

# A CALIFORNIA NETWORK OF REGIONAL FOOD HUBS





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## *A VISION STATEMENT AND STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION PLAN*

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By the Regional Food Hub Advisory Council

Brett Melone, ALBA Organics  
Eric Cárdenas, Orfalea Foundation  
James Cochran, Swanton Berry Farm  
Jennifer Gross, San Mateo County Health System  
Jonathan Reinbold, Tierra Miguel Foundation & Farm  
Lisa Brenneis Ojai Pixie Growers Association & Churchill Orchards  
Luis Sierra, California Center for Cooperative Development  
Sharon Cech, Urban & Environmental Policy Institute  
Vanessa Zajfen, San Diego Unified School District



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....	3
INTRODUCTION.....	9
Context within the Good Food Movement .....	9
Vision for a Network of Regional Food Hubs.....	10
REGIONAL FOOD HUBS .....	12
Additional Hub Functions .....	13
Case studies.....	15
Envisioning A Regional Food Hub Network.....	22
Network Structure.....	22
Network Functions .....	24
Creating a Regional Food hub network .....	31
Visualizing a Growing Network.....	31
Regional Food Hub Network Summit .....	37
Implementation Plan.....	42
Conclusion .....	44
GLOSSARY .....	45
Appendix 1: Regional Food Hub Network Summit Notes.....	47
Appendix 2: Regional Food Hub Network Summit Invitee List .....	57
Appendix 3: Post-Summit Survey Questions .....	58

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper outlines a vision and implementation plan for an improved regional wholesale marketing system that addresses the major barriers and risks that limit small family farmers' ability to bring good food to market and, in turn, provide consumers and communities with access to good food. The vision presented in this paper is of a new statewide organization that networks regional food aggregators and distributors into a system that expands marketing opportunities, reduces risk, and increases access to good food—a network of Regional Food Hubs.

### NETWORKING REGIONAL FOOD HUBS

Multiple definitions are emerging across the US and within the good food movement for aggregation and distribution businesses referred to as Food Hubs, Local Food Hubs or Regional Food Hubs. The Regional Food Hub Advisory Council calls these projects Regional Food Hubs (RFHs), and has concluded that aggregation and wholesale are the most critical elements for these new businesses. However, because of the great diversity among emerging RFH projects and the desire to include all of these efforts in a strategy for food systems reform, this definition is less prescriptive than many. The Advisory Council has defined Regional Food Hubs as:

**Regional Food Hub** - *An integrated food distribution system that coordinates agricultural production and the aggregation, storage, processing, distribution, and marketing of locally or regionally produced food products.*

This paper proposes the formation of a Regional Food Hub Network that will **(1)** provide individual RFHs with the business services and management skills they will need in order to enhance their hub operations, and **(2)** provide a mechanism for coordination between RFHs that will enable transformative food systems change.

The **Regional Food Hub Network** will provide assistance in business management and services that will amplify the success and impact of individual hubs. This Regional Food Hub Network (RFH-N) will serve and support autonomous Regional Food Hubs through inter-hub brokerage, access to infrastructure, technical assistance, and networking related hub operations in order to bolster the scale, predictability, and success of regional food production, sales, and consumption

This paper intends to build a strong case for how RFHs and a Regional Food Hub Network (RFH-N) will support the creation of a just and sustainable regionalized food system.

### CASE STUDIES

The Regional Food Hub Advisory Council highlighted four RFH case studies in order to both illustrate the commonalities and differences across hub projects in California and to show how its definition of a

RFH can translate into reality. These studies provided background that contextualizes the Advisory Council’s vision for emerging RFHs and a RFH Network that is intended to enhance the effectiveness of individual hubs and accelerate broad food systems change.

The studies include:

- ***Old Grove Orange*** – Mentone, CA
- ***ALBA Organics*** – Salinas, CA
- ***Ojai Pixie Growers*** – Ojai, CA
- ***The Santa Monica Farmers’ Market*** – Santa Monica, CA

### **Differences Among Regional Food Hubs**

The case studies showed significant differences in the types of organizational entities that these different Regional Food Hubs have formed, as well as in their management and operation practices. Comparing them revealed that RFHs can be governed informally or by a nonprofit, a single farmer, a larger distributor, or even a municipality. These results suggest that they could also be managed by another type of entity such as a cooperative. Additionally, RFHs can employ a range of operations and management strategies relating to how they aggregate and distribute products and utilize infrastructure. This range of approaches illustrates that there are many ways to construct a RFH, and that organizational flexibility makes the RFH model viable in a broad range of situations and communities.

### **Similarities Among Regional Food Hubs**

The Advisory Council found that RFHs share common goals of serving small to mid-sized farmers and supporting the growth of regional food systems. All of the profiled RFHs also work to improve food security or provide educational opportunities relating to the food system. While RFHs ostensibly exist in order to make farming more profitable for their growers, the case studies showed that they also make distinct efforts to support their communities in ways that don’t provide direct economic gains.

Additionally, RFHs have the same basic infrastructure needs, and are all driven to promote their products. They also share a common struggle to find and maintain appropriate markets, match supply and demand, and overcome logistical obstacles. All could benefit from an overarching entity that would provide support and coordinate their efforts.

## **ENVISIONING A REGIONAL FOOD HUB NETWORK**

The Regional Food Hub Network will offer a platform for coordination between hubs to increase efficiency and optimize profits for farmers while increasing access to nutritious affordable foods in all communities across the state. The Network will be a membership-based nonprofit entity that supports for-profit RFH businesses. To include only the intended populations of small and mid-sized farmers in the RFH-N and ensure that the Network concept is not co-opted by large-scale or unsustainable growers, the RFH-N will carefully define the parameters of its membership. To do so, it will develop Network definitions for “small” and “mid-sized” farms, “sustainable” farming practices, and “fair” labor practices, and will implement labeling standards that specify products’ origins. The proposed RFH-N functions and areas of service are outlined below.

## Coordinating Regional Food Supplies

The RFH-N increases the efficiency of RFHs by coordinating and facilitating the movement of food between hubs. In doing so, it will connect and strengthen regional food systems throughout the state. Coordinating produce shipments between RFHs and facilitating “inter-hub brokerage” will therefore be key functions of the RFH-N and may be accomplished using a variety of strategies, including:

- **Facilitating Inter-hub Brokerage**
- **Tapping into Existing Infrastructure**
- **Providing Logistics Service** (common carrier)
- **Providing a Place for Food to Land** (i.e. coordinating cross-docking)

## Services and Support

Another primary function of the RFH-N is to build the capacity of individual RFHs to enable them to grow to the point at which they can fully participate in the Network and ultimately become integral players in the regional food system. The Network will do this by providing a variety of services and supports to individual Hubs, including:

- **Cost Sharing** (including liability and employee benefits)
- **Fundraising** (grant writing)
- **Training Opportunities** (for Hub Managers as well as new farmers)
- **Networking** (including an annual conference and other opportunities)

## Marketing

The RFH-N may develop a seal of approval or brand for its partners that would ideally function as a co-brand with individual hubs. This brand would verify member hubs as part of a distribution network that **(1)** supports small and mid-sized farmers and sustainable growing practices, **(2)** sells products produced and distributed within California, **(3)** can provide customers with information about each step of a product’s journey, **(4)** benefits underserved consumers, and **(5)** was produced with fair labor practices.

The marketing campaign will promote the RFH-N brand and the value and importance of eating sustainable local foods by emphasizing the story of local foods, from production to the table. It will employ a variety of strategies to reach its customers including website development, online marketing, and the creation of labels and other promotional materials including point of sale elements. The Network will train hub operators in the application of these marketing tools, and each marketing method will target an array of audiences such as schools, hospitals, chefs, eco- and health-conscious consumers, and underserved populations.

## Incubating New Technologies and Pilots

As Regional Food Hubs are formed and grow to meet the increasing demand for regionally and sustainably produced food, they will require new strategies, expansions on existing techniques, and a re-evaluation of the way in which local food markets operate. By serving as incubators for pilot projects and new technologies, hubs can begin to create new mechanisms by which regionally produced food enters mainstream markets.

While individual RFHs will test the latest strategies for breaking into new markets or reaching underserved consumers, many of their efforts will benefit from support that the RFH-N could provide. The Network could keep track of hub innovations, the resources they required, and their levels of success. Using this information along with staff capacity, the Network could also provide individual hubs with technical assistance in the form of project guidance, networking, and grant writing assistance.

### **Research and Information Sharing**

The RFH-N will continuously gather and organize data on RFHs throughout the state. This will facilitate several of the Network's other functions such as outreach, sales, coordination of available infrastructure, sharing best practices, documenting progress, and influencing policy.

### **Policy Advocacy**

The RFH-N's policy platform would be informed by the needs of the Network's membership (RFHs and participating farmers). It would advocate for specific policies, laws, and regulations through the development of a strategic policy platform designed to honor members' values and stakeholder needs.

## **CREATING A REGIONAL FOOD HUB NETWORK**

This section describes the steps that the Advisory Council has taken thus far to move forward with Network development and implementation planning. It examines a mapping study designed to target optimal locations for RFH-N outreach, reviews the results of the Advisory Council's multi-stakeholder summit held in August 2010, and lays out an implementation plan for the Network.

### **Visualizing a Growing Network**

To get a sense of what a statewide network of RFHs might look like, the Advisory Council conducted a study that used GIS software to generate a series of maps. The maps display a systematic approach to determining where RFHs should be developed or supported based on growers' needs, agricultural resources, product demand, and proximity to transportation infrastructure. They then overlay the landscape of existing and emerging RFHs throughout the state. The study's specific goals were to:

- Create a RFH-N visual that illustrates the proposed vision
- Map relevant agricultural assets and resources
- Identify strategic locations for RFHs throughout the state where the Network might focus outreach efforts
- Map existing hub projects to assess the progress of RFH development
- Compare existing hub projects to study results and identify gaps in RFH development and/or the Network's awareness of hub projects

Many of the existing or emerging RFH projects line up with the target areas identified in the study. The analysis also indicates that the Central Valley is a prime location for RFHs, yet the Network has a substantial gap in that region and should therefore target outreach efforts in the area. With additional time and resources, a second phase of the study could go into greater depth in identifying priority outreach areas. This second phase should explicitly account for (1) food insecurity and/or underserved



areas, (2) specific consumer product demands, (3) products produced on farms, and (4) a census of socially disadvantaged farmer populations.

### **Regional Food Hub Network Summit**

On August 24<sup>th</sup>, 2010, the Urban & Environmental Policy Institute (UEPI) and the RFH Advisory Council convened a summit with 35 stakeholders from around the state. These included disadvantaged farmers, farmer advocates, distributors, government employees, and nonprofit representatives. The meeting was intended to present the concept of the RFH-N to the summit attendees and then gain input from the larger audience that would inform an implementation plan and next steps. The summit involved a series of presentations featuring RFH case studies and a summary of the RFH-N vision. The second portion of the event involved two breakout sessions in which attendees were placed into groups—first by area of interest or profession, and then by region—and asked a series of questions about their thoughts on the RFH-N vision, their interest in the project, potential challenges, and suggestions for implementation.

