



## Commentary

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### Messages to the new board, part 4:

#### Let's eat locally grown food

#### SIERRA CLUB SANTA LUCIA CHAPTER

*Editor's note: This is the fourth of five monthly Sierra Club commentaries devoted to policy recommendations for the incoming County Board of Supervisors*

In our last message ("Let's protect our agriculture and save ourselves," Nov. 26), we looked at steps the County Supervisors should take to keep our agricultural lands in agriculture. We addressed strengthening the Williamson Act and directing growth away from rural land and toward urban centers as supply-side approaches to protecting ag land, because such measures are directed toward maintaining lower-impact land use, to preserve watersheds, open space, ecosystems, and the quality of life residents here cherish.

The demand-side approach to agricultural land-use policy focuses on the goal of keeping food resources and purchase dollars local and protecting ag land to protect our food. The American Planning Association's Policy Guide on Community and Regional Food Planning notes, "Among the basic necessities of life—air, food, shelter and water—only food has been given short shrift by the planning community." Therefore, Honorable Supervisors, we recommend that you consider a cutting-edge policy as you resolve your vision for the Central Coast.

We suggest two models to emulate.

First, consider the Food System Sustainability and Security Resolution recently passed by the Seattle City Council. This resolution establishes goals, creates a policy framework, and identifies planning, analysis, and actions to strengthen the community's food system, sustainability, and security. The Seattle resolution, passed in concert with a Zero Waste Strategy, directed that the city:

- Strengthen community and regional food systems by linking food production, processing, distribution, consumption, and waste management to facilitate primary reliance on the region's food resources
- Support food system activities that encourage the use of local and renewable energy resources and minimize energy use
- Increase opportunities for residents to purchase and grow healthy food
- Support new opportunities for distribution of locally and regionally produced food
- Integrate food system policies and planning into land use, transportation, and urban activities

- Assess purchasing and procurement policies and identify policy and procedure changes that would strengthen support of the local food economy
- Identify additional locations and infrastructure for community gardens, food-bank gardens, and community kitchens that would strengthen the community garden program
- Support the formation of a Food Policy Council with a strong link to state and regional food policy organizations.

Second, adopt an Organics Conversion Policy and Local Food Purchase Policy to enhance the value of agricultural operations and forestall their loss to development, while giving a shot in the arm to the local economy. In June 2005, Woodbury County, Iowa passed an Organics Conversion Policy—the first in the nation—providing annual property tax rebates for those who convert from conventional to organic farming practices. Encroaching agribusiness and rural population decline meant the county needed a way to make it economically possible for the next generation of farmers to stay on their land.

Woodbury County followed up with an ordinance mandating the purchase of locally grown, organic food by the county. The Local Food Purchase Policy requires county vendors to purchase organic food grown within 100 miles of the county seat, thereby increasing local demand, production, and processing and building the infrastructure for a locally owned food system.

Rob Marqusee is the visionary County Director of Rural Economic Development who spearheaded both initiatives. “In the end,” he said in the January 2006 edition of *Food and Society*, “we anticipate a quality local food brand emerging from the increased economic activity in our area.”

Mr. Marqusee tells us he is eager to share with SLO his county’s experience with its local food purchase policy and tax incentives for organic farming practices. You can also contact the California Farm to School Task Force and HEAL-SLO (Healthy Eating Active Living, formerly the obesity task force) for their take on the Woodbury County policies and the Seattle Local Food Action Initiative. The aforementioned American Planning Association has adopted a policy of helping build “stronger, sustainable and more self-reliant” local food systems.

According to Frances Moore Lappe, author of *Diet for a Small Planet*, “A study of 57 countries with about 13 million farmers has shown 50 to 100 percent increases in yields where farmers are using local resources and organic sustainable methods.” Sounds good to us. Let’s put the policies in place that will give us that kind of food security.

The text of Seattle’s Food Sustainability and Security resolution can be read at [seattle.gov/council/attachments/2008reso31019.pdf](http://seattle.gov/council/attachments/2008reso31019.pdf). The text of Woodbury County’s Local Food Purchase policy and Organics Conversion Policy can be found at [woodburyiowa.com/departments/economic development](http://woodburyiowa.com/departments/economic%20development).

For more information on the American Planning Association’s Policy Guide on Community and Regional Food Planning, visit [planning.org/policyguides/food.htm](http://planning.org/policyguides/food.htm).

*The Santa Lucia Chapter represents the Sierra Club’s 2,500 members in San Luis Obispo County. The Executive Committee includes Karen Merriam, Steven Marx, Cleve Nash, Melody DeMeritt, Linda Seeley, Cal French, and Mark Shefrin.*