



Connections

February 2009

Farm-to-Market Ideas Sought

Do you know of innovative ways farmers and ranchers are increasing consumer access to local food? One of the exciting innovations in our region is the Sierra Foothills Meat Buyers Club, a way for consumers to buy higher-quality beef, lamb, pork and goat meat and support local ranchers at the same time. Four ranchers in Placer, Yuba and Nevada counties joined together with the Placer-Nevada Counties University of California Cooperative Extension to create the club.

Ranchers at High Sierra Beef, Highland Farms, Coffee Pot Ranch and Sinclair Family Farm offer buyers a variety of cuts of grass-fed, hormone-free meat. The first market was held last July in Penryn, and buyers can also pick up pre-placed orders in Lincoln and Auburn. The club reports earning around \$1,000 in sales per month and growing. The ranchers have also considered exploring corporate and business

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SACOG Hosts Rural Broadband Roundtable

On **February 4**, SACOG and Valley Vision hosted a regional broadband roundtable on behalf of the California Emerging Technology Fund (CETF). This was one of six regional meetings across the state to identify gaps in broadband availability and look for opportunities to use broadband for economic development, telemedicine, workforce training and other uses.



By extending broadband, the region can link rural areas to services provided in urban areas and improve economic connections. Broadband service to rural areas would facilitate opportunities such as farmer-to-consumer marketing.

The roundtable had participants from local government, community non-profits, healthcare, higher education and law enforcement. There was strong consensus to expand ubiquitous access and provide affordable access.

SACOG will continue to work with regional stakeholders to develop a strategy for expanding broadband access, in part with financial support from the CETF.

For more information contact David Shabazian at (916) 340-6231 or dshabazian@sacog.org.

USACE Approves SACOG Funding Request

On **January 23**, The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers officially approved funding for a six-county Aquatic Resources Inventory. This funding will be utilized in three steps: inventory existing data, and assess and address gaps, with an emphasis placed on supporting habitat conservation plans and other activities that enhance permit streamlining; categorize data for rapid assessment of aquatic resources, establishing a rational appreciation of the resources; and a qualification process for the resources, allowing for a more transparent and less-restrictive mitigation process.

The first step will be to assess our regional database. The SACOG Board wants to avoid duplication of efforts. To do this, SACOG will enlist the existing work of the Corps and their federal partners, local government partners, environmental consultants, private landowners and

environmentalists. Beyond these sources, SACOG will partner with Congressional Research Services and the Library of Congress to aide in the procurement of the best available data.

At the same time, SACOG will begin meeting with federal agency and habitat conservation plan stakeholders within the six-county region. Contractors will be sought to assist in the other two steps.

The Corps has committed significant oversight, support and interest in this effort. Corps Secretary Woodley, a strong proponent of this partnership, will stay on in his post for a least a year, and sees it both as part of his legacy as well as a model that could be used across the country. The U.S. EPA has recently expressed great interest in this project as well and may be an additional funding partner.

Farm-to-Market (continued)

sales with several local companies and sites.

Innovation doesn't come without its challenges. For some ranchers, they have to drive an hour or more to sell their cattle. Driving to USDA-certified slaughterhouses also takes time away from ranching, and increases the cost of selling meat locally. One of the club's ranchers has to travel two hours roundtrip to Dixon in order to sell his meat at the in-town farmers' market.

Share your stories of other innovative ways farmers and ranchers in our region are finding to increase consumer accessibility to locally-produced food by emailing rucs@sacog.org.



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Stay current on rural-urban issues
at www.sacog.org/rucs

New El Dorado County Wine Ordinance

On **February 3**, the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors approved a new winery ordinance that restricts some uses and provides support for improving sales.

The ordinance limits the number of special events a winery can hold to 48 per year, and requires wineries to contribute to road maintenance costs on roads not maintained by the county.

These latest regulations came from neighbor complaints of traffic impacts and noise disturbances related to large special events. Supported by the county's two largest winery associations, the new ordinance also improves local economic development by allowing direct sales of

value-added products and implementing general plan policies that promote the development of agricultural uses while protecting the agricultural character of the county. The ordinance further aims to lay a map for future winery development and growth.

To view the winery ordinance visit:
www.co.el-dorado.ca.us/ag/



Follow the Issues & Get Involved



Issue papers for land use, local markets and transportation are available for review and comments on the "RUCS Wiki", accessible at www.sacog.org/rucs.

Input is sought from farmers, community members, local agency staff and interested individuals.

The Local Markets Working Group will meet **March 12**. The Transportation Working Group is tentatively scheduled to meet in March.

To receive ongoing project updates, select "Get Involved" at www.sacog.org/rucs

Region Highlighted for Best Practices

SACOG recently participated in a meeting hosted by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) looking at how regional planning organizations and state transportation departments are innovating in federal review of projects and plans.

The Sacramento region's Blueprint was cited as a best practice, and SACOG, along with U.S. EPA and Caltrans, explained the benefits of state funding of federal resource personnel to aide in early consultation and planning objectives. Other presenters included representatives of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and transportation officials from across the country.

The meeting highlighted how federal environmental review streamlining helped

with SACOG's Metropolitan Transportation Plan for 2035, and how streamlining could be used further in future updates.

One useful example came from Maryland, which has instituted a green infrastructure project with regional and watershed-based mitigation and policy streamlining that could be modeled in other parts of the country.

More transparent early planning and coordination could also benefit the Army Corps of Engineers-funded Aquatic Resources Inventory, as well as the Rural-Urban Connections Strategy. SACOG, FHWA and Corps representatives will meet later this month to discuss opportunities to improve federal environmental review.