In terms of feedback on the proposed RFH-N functions, the majority of attendee responses fit into existing categories outlined in the *Network Functions* section. The one response topic that did not fit into the established network function categories had to do with community benefits. It is hoped that the RFH-N will incorporate community benefits into its core functions and, in doing so, strengthen regional economies, provide educational opportunities, promote quality green jobs throughout the value chain, and support projects that increase access to fresh and nutritious local foods.

When asked about their interest in the project and investing in the future Network, the main Network functions that participants cited as critical to cultivating member buy-in were (1) cost sharing and other financial support, (2) coordination of logistics and shared infrastructure, (3) focused outreach to farmers and hub managers, (4) research on existing hubs and different regions' needs, (5) marketing, and (6) political advocacy. In addition to these responses, participants also brought up several considerations that are not directly related to Network functions or services. These concerned clarity, planning, and equity throughout the food system.

In response to a question about anticipated challenges, participant answers ranged from overcoming financial and regulatory barriers to cultivating buy-in to fulfilling the expectations of all of the parties involved.

And finally, when asked about implementation, participants suggested reconvening the group, clarifying the Network's mission and goals, forming an advisory board, securing funding, developing a feasibility study and business plan, formalizing the RFH-N as an organization, launching a marketing campaign, and continuing research and outreach efforts.

### **Implementation Plan**

Based on the Advisory Council's findings from the Network summit and follow-up survey, a step-by-step implementation plan was developed. Below is an abbreviated version of this plan.

<b>CALIFORNIA REGIONAL FOOD HUB NETWORK IMPLEMENTATION PLAN</b>		
	<b>TASK</b>	<b>OVERSEEING PARTY</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Establish regular meetings</b>	UEPI + RFH Advisory Council members
<b>2</b>	<b>Form RFH-N Advisory Board</b>	UEPI + RFH Advisory Council Members + interested stakeholders
<b>3</b>	<b>Establish Network mission, values, &amp; goals</b>	Network Advisory Board
<b>4</b>	<b>Secure initial funding</b>	Network Advisory Board
<b>5</b>	<b>Develop feasibility study &amp; business plan</b>	Network Advisory Board + hired consultant
<b>6</b>	<b>Formalize organization</b>	Network Advisory Board
<b>7</b>	<b>Secure implementation funds</b>	Network staff + board of directors
<b>8</b>	<b>Launch marketing campaign</b>	Network staff + board of directors + hired consultants
<b>9</b>	<b>Continued research &amp; information management</b>	Network staff + board of directors + members
<b>10</b>	<b>Continued capacity development &amp; outreach</b>	Network staff + board of directors

## INTRODUCTION

This paper outlines a vision and implementation plan for an improved regional wholesale marketing system that addresses the major barriers and risks that limit small family farmers' ability to bring good food to market and, in turn, provide consumers and communities with access to good food. The vision presented in this paper is of a new statewide organization that networks regional aggregators and distributors into a system that expands marketing opportunities, reduces risk, and increases access to just food—a network of Regional Food Hubs.

### CONTEXT WITHIN THE GOOD FOOD MOVEMENT

Can a system designed to simply move food from one place to another ensure that food is fair or just? Can it promise that food is produced with equitable labor practices and that its production supports the local economy? Is this food accessible to a range of consumers in the region, including those that are currently underserved? Can those who produce, process, and transport these foods actually afford to eat them?

Just food is much broader than ethical production and distribution practices or organic, fair trade, or local labels alone. Access to good food for underserved or food-insecure consumers is central to the food justice movement and has become an important focus for re-evaluating the problems in our food system.<sup>1</sup> Increasingly, food access and good food advocates are demanding that local, organic and fresh foods should both cost consumers less and be made available in every community, corner store, and institution. However, the “agriculture of the middle,” a major segment of the agricultural industry that makes widespread access to quality food possible, is itself deteriorating.<sup>2</sup>

The once vast array of mid-scale food businesses such as packinghouses, independent processors, and regional grocery stores are feeling the effects of the trend of consolidation occurring in the food industry, which continues to pressure and squeeze out the infrastructure and retail venues that serve mid-scale agricultural operations. What remains are large commodity food producers, small artisanal food purveyors, an intensely concentrated food industry, and a handful of independent food businesses. Consolidation has also concentrated fresh produce production in a few states. California is the top producer of fresh produce in the US and its products are shipped throughout the country and internationally as well. Therefore, the hollowing out of California's mid-scale agriculture impacts national and global food systems.

Large-scale agriculture businesses have found it most efficient to do business exclusively with large chains, which also contributes to the decline of mid-scale agriculture. This represents a very narrow definition of efficiency, and the results of this logic have had negative impacts on farmers, consumers and the overall health of our communities in California. The mainstream food system, which increasingly favors large-scale production—mega grocery chains contracting directly with mega growers

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<sup>1</sup> National Good Food Network, accessed July 12, 2010, <http://ngfn.org/>

<sup>2</sup> Fred Kirschenmann, Steve Stevenson, Fred Buttel, Tom Lyson and Mike Duffy, *Why Worry About the Agriculture of the Middle? A White Paper for the Agriculture of the Middle Project* (2003), accessed July 13, 2010, <http://www.agofthemiddle.org/>

–has undercut the terminal market system and the independent grocery stores that they supply. While fertile farmland is converted to other uses and food is shipped greater and greater distances, mid-sized wholesalers have gone out of business and many communities have been left without access to fresh, nutritious foods.

That terminal markets and independent grocers survive at all is a tribute to their energy and resourcefulness. However, even as these businesses struggle to stay afloat, they hold the keys to keeping small to mid-scale farmers in business. Mid-size wholesale customers are critical for mid-size growers who are not big enough to sell to large grocery chains or institutions but cannot afford the transaction costs of selling their entire production at farmers’ markets. There is significantly less labor involved in selling a single 1,000-pound order of oranges than in selling the same oranges to 500 customers, two pounds at a time.

Although industrial agriculture and grocery giants have squeezed mid-scale wholesalers and retailers to the edge of existence, the skeleton of agriculture of the middle still exists in the form of a handful of mid-scale farms and under-utilized infrastructure. Today this skeleton is being reanimated, repurposed and, when necessary, rebuilt through the renewed energy of good food advocates. These efforts aim to recreate thriving regional food systems that meet the needs of our 21<sup>st</sup> century society and supply good food to populations most in need.

## **VISION FOR A NETWORK OF REGIONAL FOOD HUBS**

Most of the work emerging in this field has thus far focused on documenting and studying innovative food hubs, distribution and aggregation businesses, co-operatives, enterprising farm businesses, and other such single business models. The Advisory Council’s focus is to envision a strategy for networking these diverse projects in ways that would maximize their individual efficiency and achieve greater systems change.

The Advisory Council is proposing a Network of Regional Food Hubs that will **(1)** provide individual Regional Food Hubs with the critical business services and management skills they will need in order to enhance their hub operations, and **(2)** provide a mechanism for coordination between Regional Food Hubs that will enable transformative food systems change.

Although these goals are ambitious, the Regional Food Hub Network is not a pie in the sky suggestion. It is something that the Regional Food Hub Advisory Council believes to be an attainable means for true food system reform. As funds are increasingly becoming available for these types of endeavors, more organizations are considering building them. National networks are emerging to address regional food concerns.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, facets of this Regional Food Hub Network could be implemented today, with relatively low start-up costs and no bricks and mortar investment. This Network has the potential to both support Regional Food Hubs as they develop and grow along with them.

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<sup>3</sup> National Good Food Network, “National Good Food Network Overview,” accessed July 12, 2010, <http://ngfn.org/about>

This paper aims to build a strong case for how Regional Food Hubs (RFH) and a Regional Food Hub Network (RFH-N) will support the creation of a just and sustainable regionalized food system.

This paper will look at several existing RFH projects and demonstrate the ways in which a network might strengthen their operations. It will then suggest specific functions and services that a RFH-N could provide, and finally outline a strategy for the implementation of such a Network across California.

## REGIONAL FOOD HUBS

Multiple definitions are emerging across the US and within the good food movement for aggregation and distribution businesses referred to as Food Hubs, Local Food Hubs or Regional Food Hubs. All of these terms and definitions revolve around the basic functions of organizing or re-organizing the relationships within the traditional food chain to better serve disadvantaged producers and underserved consumers.

Recently, several different organizations have put forth their own definitions of Food Hubs. A 2008 study in England defined Food Hubs as an “organizational model where food sourcing and supply is coordinated, and may be contrasted with a wholly dispersed market system (becoming more credible through internet shopping) comprising of direct links between producer and consumer.”<sup>4</sup>

Taste of Anglia defines these hubs as the “trading arm that runs a commercial operation, providing a physical link between regional suppliers and regional customers (retail outlets, pubs, restaurants and hotels), with warehousing facilities and three multi-temperature vehicles for collection and distribution.”<sup>5</sup>

James Barham of the USDA defines a Regional Food Hub as “a centrally located facility with a business management structure facilitating the aggregation, storage, processing, distribution, and/or marketing of locally/regionally produced food products.”<sup>6</sup>

Although the Advisory Council’s definition is most similar to James Barham’s, the similarities across these definitions is exciting as they support this paper’s basic view of Regional Food Hubs—that aggregation and wholesale are the most critical elements of a RFH. However, because of the great diversity among emerging RFH projects and our desire to include all of these efforts in a strategy for food systems reform, this definition is less prescriptive than many. The Advisory Council has defined Regional Food Hubs as:

***Regional Food Hub*** - An integrated food distribution system that coordinates agricultural production and the aggregation, storage, processing, distribution, and marketing of locally or regionally produced food products.

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<sup>4</sup> Adrian Morley, Selyf Morgan and Kevin Morgan, *Food Hubs: The ‘Missing Middle’ of the Local Food Infrastructure?* (BRASS Centre, Cardiff University, 2008)

<sup>5</sup> Food Chain Center, “Facilitating Collaboration in Regional Food Hubs, Taste of Anglia Puts E-commerce to the Test,” accessed July 15, 2010, <http://www.foodchaincentre.com/cir.asp?type=1&subtype=&cir=173>

<sup>6</sup> Know Your Farmer Know Your Food Regional Food Hub Subcommittee, “Regional Food Hubs: Linking Producers to New Markets,” accessed July 18, 2010, <http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/knownyourfarmer?navid=KNOWYOURFARMER>

This definition allows for flexibility in that it does not mandate that successfully reactivating, repurposing, or rebuilding the “missing middle” will come only from brick and mortar-based projects. It allows for the possibility that RFHs will grow out of inter-business relationships and human capacity in coordinating the sharing of existing infrastructure and resources. As documented in the case studies presented below, these relationships can manifest themselves in a variety of ways to achieve successful RFH projects.

The context, goals and location of each individual RFH determines how it operates and to what end. The goals of revitalizing agriculture of the middle are multiple, but the primary goal is to facilitate the distribution of “significant volumes of high-quality, differentiated food products, and distribute profits equitably among the strategic partners.”<sup>7</sup> What constitutes high volumes of high-quality food is not strictly defined, but it is safe to say that Regional Food Hub infrastructure would not be built to help farmers sell 500 orders of two pounds of oranges.

Farmers’ markets, community supported agriculture (CSAs), and other direct marketing strategies have been instrumental in allowing for new and small-scale agriculture enterprises to emerge, flourish, and have long-term businesses sustainability. However, as direct marketing schemes have increased access to local food and helped farmers survive, many of these farmers are now seeking new sales venues and a RFH could help link these small and mid-sized farmers to new markets.

