the working lands economy and investments.*

This would include creating a program manager position and support staff that would provide assistance and oversight for working lands activities, including administering the implementation of this Plan, the Regional Working Lands Conservation Program (Strategy 3.2), and the operations of the WLRD (Strategy 3.1). This strategy Implements GP AG Goal 10-1.

**ACTIONS:**
- Develop job descriptions that include a program manager and potential needed staff based on assessment of responsibilities and successes and challenges of similar efforts in other counties/agencies.
- Identify existing staff resources, budget resources and potential funding sources to support the creation of support staff.
- Explore hiring a grant writer that would be responsible for researching, writing, and coordinating grant application processes to secure funding for the implementation of this Action Plan.

**IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS:** County-wide agencies  
**FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES:** UC ANR Climate Smart Ag Technical Assistance  
**CASE STUDIES & RESOURCES:** Santa Clara County Ag Planner Manager job description

**STRATEGY 3B**

*Identify and secure funding for scaling carbon farming and other nature-based solutions countywide.*

With increased emphasis on slowing the effects of climate change, at both the State and federal levels, there is recognition that maintaining working landscapes can help to sequester carbon and provide other types of valuable environmental benefits. There may be increasing opportunities for funding that can be used to compensate landowners for implementing climate-smart practices (CSP) that sustain and build ecosystem services on their properties. Support partnerships to secure funding, deliver education, and provide technical assistance for the implementation of conservation management practices that protect, sustainably manage, and restore nature to deliver multiple outcomes, including addressing climate change, improving public health, increasing equity, and protecting biodiversity.

**ACTION:**
- Develop a collaboration with the Sierra Foothill Conservancy, Mariposa County Planning, UC Cooperative Extension, Mariposa RCD, and other organizations to pursue California Department of Food and Agriculture Healthy Soils Pilot Block Grants Program (and similar grant programs) and as an organizing structure and platform for promoting widespread adoption of conservation management practices throughout Mariposa County.
- Work closely with the ranching community to understand existing practices and the extent of land grazed, tracking both cattle volume and grazing extent, and conduct periodic soil carbon sampling to better understand the baseline of benefits from existing practices.
Nature-based solutions are sustainable planning, design, environmental management and engineering practices that weave natural features or processes into both natural and modified ecosystems to promote adaptation and resilience. These solutions use natural features and processes to deliver multiple outcomes, including the reduction of flood risk, improvements to water quality, protection of property, and increased resilience to wildfires etc.

Nature-based solutions are important because they offer significant monetary and non-monetary benefits. They often come at a lower cost than traditional infrastructure improvements. These benefits include economic growth, green jobs, increased property values, sustainable water systems and better public health. Numerous examples of effective nature based solutions are readily available, including:

- Climate smart agricultural practices increase soil carbon and function for improved water quality and availability, nutrient efficiency and natural fertility, crop production and forage growth. They can also increase water storage for flood and drought resilience, contribute to our economy, increase food security, improve water and air quality, support biodiversity, and on grasslands can reduce the risk of extreme wildfire.

- Climate smart forest management reduces the threat of catastrophic wildfire and supports long-term carbon storage. Nature-based solutions that improve the health of our forests also capture and clean our water supply, improve air quality, provide habitat for wildlife, create high-road jobs, and support local economies through tourism, recreation, and forest products.

**WHAT DO WE MEAN BY NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS AND WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT?**

Focus on identifying and completing visible pilot/demonstration projects under State and Federal grant and technical support programs (such as the Healthy Soils Initiative) that provide support to scale carbon farming and nature-based solutions.

Assess opportunities for Mariposa County agricultural operators to participate in voluntary carbon markets (VCMs) which would allow them to benefit from selling “environmental credits” (e.g., offsets) for climate-smart land stewardship and agricultural practices.

**IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS:** UCCE, Mariposa County Planning, SFC, Mariposa RCD, NRCS, Mariposa County Air Pollution Control District

**FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES:** CDFA, Healthy Soils Pilot Block Grants Program, UC ANR Climate Smart Ag Technical Assistance; Point Blue, Roots Program; Zero Footprint, Restore Program; NRCS EQIP

**CASE STUDIES & RESOURCES:** Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality, Water Quality Trading Program; American Carbon Registry
CARBON FARMING: WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

Carbon sequestration is the natural process of plants taking in CO2 from the atmosphere and, through a biochemical interaction between the roots, the soil, and microorganisms, storing that CO2 in the soil profile. Rangeland and cropland, including publicly and privately managed lands, comprise a large portion of the land base in Mariposa County. These working lands have significant potential for sequestering carbon from the atmosphere, thus serving as a climate mitigation strategy. Active management of working lands can enhance the rate of carbon sequestration in soils and vegetation, therefore carbon farming (i.e., the suite of practices that brings about more sequestration) has a critical role to play in helping Mariposa County develop resilience to climate change while simultaneously reducing atmospheric greenhouse gases driving climate change. Carbon farming and other related agricultural activities may be referred to as “climate beneficial” because of the capacity to draw carbon from the atmosphere and for the numerous co-benefits of carbon farming, including increased soil organic matter and soil water-holding capacity. Such activities include, but aren’t limited to compost application, cover cropping, hedgerow planting, and prescribed grazing.

+ STRATEGY 3C

Continue to explore options for forest and land stewardship opportunities in collaboration with the Native American community.

Related to federal and state interest in climate change, there is increasing emphasis on forest health and resilience to wildfires on public lands. In addition, there is greater awareness of the important historic role of Native American groups in the stewardship of the landscape and interest in cooperating with Native American groups in public land management. This extends not only to planning for public land management, but also in some cases directly hiring Native American organizations to help in actively managing public lands consistent with historic Native American practices. This may create expanded opportunities for generation of local employment and income through the participation of Native American groups from Mariposa County in the stewardship of public lands within the County.

Expand the SSMN Pollinator Project to train and develop a versatile Tribal Conservation Corps to provide holistic land stewardship services including habitat restoration, fuels reduction, cultural and prescribed burning, and reforestation. Likewise, expand opportunities for cultural burns to reduce fuel, improve natural resources, and replant native plant species of traditional significance to the Southern Sierra Miwuk tribe.

ACTION:

■ Develop a collaborative partnership among SSMN, NPS, the BLM, and the US Forest Service to explore stewardship opportunities on public lands.

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS: SSMN, NPS, Mariposa County, SFC, MFSC, Mariposa RCD, BLM, US Forest Service

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES: CA Wildlife conservation Board; CA Dept of Fish and Wildlife; CAL FIRE Forest Health Grant Program; Sierra Nevada Conservancy; National Science Foundation; U.S. Joint Fire Science Program

CASE STUDIES & RESOURCES: Native American approaches to fire management
WE ARE A RURAL COUNTY WITH ALL OF THOSE RURAL VALUES AND TRADITIONS, PARTICULARLY THOSE OF COMMUNITY. RANCHING AND FARMING ARE WOVEN INTO THE FABRIC OF MARIPOSA COUNTY’S IDENTITY, NOW AND IN THE FUTURE."

-Survey Respondent, Fall 2022