## **ADDITIONAL HUB FUNCTIONS**

While a RFH’s primary function is to facilitate the aggregation and distribution of locally and regionally produced foods, thereby expanding opportunities for small and mid-scale farmers, RFHs have the potential to be much more. Particularly in populous urban areas, RFHs can go beyond facilitating wholesale operations to include their own retail or farmers’ markets.

Properly conceived and executed, a single urban food hub in Los Angeles (or another large California city) could rejuvenate California’s regional distribution system. It could also support disadvantaged and other growers, wholesalers, retailers and customers of all sizes by recognizing that a vibrant food system requires opportunities and efficiencies at many different scales.

Los Angeles is the largest city in California, which is the biggest agricultural state in the country. A RFH in Los Angeles, for example, ought to reflect its people: flexible, practical, and diverse. Therefore, a RFH in Los Angeles should assemble a wholesale market, a retail market and a permanent farmers’ market at a single site, creating a hybrid hub marketplace. At such an urban RFH, each component would strengthen the larger hybrid venture.

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<sup>7</sup> Agriculture of the Middle, accessed June 15, 2010, [www.agofthemiddle.org](http://www.agofthemiddle.org)

### ***Wholesale Component***

A well-managed wholesale brokerage builds sales volumes for regional produce, which helps producers move orders more efficiently. At the same time, wholesale buying lowers transaction costs for regional producers and their wholesale customers. A wholesale facility could also engineer access to lower-cost seasonal overstock produce from large growers and make it available to their retail customers at a favorable price. Additionally, grower-direct deliveries to a wholesale terminal would supply a same-site retail grocery with a wider variety of fresher produce, faster and at a lower cost.

### ***Retail Market***

The higher margins on produce sold at an on-site retail store would help support the lower-margin wholesale business. Additionally, sharing a site with a busy retail market would offer the wholesale market a convenient place to move stock that is not selling in the wholesale channel. A retail market could also offer wholesale customers (especially restaurants) a wider variety of available products at reasonable prices, which would streamline their shopping in a single location (and capture their dollars). In general, a retail market would widen the enterprise's customer base while providing an avenue for retail and wholesale customers to meet with growers and learn from each other.

A retail market could also be a venue for job creation. It could provide jobs at various skill and pay levels that offer on-the-job training in the art of local produce procurement and merchandising, a trade which has been lost by the bulk of modern grocery chains.

An on-site retail market could help support growers and its own retail customers by absorbing peak-season produce flows in years of abundance. Passing peak-season low prices on to their customers would create increased demand for seasonal items. This market would also provide a more robust sales channel for small quantity one-offs and short season products from growers of all sizes.

### ***Permanent Farmers' Market***

There would also be several benefits to having a permanent farmers' market on site at an urban RFH in a city such as Los Angeles. A farmers' market area allows for direct marketing of small grower produce, including food grown in the city. It offers a low cost-of-entry venue for start-up growers to gain access to direct marketing opportunities.

The presence of retail and wholesale activity at the same site as the farmers' market would bring these new growers into contact with the people who can mentor them on the process of selling into retail and wholesale markets.

Sharing a site with a farmers' market also offers the wholesale and retail markets a place to meet more growers and encounter new products and suppliers. Additionally, the color and sense of adventure that a large marketplace exhibits attracts foot traffic, which will also benefit the retail store.

Overall, expanding the scope of an urban RFH's functions to include retail and a farmers' market would be advantageous for all of the participating businesses and could significantly expand the Hub's impact on the larger food system.



## **CASE STUDIES**

This section highlights four RFH case studies, which are included to illustrate the commonalities and differences across hub projects in California and show how this vision might translate into reality. These studies provide background that contextualizes the Advisory Council's vision for emerging RFHs and a RFH Network, which could ultimately enhance the effectiveness of individual hubs and accelerate broad food systems change.

## REGIONAL FOOD HUB PROFILE: OLD GROVE ORANGE

<b>Name</b>	Old Grove Orange (OGO)
<b>Location</b>	Mentone, CA - San Bernardino County - [Suburban]
<b>Ownership Entity</b>	For-profit business (single owner)
<b>Org. Mission/ Goal of RFH</b>	N/A
<b>Participating Farmers</b>	24
<b>Operations + Management</b>	<p>OGO is managed and operated by Bob Knight, a citrus farmer and the owner of OGO. Bob buys directly from growers at 5-10% more than the alternative market price. He keeps overhead costs low by having a modest product line and maintaining a local scale and scope of distribution, so there is no need for long distance hauling distribution infrastructure or significant investment in marketing.</p> <p>Seventy-five percent of the products aggregated at OGO are sold under the OGO label. OGO employees harvest from participating farms and bring product back to OGO for grading, packing, and distribution. The remaining 25% of products are sold by OGO but under farmers' own labels. Farmers pick, pack, and deliver to OGO where product is distributed and sold alongside OGO products.</p>
<b>Aggregation Point</b>	<p>Products are aggregated, graded, and packed for distribution at OGO, which is a 3,000 sq. ft. facility owned by Bob Knight. This facility includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 2 walk-in coolers</li> <li>▪ 1 bin dumper</li> <li>▪ 1 packing shed (where packing and grading occurs by hand)</li> <li>▪ 1 loading dock</li> <li>▪ 3 delivery trucks + 2 hauling trucks</li> </ul>
<b>Marketing</b>	OGO Label
<b>Customers</b>	K-12 school districts (of various sizes), 1000-member citrus CSA
<b>Products</b>	Citrus fruits, apples, grapes, peaches, avocados, kiwifruit, strawberries
<b>Community Oriented Programs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Food Bank: Glen's Citrus sells gleaned fruit. Culls are donated to Inland Harvest Food Bank</li> <li>▪ Participates in farm to school programs</li> </ul>
<b>Challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Unknown</li> </ul>

## REGIONAL FOOD HUB PROFILE: ALBA ORGANICS

<b>Name</b>	ALBA Organics (AO)
<b>Location</b>	Salinas, CA - Monterey County - [Rural]
<b>Ownership Entity</b>	Nonprofit - AO is a project of ALBA, a 501(c)3
<b>Org. Mission/ Goal of RFH</b>	<p>ALBA’s mission is to advance economic viability, social equity, and ecological land management among limited-resource and aspiring farmers. They work to create opportunities for family farms while providing education and demonstration on conservation, habitat restoration, marketing, and whole farm planning.</p> <p>AO is ALBA’s Regional Food Hub. AO’s primary goal is to provide high quality, locally grown organic produce to institutional and wholesale buyers in the Greater San Francisco Bay Area and the Central Coast region. The AO enterprise is an outgrowth of ALBA’s educational programs, and thus exists to support ALBA’s mission. Hence, connecting beginning and limited-resource farmers with markets is a concurrent goal.</p>
<b>Participating Farmers</b>	30 – 50
<b>Operations + Management</b>	<p>ALBA operates AO as an earned-income venture – providing mission-related services that will eventually generate a modest level of income for the organization. AO is licensed as a producer-dealer by CDFA, essentially operating as a wholesale distributor. AO buys product outright from farmers and represents them in the market by providing a source-verified, certified organic product to their customers.</p> <p>AO develops a crop plan each fall with participating growers, which gets updated on a periodic basis. The plan is based on historic volumes for crops. New crops are added throughout the year as per customer request or emerging market opportunities.</p>
<b>Aggregation Point</b>	<p>ALBA owns a 3,000 sq. ft. facility that is located at its Rural Development Center, and 110-acre farm near Salinas. The facility includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Outdoor covered washing station with sink</li> <li>▪ Receiving area</li> <li>▪ 1500 sq. ft. dry storage (non-cooled),</li> <li>▪ 800 sq. ft. cold storage and 800 sq. ft. medium-cold storage for products needing humidity</li> <li>▪ Forced air cooler</li> <li>▪ Forklift</li> <li>▪ 2 delivery trucks</li> </ul>
<b>Marketing</b>	ALBA Organics Label
<b>Customers</b>	University housing and dining services, conference centers, K-12 school districts (including low-income/underserved school districts), hospitals, other wholesale distributors, retail stores, and restaurants. No direct-to-consumer sales or retail outlet.
<b>Products</b>	Variety of fruits and vegetables
<b>Community Oriented Programs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provides education and technical assistance to its beginning and limited-resource grower vendors as part of its business model.</li> <li>▪ Welcomes groups of all kinds to learn about its work.</li> <li>▪ Working on programs to sell to corner stores in low-income and underserved communities</li> <li>▪ Works with Community Alliance of Family Farmers (CAFF) to support harvest-of-the-month program for area schools.</li> </ul>
<b>Challenges</b>	Demand exceeds supply. Growers and AO are undercapitalized. Information management is a challenge because the systems and products currently available on the market are either too sophisticated and costly or not sophisticated enough.

## REGIONAL FOOD HUB PROFILE: OJAI PIXIE GROWERS

<b>Name</b>	Ojai Pixie Growers
<b>Location</b>	Ojai, CA – Ventura County – [Suburban]
<b>Ownership Entity</b>	None - Independent for-profit growers
<b>Org. Mission/ Goal of RFH</b>	Ojai Pixie Growers banded together to raise the profile of the Ojai Valley as a special place and a source of the highest-quality tangerines. Ojai Pixie Growers meet regularly to share information about growing tangerines.
<b>Participating Farmers</b>	40
<b>Operations + Management</b>	<p>The Ojai Pixie Growers do not really have a “hub” as they are an informal association of growers/direct marketers who sell their own fruit. The growers freely and independently make arrangements at the beginning of the season to have Ojai Pixie packers sell fruit for them. Then local Ojai brokers (who are also Pixie growers) provide a single point of contact for sales and marketing information and coordinate picking and packing to fill orders. Ojai Pixie Growers use local labor contractors to provide picking crews, forklifts, and truck transport for fruit, bins, and cartons. The contractors haul, organize, and sell the fruit.</p> <p>In much of the citrus industry there is a premium on early fruit so it is often picked prematurely, resulting in a lower-quality product that eventually depresses the market. Thousands of acres of orange groves have been lost as a result. Because Ojai Pixie Growers is not a cooperative or any type of formal entity, the local brokers who sell the Pixies maintain the freedom make decisions quickly and independently and protect their standards of freshness and eating quality. Ojai Pixie Growers pick to order and only picks fruit once it is ripe, maintaining their products’ high-quality.</p>
<b>Aggregation Point</b>	<p>Ojai Pixie Growers do not have a dedicated facility. Most fruit is packed by contract at a 10,000 sq. ft. commercial citrus packinghouse that has excess capacity due to recent changes in the citrus industry. Between the packing house and labor contractors, the Pixie growers utilize:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Commercial loading docks</li> <li>▪ Cold storage</li> <li>▪ Bin trailer trucks</li> <li>▪ Customized tangerine packing line</li> <li>▪ Inventory tracking system</li> <li>▪ Less Than a Load (LTL) commercial trucking services</li> <li>▪ Citrus expertise of commercial packing house employees</li> </ul>
<b>Marketing</b>	Ojai Pixie Growers have their own label, logo, and website (ojaipixies.com). They often get press because their local product has a narrative value.
<b>Customers</b>	Wholesale brokers, retail grocery chains, WIC stores, Japanese export wholesalers.
<b>Products</b>	Pixie tangerines
<b>Community Oriented Programs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sell pony-sized pixies to WIC-only stores</li> <li>▪ Donate to local efforts such as the UC Riverside Citrus Breeding program and sponsors UC grad student research projects</li> <li>▪ Contributed to “Food for Thought,” a nonprofit focused on food issues and garden-based learning</li> </ul>
<b>Challenges</b>	Seedless tangerines have gone mainstream and big operators are oversupplying the market. There is now increased pressure to differentiate from mass-produced commodity tangerines. There is an absence of small-scale groceries and retail outlets to sell their product.

## REGIONAL FOOD HUB PROFILE: SANTA MONICA FARMERS' MARKET

<b>Name</b>	Santa Monica Farmers' Market (SMFM)
<b>Location</b>	Santa Monica, CA – Los Angeles County - [Urban]
<b>Ownership Entity</b>	Public - City-run farmers' market
<b>Participating Farmers</b>	21 (average number of wholesale farmers on a given week)
<b>Org. Mission/ Goal of RFH</b>	SMFM aims to accommodate as many California farmers as possible and promote healthy eating and sustainable agriculture in California. They do so by providing fresh, locally-grown products from small farms to urban customers, thereby building community and preserving California farmland.
<b>Operations + Management</b>	Santa Monica Farmers' Market is a California certified farmers' market managed and operated by the City of Santa Monica that also incorporates an "unofficial" wholesale operation. Coordination of orders occurs directly between farmers and customers with no assistance from the farmers' market association or management. Orders are placed with farmers, prepared on farms, and delivered to the market on farm trucks. Wholesale orders are stacked on the backside of tables/stands and picked up by clients. Farmers with larger wholesale operations tend to have an employee dedicated to managing those accounts and sales.
<b>Aggregation Point</b>	The Santa Monica Farmers' Market is a non-permanent market that takes up approximately five city blocks for five hours at a time. The wholesale businesses rely on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Their trucks</li> <li>▪ Parking permits and up-front parking spaces provided by the City to accommodate larger wholesale trucks for the duration of the market.</li> <li>▪ Electrical outlets</li> </ul>
<b>Marketing</b>	There is no label associated with the SMFM. However, the market is frequently featured in the media. Additionally, all foods sold at the SMFM must comply with the Identity, Responsibility and Quantity codes (IRQ) established by California Code of Regulations. Under this code, farmers must display the following information on their invoices or labels: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Date of purchase</li> <li>▪ Identity of produce purchased</li> <li>▪ Producer's name and address</li> <li>▪ Quantity of produce (by weight or count)</li> </ul>
<b>Customers</b>	Local restaurants, boutique to mid-scale distribution firms, Santa Monica Unified School District, individual consumers (retail).
<b>Products</b>	Variety of fruits and vegetables
<b>Community Oriented Programs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Accepts EBT</li> <li>▪ Hosts farm tours for Santa Monica Unified School District and other school districts.</li> <li>▪ Hosts "Lunch with a Chef" and "Ask the Dietitian" cooking demonstrations featuring local chefs and dietitians and using market ingredients.</li> <li>▪ Seasonal festivities and promotions including All you Can Carry Pumpkins, Cinco de Mayo, etc.</li> <li>▪ Participates on "The Market Report," NPR's weekly Good Food broadcast about fresh seasonal products at the market.</li> </ul>
<b>Challenges</b>	There is no permanent infrastructure and no central management structure for wholesale operations that coordinates sales. This ultimately limits the efficiency and capacity of wholesale operations. Also, the "cold chain" is frequently interrupted due to farmers' lack of refrigerated trucks and the way in which produce is moved on a dolly in the midst of a busy farmers' market

## **Differences Among Regional Food Hubs**

This paper posits that the key to strengthening and expanding regional food systems lies in utilizing and coordinating existing infrastructure and RFH initiatives, so it is critical to embrace and involve a wide array of projects. In order to encompass the range of projects and initiatives that fall under the RFH umbrella, the Advisory Council crafted a definition that is inclusive rather than prescriptive. The featured case studies represent this diversity in several ways.

### ***Ownership Entity***

While many of their primary functions are the same, each of the hubs employs a different organizational strategy to help them aggregate and sell their produce. These case studies show that RFHs can be governed informally, by a nonprofit, by a single farmer, a larger distributor, or even a municipality. This range of approaches implies that another type of entity, such as a cooperative, could also be effective. It also illustrates that there are many ways to construct a RFH, and that organizational flexibility makes the RFH model viable in a broad range of situations and communities.

### ***Management and Operations***

The management and operations strategies of these hubs are nearly as varied as their organizational forms. While OGO and ALBA buy product outright and act as small-scale distributors, the Ojai Pixie Growers use mainstream brokers and wholesalers to handle their fruit, and farmers at the Santa Monica Farmers' Market sell directly to their customers, who use the market as an aggregation point.

The level of planting and harvesting coordination between farmers to meet customer demand varies among these hubs as well. ALBA coordinates with its farmers on both planting and harvesting. OGO and the Ojai Pixie Growers coordinate only their harvesting and packing, and any coordination that occurs at the SMFM is on an individual customer basis.

The farmers participating in all of these RFHs have confronted the barriers imposed by their small scale by banding together with other small and mid-sized growers to achieve larger volumes and reach wider markets. However, they each use tactics and approaches that fit the specific needs of their given regions and communities.

## **Similarities Among Regional Food Hubs**

Whether a farmer, farmer group, entrepreneur, nonprofit, or public entity, those involved in RFHs have a common goal of serving small to mid-sized farmers and supporting the growth of regional food systems. Yet, these case studies exhibit several similarities beyond these fundamental shared values.

### ***Community Orientation***

All of the profiled RFHs work to improve food security or provide educational opportunities relating to the food system. These are not just businesses, but active community members. OGO donates excess product to food banks and participates in farm to school programs through classroom education and sales to K-12 school districts. ALBA also participates farm to school programs, educates community members, and sells to corner stores in underserved communities. The Ojai Pixie Growers sell to WIC-only stores and work with food-based community groups. The SMFM works with the Santa Monica

school district, offers farmers' market tours and educational opportunities to grade school classes, and accepts EBT at its markets.

While RFHs ostensibly exist in order to make farming more profitable for their growers, these efforts are frequently not associated with direct economic gains. They speak to the hubs' dedication to their community's wellbeing and commitment to supporting local farming and local foods.

### ***Infrastructure***

Although infrastructure ownership varies across RFH models, all of them require similar infrastructure basics to carry out their businesses. They all need some method of aggregating their product, including packing, grading, and transportation. All of the featured hubs use:

- **An aggregation point**
- **Places to load/unload products**
- **Trucks**
- **Storage** (*SMFM does not provide storage, which limits the volume of wholesale business conducted there*)

### ***Marketing***

All of the profiled RFHs engage in some form of marketing. With the exception of SMFM, all of the RFHs have labels that communicate their local messaging and frequently emphasize the story behind their products. Because these farmers cannot compete with the price points of industrial agriculture, the value they add for the higher price comes in the form of fresher local foods of superior quality. As the most celebrated certified farmers' market in Southern California, the SMFM has been a major force in the creation of consumers' perceived value of locally produced food. A vibrant farmers market is the living embodiment of the value of a healthy regional food system.

### ***Challenges***

Even as these RFHs continue to operate, they struggle to find and maintain appropriate markets, match supply and demand, and overcome logistical obstacles. These case studies of RFHs (along with other aggregation and distribution hubs) demonstrate that, despite the difficulties, farmers and businesses are successfully implementing their food system visions in discrete communities across California and the United States.

While these projects all improve prospects for small farming operations and the viability of local agriculture, their collective impact on food systems reform is dampened. Most RFH projects are strapped for time and resources and are working tirelessly to maintain their current operations, leaving little energy to secure new funds or orchestrate broader initiatives for food systems change. As a result, many of these efforts have become siloed within disparate organizations. While all involved are working to build an alternative food system or co-opt the existing system to meet the needs of small and mid-scale growers, working in isolation has made it difficult to forward their greater social and small farm agendas.

## ENVISIONING A REGIONAL FOOD HUB NETWORK

Those who seek to create transformative change in the food system cannot expect one farmer, co-op or nonprofit to be the singular solution to system-wide problems. Collaboration, coordination and sharing of resources are essential. To capitalize on the collective strengths of concurrent efforts, the RFH Advisory Council is proposing to network California's RFH projects through a central entity. This network will provide RFHs with services and management assistance that will amplify the success and impact of individual hubs.

*The **Regional Food Hub Network (RFH-N)** will serve and support autonomous Regional Food Hubs through inter-hub brokerage, access to infrastructure, technical assistance, and networking related to hub operations in order to bolster the scale, predictability, and success of regional food production, sales, and consumption.*

The Regional Food Hub Network will offer a platform for coordination between hubs to enhance efficiency and optimize profits for farmers while increasing access to nutritious affordable foods in all communities across the state. In summary, the RFH-N's primary goals will be to:

- **Support a sustainable regionalized food system in California**
- **Increase opportunities for small and mid-sized farmers through coordination of sales, marketing, and other services**
- **Make locally produced foods available and accessible to institutional customers**
- **Improve equity throughout the regional food chain, supporting quality jobs from farm to fork**
- **Increase access to fresh, sustainably and regionally produced foods in underserved communities**

The following section will outline the RFH-N's structure and map out its primary functions that will allow it to accomplish these goals and benefit growers, consumers, and foodsheds throughout the state.

### NETWORK STRUCTURE

The RFH-N will not be a for-profit business. It will not own, buy or sell products. Instead, it will assist individual RFHs in their efforts to buy and sell products and reach new markets. For these reasons, the Advisory Council envisions the RFH-N as a nonprofit entity that supports for-profit RFH businesses. It will be a membership-based organization in which member hubs pay dues that will vary based on factors such as a member's size, ability to contribute, and receipt of services and support.

Once start-up costs are covered, these membership fees will finance the Network's basic services and functions. There will likely be an additional cost for selective services such as shared liability insurance. As it develops, the Network will need to distinguish between its basic functions and additional offerings. While a small portion of member dues may support the development of innovations or community-based projects that are outside of the scope of the Network's basic functions and may not provide immediate returns for members, these initiatives will be primarily funded by grants and other outside funding streams.



## Membership

The RFH-N is intended to support a specific population of small and mid-sized growers throughout the state who could collectively form the foundation of a sustainable regionalized food system. These farmers are being squeezed out of existence by competition from industrial-scale farms and the costly regulatory requirements that are designed to govern these larger operations. Given this situation, it is important to ensure that the RFH-N devise a way to focus its efforts on the state's small and mid-scale growers while excluding undesirable farms whose operations are not in line with the Network's ideals or mission.

To include only the intended populations and ensure that the RFH-N concept is not co-opted by large-scale or unsustainable growers, the RFH-N must carefully define the parameters of its membership. At a minimum, this would mean developing clear definitions and/or requirements for the following terms:

- **Small & Mid-sized** – There are currently a variety of working definitions for “small” and “mid-sized” farms. The RFH-N will need to decide upon standard definitions for these terms and determine an upper size limit for its members' farms.
- **Sustainable** – It is not expected that the RFH-N will deal exclusively with certified organic products. However, it must have some standards in place for sustainable farming practices for the purposes of marketing RFH products to consumers and ensuring that unsustainable farms are prevented from becoming a part of the Network.
- **Local/Regional** – All of the California RFH-N's members will come from within the state. However, that may be the extent of the Network's restrictions on a product's distance from its final consumer. “Local” is a subjective term and may change from region to region depending on a given foodshed and/or population. Therefore, rather than establishing a Network-wide definition for “local,” the RFH-N's standards surrounding locally produced goods may instead take the form of labeling and transparency. The Network might require that individual RFHs specify the geographic boundaries of their growers' operations and clearly label their products accordingly.

In this scenario, the RFH-N's role would be to promote locally produced foods, emphasizing that the shortest distance from a producer is best. This combination of marketing and available information will encourage consumption of local products and enable customers to make educated purchasing decisions.

- **Fair** – To live up to its goals of promoting a just food economy and equity throughout the food system, the RFH-N will have to develop basic standards for fair labor practices that member hubs must meet. So as not to place an unfair burden on the smallest farms, wage requirements may vary depending upon a farm's size or income level.

Developing the criteria for each of these terms will require discussion and formal decision-making as the Network develops. At the same time, well-designed membership requirements will be critical to reach the Network's goals of achieving meaningful food systems change.

## **NETWORK FUNCTIONS**

This section will explain what a Regional Food Hub Network does by outlining its major functions and areas of service. These include coordinating regional food supplies, providing member services and support, marketing, developing new projects and innovations, conducting research and sharing information, and advocating for beneficial policy changes.

### **Coordinating Regional Food Supplies**

While individual RFHs focus on expanding economic opportunities for small farm operations by helping them reach new markets, the RFH-N increases the efficiency of RFHs by coordinating and facilitating the movement of food between hubs to connect and strengthen regional food systems throughout the state. Coordinating food supplies between RFHs and facilitating “inter-hub brokerage” will therefore be key functions of the RFH-N and may be accomplished using a variety of strategies.

#### ***Facilitating Sales and Inter-hub Brokerage***

At times, some RFHs will likely have surplus product while others are faced with unmet demand, due to the variation in seasonal availability of products throughout California. By monitoring the supply and demand of individual RFHs, the RFH-N will be able to facilitate sales across member hubs.

The Network will not buy or sell products itself, but instead will serve as a coordinating agent. Individual hubs will be able to report their surplus supply or unmet demand to the Network and, in turn, the Network members have the opportunity to match supply and demand with other participating hubs and/or customers. The hubs will then conduct business transactions independently of the Network.

#### ***Tapping into Existing Infrastructure***

All over California, agriculture and food production businesses generate excess and underutilize facilities as they attempt to keep up with the changing demands of the food industry. At the same time, small wholesale food distribution businesses (including RFHs) strain to cover the costs of infrastructure. These businesses must derive their operating costs from the commission they charge on sales—and these margins are low. RFHs will be more financially sustainable if they make the greatest practical use of existing resources, services, and facilities and conserve their infrastructure capital for facilities and equipment that they absolutely must own outright. Canny alliance building and co-ventures with existing aggregators, distributors, and retailers could also make a RFH feasible for groups without the resources to fund a start-up.

The RFH-N could serve as a clearinghouse for information on existing aggregators, distributors, and retailers with excess capacity or a willingness to rent or share facilities or equipment. Resources that might appear on the RFH-N’s listings include processing and grading facilities, commercial kitchens, cold storage, distribution terminals that can receive trucks, available parking space for delivery trucks, and more.

### ***Logistics Service***

If member hubs desire it, the RFH-N could expand its services to include the establishment of a logistics service for members of participating RFHs. The RFH-N could establish accounts at appropriate common carrier trucking companies and offer a booking service to qualifying hubs.

Consolidation of buying and scheduling should increase access and lower costs for Network members while providing a commission for the RFH-N sufficient to cover their operating costs. Coordinating transportation logistics can be a challenge for both small growers and their customers without access to common carrier trucking systems. By developing an accessible directory of available facilities and services—the logistical network essential to making such co-ventures work efficiently—a RFH Network would provide critical assistance.

The RFH-N could lower barriers to common carrier access for growers shipping less than a truckload (or less than a pallet) by offering common carrier access to member hubs as a fee-for-service proposition. The Network could coordinate shipping of members' products, combining sub-pallet quantities bound for the same destination and building up to scheduled runs.

### ***A Place for Food to Land***

Efficient trucking is certainly necessary, but trucking alone will not get the job done. A critical factor in making transport functional is having a proper place for transported produce to land. Rapid travel and climate control are essential to maintain the freshness, and the value, of perishable fresh produce.

To function optimally, common carriers need 24-hour access to destination terminals. Wholesale terminal markets are open all night so common carrier trucks can deliver product in time for immediate transfer to the customer's truck for the final trip to the store, or into climate controlled storage.

Customers benefit from all-hours access as well. Retail outlets typically pick up perishables early in the morning, so perishable stocking is largely complete before the store opens.

A RFH-N could identify existing terminal facilities and develop a network listing of terminals and other places (such as food banks) that would agree to provide “cross-docking” –landing and temporary storage—on a fee-for-service basis. Network development of cross-docking agreements with existing facilities would strengthen its logistics service substantially without requiring hubs or the RFH-N to own real estate.

### **Services and Support**

Another primary function of the RFH-N is to build the capacity of individual RFHs to enable them to grow to the point at which they can fully participate in the Network and ultimately become integral players in the regional food system. The Network will do this by providing a variety of services and supports to individual hubs.

## ***Cost Sharing***

There are many business models for collaboration with the goal of reducing costs for goods and services among similar businesses. Usually the arrangement involves either a cooperative or an association (such as the American Automobile Association (AAA), or an industry association such as the Farm Bureau). In this case, the individual hubs would benefit from being a member of the RFH-N and the Network would negotiate lower prices on critical goods and services.

Some goods and services that might be relevant to consider in this model include:

- **Insurance** (including both liability and employee benefits)
- **Safety certifications**
- **Information systems**
- **Marketing and advertising**
- **Packing materials**
- **Access to common carriers** (trucking rates)
- **Equipment**

In the context of the RFH-N, there are many applications for cost-sharing arrangements. Access to affordable insurance could be particularly beneficial for both farmers and individual RFHs. Individual hubs and small farmers face challenges similar to those of any small business or start-up firm with regard to access to affordable insurance. As a result, small farmers are frequently locked out of the marketplace due to inadequate liability coverage—particularly to satisfy the requirements of institutional customers—and many are unable to afford employee benefits. The inability to provide employees with basic benefits pushes many talent and skilled workers attracted to farm- and food-related industries out of the field. The RFH-N could provide opportunities for pooled insurance policies, which could substantially reduce costs for hub operators and participating farmers.

## ***Fundraising***

Funding is a perpetual challenge for any start-up or small business wanting to expand. When capacity is limited, it is often difficult for new RFHs to apply for grant funding to develop their projects without outside help.

The RFH-N would identify appropriate funding sources for individual RFHs and assist with grant writing. The Network would also coordinate and facilitate communication among potential hub grantees in order to avoid duplication of applications and maximize the chances of success. Over time, the RFH-N would also accumulate enough information about individual RFHs as well as projects that span the Network to easily demonstrate a need for funds, create sound budgets, and show progress for the purpose of evaluation.

## ***Training Opportunities***

Regional Food Hubs do and will continue to require skilled workers.<sup>8</sup> However, perceived limitations in job advancement have made attracting and retaining employees in the field of farming and food-related industries difficult. This perception is partly due to a lack of formal training opportunities.

For example, although there has been considerable discussion about creating a standardized training course for farmers' market managers, none currently exists. Similar to farmers' markets, RFHs require skilled managers to efficiently operate their businesses. The RFH-N could spearhead a training program that would focus on sales and management, and would benefit from the RFH-N's broad scope of members.

Training opportunities for new farmers may also be well situated within the RFH-N. As the farmer population is rapidly aging, new farmers will be essential to the expansion of regional food systems. As many younger farmers are entering the industry with no farming background, they will require training in growing methods, marketing, finance, and other areas. Educational opportunities along these lines could be coordinated or provided by the Network.

## ***Networking***

With members spanning the state of California, the RFH-N has tremendous potential to bring people together and provide opportunities for networking and sharing ideas. The RFH-N could serve as a central resource to connect and convene its members and other stakeholders throughout the state. Ideally, the Network would also hold an annual event or conference for members and other interested parties to highlight innovations, best practices, challenges, and opportunities common to the RFH community.

## **Marketing**

The local and regional food movement has emerged and grown in response to consumer demands for safe, nutritious, and sustainably produced foods. The popularity of and demand for local foods has increased dramatically in recent years and continues to grow. While the term "local" does not have a technical definition, local foods have rapidly built a niche market—primarily due to the successful use of narrative and a perceived personal connection to food producers.

Savvy consumers demand to know who grew their food, how it was grown, and where it was grown. Some businesses are now taking their marketing a step further and narrating a product's entire journey from farm to fork, illustrating how the product has passed through various segments of the regional food chain to arrive in the consumer's hand. Sharing that narrative is a large part of what advocates, farmers, and RFH operators do because it is a useful marketing tool that builds better businesses, better food, and viable regional food systems.

Competition for the local food market share is now increasing within regions. In some cases national and even multi-national companies have usurped the local and organic story and are manipulating the

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<sup>8</sup> Community Food Enterprise, accessed July 15, 2010, <http://www.communityfoodenterprise.org/>

vague terminology around “local” to sell their products, which are not always produced within the region. At the same time, small farmers and RFH operators have limited time and funds to develop comprehensive marketing campaigns, farm logos, and tags lines that tell the story of the food they grow.

### ***Marketing Campaign***

The RFH-N will develop a seal of approval or brand for its members. This will be designed to accompany a RFH’s individual label as a co-brand. The Network’s brand will verify that a product comes from a member RFH and is part of a distribution network that:

- **Supports small and mid-sized farmers and sustainable growing practices**
- **Sells products produced and distributed within California**
- **Can provide customers with information about each step of a product’s journey**
- **Benefits underserved consumers**
- **Was produced with fair labor practices**

The goal of the RFH-N’s label would not be to detract from an individual hub or farmer’s brand but to enhance their labels by providing additional value and credibility. The use and placement of the logos would always be at the discretion of RFH operators and participating farmers.

Much of the RFH-N’s marketing will target wholesale customers and focus not just on the story of how a product was grown, but how it was distributed and transported. This will reinforce the quality and integrity of the products traveling through the distribution system<sup>9</sup> and highlight not only the farmer’s story but the wholesaler’s and trucker’s as well.

In this way, a RFH-N label will have the potential to create product traceability and build transparency throughout this wholesale distribution system. The Network will also use its marketing strategies, in conjunction with community-based programming to tap new and emerging markets such as schools, corner stores, and retail outlets in underserved communities.

The marketing campaign will promote the RFH-N brand and the value and importance of eating sustainable local foods by emphasizing the story of local foods and their journeys from production to final markets. It will employ a variety of strategies to reach its customers, including website development, online marketing, and the creation of labels and other promotional materials including point of sale elements. Each of these methods will target an array of audiences such as schools, hospitals, chefs, eco- and health-conscious consumers, and underserved populations. The Network would also train hub operators in the application of each of these marketing tools.

### **Incubating New Technologies and Pilots**

As Regional Food Hubs are formed and grow to meet the increasing demand for regionally and sustainably produced food, they will require new strategies, expansions on existing techniques, and a re-evaluation of the way in which local food markets operate. By serving as incubators for pilot

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<sup>9</sup> Food Alliance, accessed June 23, 2010, <http://foodalliance.org/>

projects and new technologies, RFHs can begin to create new mechanisms by which regionally produced food enters mainstream markets.

Among the many hub benefits highlighted by advocates, access to affordable and sustainably produced food is a top priority. Indeed, this is a critical component recognized by many as fundamental to improving community health and supporting local economies. By creating a space where regional growers can begin to aggregate produce for mass consumption and share the use of, for example, light processing equipment, economies of scale and the cost to the consumers begin to be addressed. By further incorporating shared cooling space, packaging, and distribution, RFHs begin to emerge as a viable and cost-effective alternative to conventional distribution methods.

While individual RFHs will test the strategies for breaking into new markets or reaching underserved consumers, many of their efforts would benefit from the support provided by the RFH-N. The Network will assist its member hubs in securing funding for innovative projects and provide guidance as they pilot new strategies for reaching underserved populations and other potential markets. The Network would keep track of hub innovations, the resources they require, and their levels of success. Using this information along with staff capacity, the Network will be able to provide its members with a range of methods for enhancing their customer bases while combating food insecurity.

Some current and possible hub innovations are outlined below:

### ***Marketing Innovations***

- **On-site Retail Grocery** – This would offer a new market opportunity to supplement wholesale business at RFHs.
- **Permanent Farmers’ Market** – This would also provide growers with an additional venue to sell their products.
- **Coordinated Buying Programs** – Local advocates and organizations would coordinate large-scale aggregate purchasing strategies for large buyers and institutions.
- **Alternative Currency** – Individual hubs would develop tariffs and exchange rates. Then, inter-hub trading would place equal value on equivalent products from separate RFHs. The intention is to eliminate comparative advantage from one region to the next. For example, a head of lettuce from Imperial County would be disallowed from being sold in San Diego for cheaper than it can be produced.

### ***Access Innovations***

- **On-site EBT/WIC/SNAP Offices** – These would provide consumers of limited means with immediate access to good food.
- **WIC CSA** – The constraints of the WIC program, including size and packaging requirements of food, are such that most CSAs do not meet the federally mandated guidelines. However, these could be overcome with the increased coordination of agricultural production and distribution provided by a RFH. Irregularly sized products, which are normally undesirable, can be repurposed for a WIC-only CSA that will both increase access for underserved populations and provide an economic return to growers where one did not previously exist.
- **Green Carts** – These could be in the form of “healthy snack carts” or “mobile farmers’ markets” that are stocked and housed at a RFH. As mobile vendors, they have the potential to travel into

target neighborhoods and offer nutritious food options to underserved communities without the delay of time-consuming and costly infrastructure development projects.

### **Research and Information Sharing**

The RFH-N will continuously gather and organize data on RFHs throughout the state, which will facilitate several of the Network's other functions. Research on RFHs and the needs of specific regions will inform outreach efforts and capacity building as well as marketing. A record of case studies and best practices will ideally streamline member hubs' paths to success. Sharing information on product availability and customer demands will facilitate sales and coordination between hubs. A comprehensive database of information on RFHs will also make it possible to gather statistics and measure the progress of the Network as it develops and supports the regionalized food system. Analyzing regional food trends throughout the state could then inform further research initiatives and potentially influence policy and funding opportunities.

### **Policy Advocacy**

As the concept of Regional Food Hubs has emerged and become increasingly popular, it has gained the attention of policymakers. Given that RFHs are impacted by issues relating to agriculture, public health, rural and urban business development, and the logistics associated with running a hub, it will be increasingly important for RFHs to develop an organized policy advocacy strategy.

The RFH-N's policy platform would be informed by the needs of the Network's membership (RFHs and participating farmers). It would advocate for specific policies, laws, and regulations through the development of a strategic policy platform designed to honor these values and stakeholder needs.



## CREATING A REGIONAL FOOD HUB NETWORK

Outlining the RFH-N's basic structure and numerous functions makes it clear that implementing such a project will be a major undertaking. This section describes the steps that the Advisory Council has taken thus far to move forward with Network development and implementation planning. It examines a mapping study designed to target optimal locations for RFH-N outreach, reviews the results of the Advisory Council's multi-stakeholder summit held in August 2010, and finally lays out an implementation plan for the Network.

### VISUALIZING A GROWING NETWORK

As a preliminary step in creating a network of RFHs, the Advisory Council sought to identify target hub locations, then compare them to existing and emerging hubs to get a sense of what a statewide network might look like. To achieve these objectives, a series of maps were generated using GIS software. The maps display a systematic approach to determining where RFHs should be developed or supported based on growers' needs, agricultural resources, product demand, and proximity to transportation infrastructure. Additional maps overlay the landscape of existing and emerging RFHs throughout the state.

In developing the methodology for this study, it became clear that RFHs tend to fall into one of two categories: those that are located in rural areas and focus mainly on aggregation ("supply hubs"), and those that are located in more densely populated urban areas and primarily facilitate the distribution of local products to consumers and markets ("demand hubs"). Because these two hub types have slightly different core functions, distinct sets of criteria must be used to determine their optimal locations. For that reason, this study assesses demand and supply hub locations separately and then combines the results to map a more comprehensive series of proposed RFH sites. The study also plots existing RFH projects known to the Advisory Council and overlays them on top of the proposed sites as a basis of comparison.

The specific goals of the study were to:

- **Create a RFH-N visual that illustrates the proposed vision**
- **Map relevant agricultural assets and resources**
- **Identify strategic locations for RFHs throughout the state where the Network might focus outreach efforts**
- **Map existing hub projects to assess the progress of RFH development**
- **Compare existing hub projects to study results and identify gaps in RFH development and/or the Network's awareness of hub projects**

The following section describes this study in detail.

### Demand Hub Locations

Map 1 (p. 34) is intended to identify optimal demand hub locations by highlighting accessible areas that have a high demand for RFH products. Based on the assumption that all people should have access to fresh and locally produced food, the study used population as an indicator of demand for urban

RFHs. Because these hubs depend on transportation infrastructure to receive products and reach consumers, it also factored in proximity to freeways.

Map 1 shows population density by county throughout the state. It draws attention to cities with populations over 300,000 with the darkest blue color representing the most densely populated areas. The state's major freeways are also plotted on the map to illustrate access to transportation infrastructure. The yellow dots represent proposed demand hub locations—high-density areas that are close to freeways.

## **Supply Hub Locations**

Regional Food Hubs that focus on aggregating supply should ideally be located in places that are convenient for as many small to mid-sized growers as possible. This portion of the study attempts to determine strategic locations for aggregation-based RFHs by identifying the areas in the state with the highest concentrations of small farms and that also have sufficient access to freeways.

In order to target small and mid-sized farms, the study first looked at farm size throughout the state. Map 2 (p. 34) shows the average size of farms by county. Counties with the smallest average farm size are the darkest in color.

To gain a clearer sense of the concentrations of small farms throughout the state, the study also considered the number of farms per county. This differentiated more urban counties such as Los Angeles County, which has a small average farm size but relatively few farms overall. Map 3 (p. 35) depicts the number of farms per county showing counties with the greatest number of farms in the darkest green.

Finally, to create a single map that portrays the state's most productive agricultural areas with the highest densities of small farms and that are in close proximity to freeways—the most strategic locations for supply hubs—a suitability analysis was conducted using GIS software. Map 4 (p. 35) shows the results of this analysis. Based on these criteria, the darkest green areas are the best suited for aggregation hubs. The light green dots within those areas indicate proposed supply hub sites.

## **Proposed Hub Locations**

To support small farmers and reach urban markets, the RFH-N will include both demand and supply hubs. Map 5 (p. 36) combines the results of the two previous analyses to provide a visual of the full network of proposed hub sites.

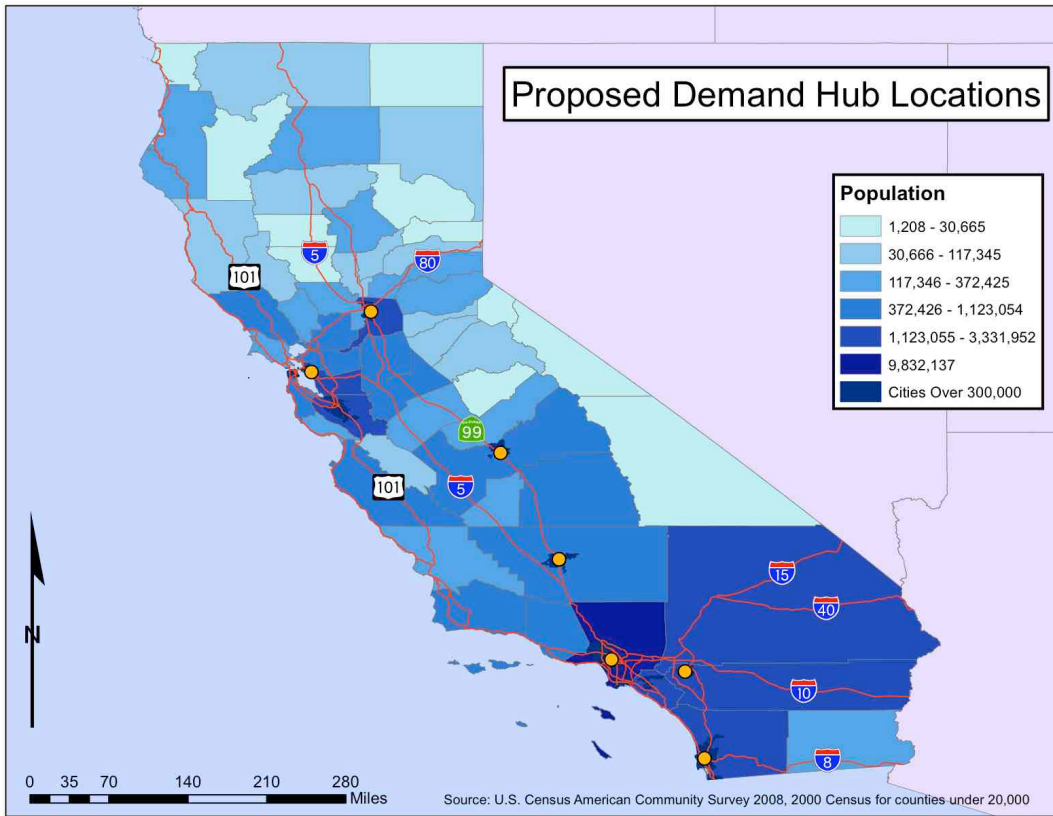
## **An Emerging Regional Food Hub Network**

The final map (Map 6, p. 36) outlines a preliminary vision of the RFH-N by overlaying the existing and emerging RFH projects known to the Advisory Council over the study's recommended hub sites. This comparison of existing and proposed hubs shows that many current RFH projects line up with the study's findings. It also indicates that the Central Valley is a prime location for RFHs, yet the Network has a substantial gap in that region and should therefore target outreach efforts in the area.

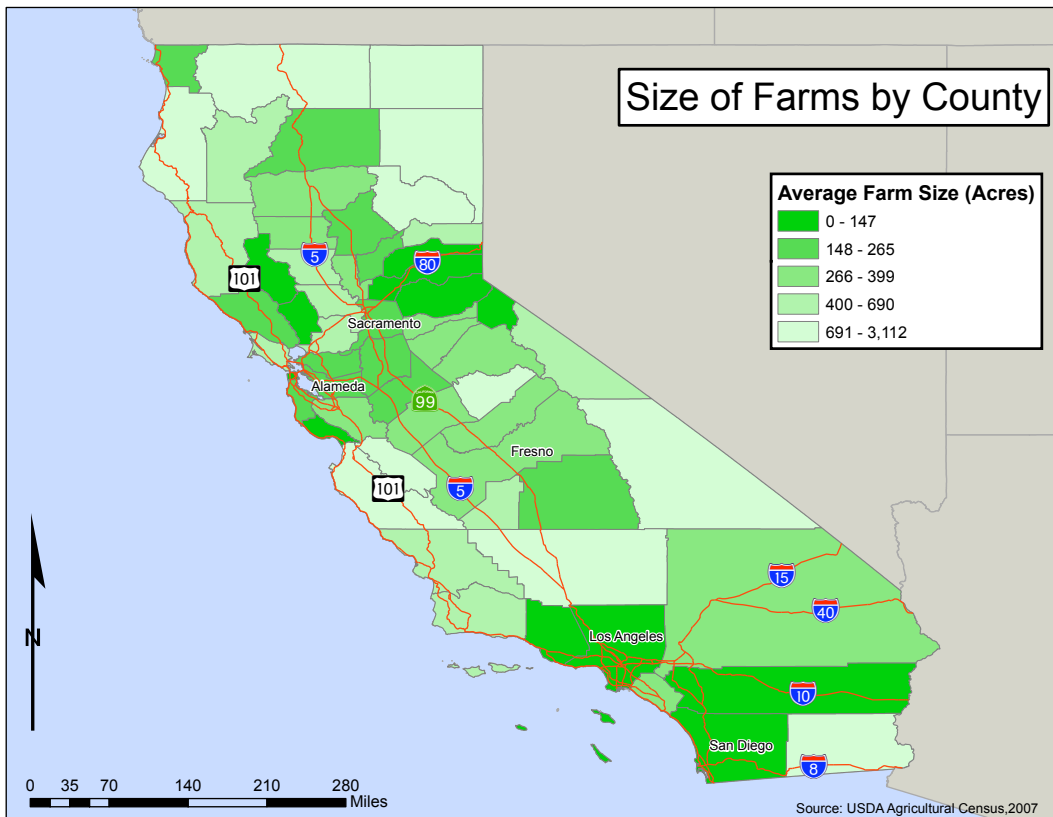
Some of the existing RFH projects are not within target areas at all, yet this does not imply that they are not providing valuable functions or that they should be excluded from the Network. The study selected locations that stand out within California due to their agricultural assets and demand potential. As a part of the most populous state in the country and one that is disproportionately rich in agricultural resources, even areas where RFHs are not proposed by this study should be able to support strong regional food economies. Existing and emerging hubs outside of the study results highlight the abundance of local vision, leadership, and producer and consumer buy-in that make RFHs viable. They speak to the significant potential to expand and connect the state's regional food systems through an extensive RFH-N.

With additional time and resources, this study could take into account further variables to be considered when identifying potential RFH locations. For example, instead of using population as a measure of demand, the study could develop indicators to account for underserved areas and consumer support of locally produced foods based on buying patterns. A more in-depth study could also distinguish between supply hubs that deal with food crops versus wine grapes, cotton or tobacco. It could also look at specific data on socially disadvantaged farmers to pinpoint need more accurately.

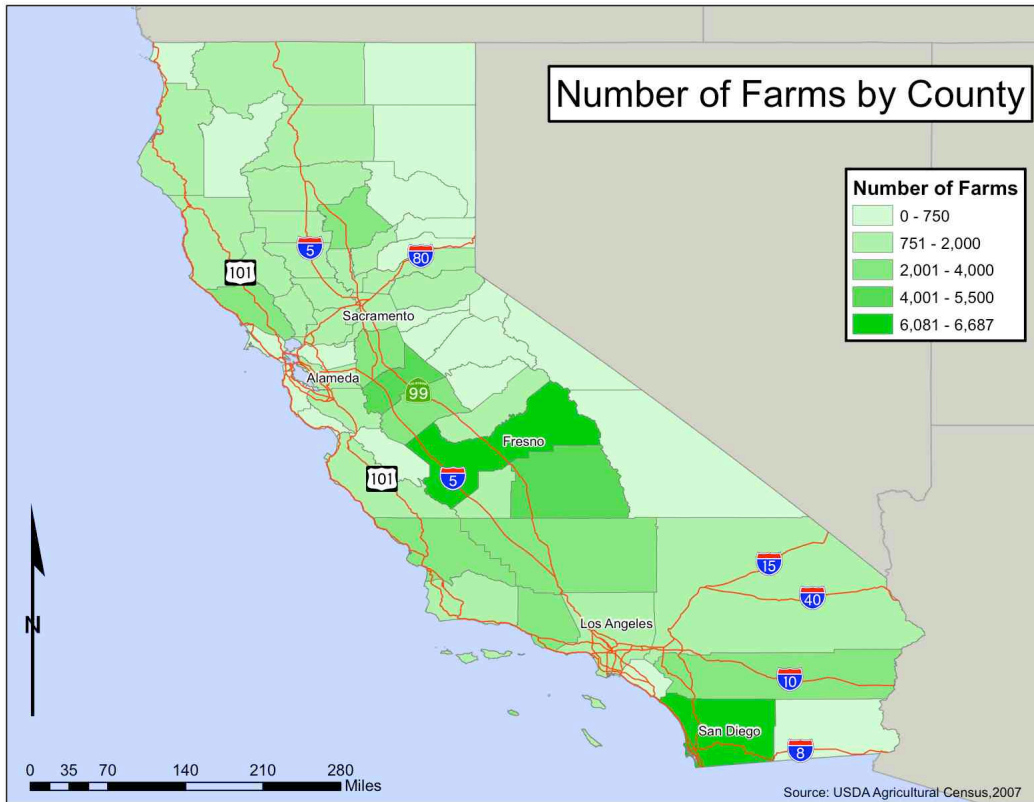
While this study successfully portrays the possible geographical scope of the California RFH-N, it could be more comprehensive and a more in-depth mapping analysis could improve the results. The Advisory Council therefore recommends that a second phase of the study be conducted as a next step in implementing the Network and identifying priority outreach areas. Phase II of the study should explicitly account for **(1)** food insecurity/underserved areas, **(2)** specific consumer product demands, **(3)** products produced on farms, and **(4)** a census of disadvantaged farmer populations.



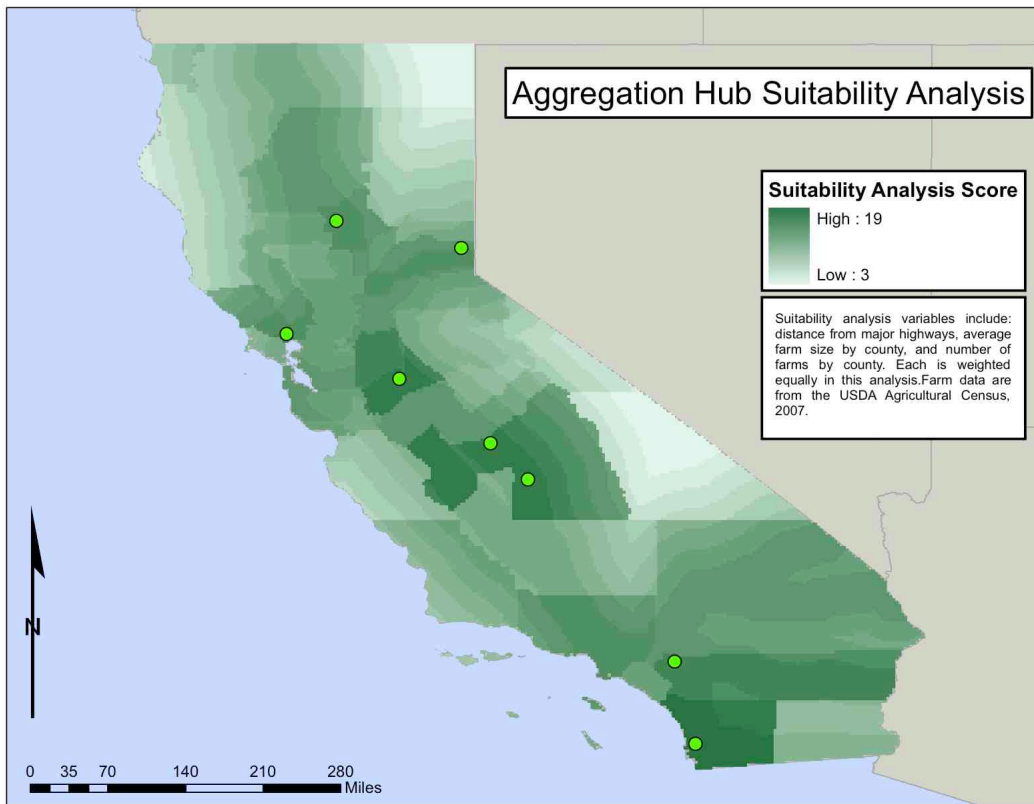
Map 1: *Proposed Demand Hub Locations* (created by Steven Simon)



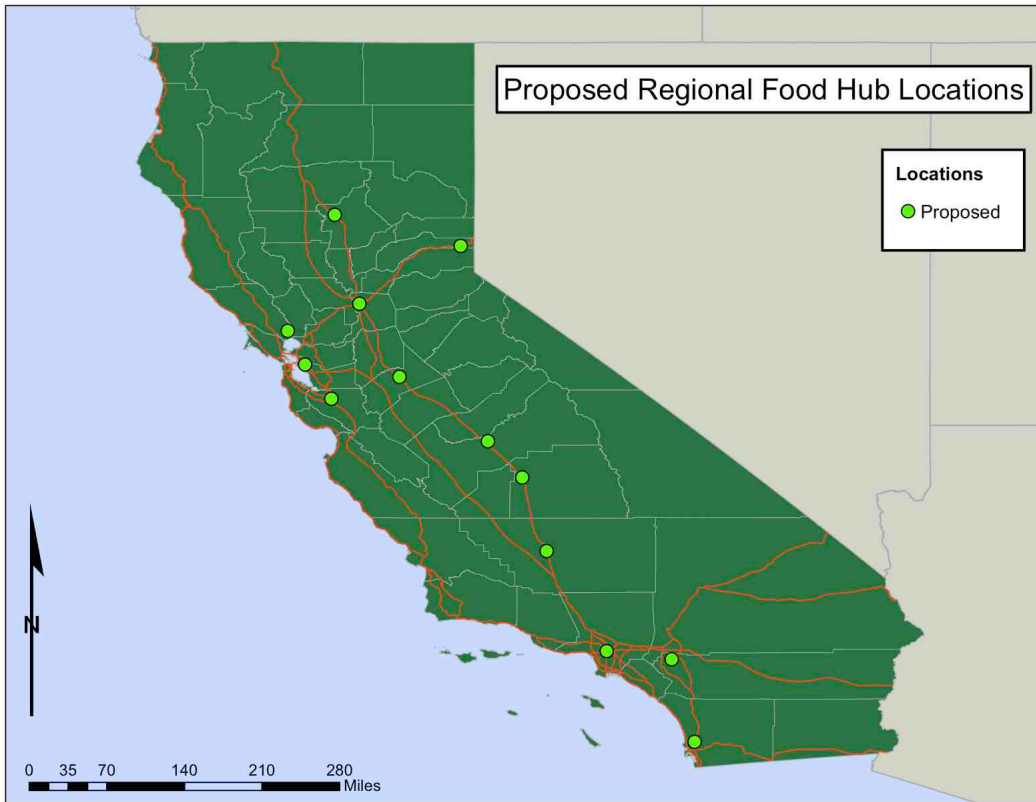
Map 2: *Farm Size by County* (created by Steven Simon)



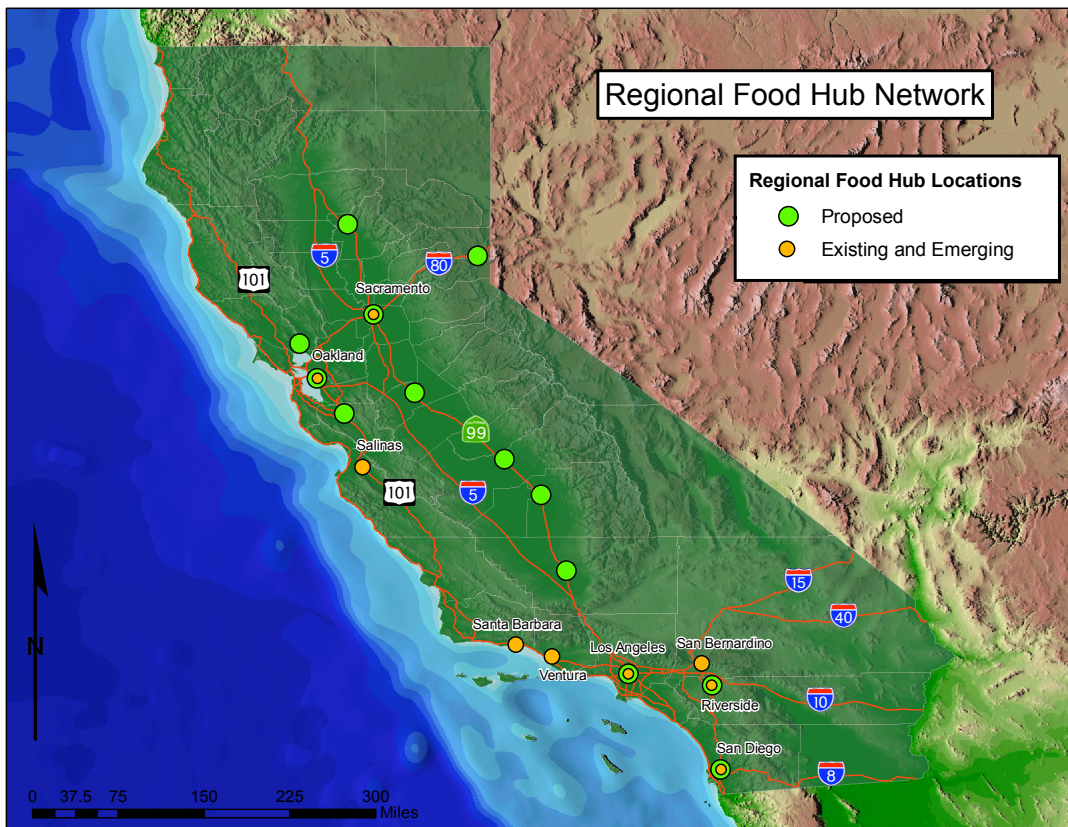
Map 3: *Number of Farms by County* (created by Steven Simon)



Map 4: *Aggregation Hub Suitability Analysis* (created by Steven Simon)



Map 5: *Proposed Regional Food Hub Locations* (created by Steven Simon)



Map 6: *Regional Food Hub Network* (created by Steven Simon)

## REGIONAL FOOD HUB NETWORK SUMMIT

On August 24<sup>th</sup>, 2010, UEPI and the RFH Advisory Council convened a summit with 35 stakeholders from around the state. These included disadvantaged farmers, farmer advocates, distributors, government employees, and nonprofit representatives. The meeting was intended to (1) present the concept of the RFH-N, and (2) gain input from the larger audience to inform an implementation plan and next steps.

The summit first introduced the RFH-N concept through a series of presentations that featured RFH case studies and a summary of the Advisory Council's vision. Summit attendees then broke into groups for two breakout sessions. The same questions were asked in each session, but the groups were divided differently to elicit a variety of responses and provide participants with opportunities to network with one another. In an effort to gain a sense of farmers' versus distributors' versus government employees' perspectives, participants first broke into groups by area of interest or profession. Next, participants were grouped together by region so that they might bring up localized issues, become aware of other projects in their areas, and potentially collaborate. Following the summit, the Advisory Council also sent out a survey to evaluate the event and attain additional feedback on the RFH-N.<sup>10</sup> This section summarizes the feedback and input gained during and following the summit.

### Feedback on Network Functions

To gauge the breakout session participants' interest in the RFH-N and to determine the Network's most valuable functions, the moderators first asked participants, "Why would you support the development of a RFH-N and in what ways might a Network be most helpful to individual RFH projects?" The majority of responses to this question fit into the categories established in the *Network Functions* section above.

Those suggestions relating to *Coordinating Regional Food Supplies* reiterated many of the points mentioned in that section above, with a particular emphasis on the logistics of moving food through regional food systems. Responses concerning *Research and Information Sharing* focused on improving communication among network members to increase efficiency and avoid duplicating efforts. Within the category of *Services and Support*, participants stressed the importance of securing funding that would reduce individual costs, offering opportunities for networking and skill development, and facilitating access to new institutional markets. The feedback on *Marketing* emphasized branding, the promotion of locally and regionally produced foods, and the development of product standards across member hubs. And finally, suggestions about *Political Advocacy* revolved around the need to present a unified voice to policy-makers and foster buy-in from political leaders and other groups.

### Community Benefits

Responses related to community benefits did not fit into the established network function categories. Like *strengthening the regional food system*, benefits to the community are not an explicit Network

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<sup>10</sup> See Appendix 3: Post-summit Survey Questions

function but rather an overarching goal. It is hoped that the RFH-N will incorporate community benefits into its core functions and, in doing so, strengthen regional economies, provide educational opportunities, promote quality green jobs throughout the value chain, and support projects that increase access to fresh and nutritious local foods.

### **Cultivating Member Buy-in**

As a network of members and member hubs, creating buy-in is central to the RFH-N's development. The moderators next asked participants, "What would a Network need to provide to RFHs in your region in order for you to invest in its development?" In answer to this question, many participants restated the importance of Network functions that were introduced in response to the first question. The main functions that participants cited were (1) cost sharing and other financial support, (2) coordination of logistics and shared infrastructure, (3) focused outreach to farmers and hub managers, (4) research on existing hubs and different regions' needs, (5) marketing, and (6) political advocacy. In addition to these responses, participants also brought up several needs that are not directly related to Network functions or services. These concerned clarity, planning, and food system equity.

#### ***Clarity***

Participants were very straightforward in communicating their desire for the Network to have a clearly defined mission, set of goals, and governance structure. They also wanted any other vague assumptions about the Network, its participants, or its functions to be explicitly identified. For example, a clear definition of the Network's members and products is essential to developing an effective marketing campaign.

This vision paper is the first step in the planning phase of the RFH-N. It outlines the Network's goals and functions and suggests a potential governance structure. It is intended to begin a conversation about the Network, but does not go into the specifics of each and every detail. Therefore, to satisfy participants' understandable need for further clarity, the implementation plan contains structured opportunities for developing the Network's mission and goals, determining membership costs and services, forming a governing body, and creating Network-wide definitions.

#### ***Planning***

Participants also requested that the Network have a viable business plan. They specifically emphasized that the Network must develop a feasible strategy for economic sustainability without continued grant funding to cover operations. The creation of a feasibility study and business plan is accordingly a main objective of the implementation plan.

#### ***Promoting Equity throughout the Food System***

Many participants also expressed the need for the Network to embrace equity as a fundamental value. Achieving this would require an examination of the RFH-N's beneficiaries and implementation of measures to ensure that benefits are equitably distributed along the regional food chain, from growers to underserved consumers. While a value is not a Network function or step within implementation, it can be incorporated into the Network's mission, goals, procedures, member requirements, and projects, all of which will be formalized over the course of implementation.



## **Anticipated Challenges**

The RFH-N requires coordinating the needs of diverse stakeholder groups. In an effort to anticipate the inherent obstacles and mitigate as many as possible in advance, the moderators asked breakout session participants, “What do you think would be the biggest challenges for the RFH-N and RFHs interested in joining a Network?” Participant answers ranged from feasibility issues like overcoming financial and regulatory barriers, to cultivating buy-in, to fulfilling the expectations of all of the parties involved.

### ***Funding***

Consistent with their responses to the first two questions, breakout session participants listed financing as the most significant hurdle in RFH-N development. They elaborated that securing initial funding for infrastructure, required certifications, and effective traceability systems would all add to costs. Additionally, it might be difficult to develop a sustainable revenue stream, particularly given the current economic climate. Although specific funding sources are not identified in the implementation plan, securing funds and developing a sustainable economic model for the Network are both central goals.

### ***Buy-in***

Participants warned that gaining member and stakeholder buy-in will be a major challenge for the RFH-N, particularly in the absence of clarity and planning as described above. As expressed in the previous section, the implementation plan will attempt to address ambiguities and develop strategies for targeted outreach.

### ***Cohesion***

Many participants cited cohesion among stakeholders or meeting the needs of parties with distinct or contrasting objectives as the Network’s most daunting challenge. Some wondered if it is possible to simultaneously advocate for underserved consumers and support the economic needs of small farmers, or to promote equity and transparency in an industry that is based on competition. These will not be easy conflicts for the Network to address, and developing optimal solutions will require much thought and consideration.

Because the Network’s membership will consist of RFHs with a membership of small farmers, the majority of the Network functions will cater to the farmers’ needs. Network staff will also pursue funding to support innovations and facilitate partnerships that increase food access in underserved communities, ideally developing new markets for RFH growers.

At the same time, the Network will have to develop strategies and strategic partnerships to support the smallest growers as mid-sized farms have proven to be the more economically advantageous partners. Growers of different sizes will ideally be able to support one another within the Network, but negotiating strategies to achieve these mutually beneficial relationships will have to be determined in the Network’s business plan. Overall, juggling the needs of such diverse stakeholders and developing an atmosphere of trust among them will have to be one of the RFH-N’s primary focuses, particularly in the development stages.

## **Implementation Strategy**

Finally, moderators asked, “What should be the first steps in implementing a RFH-N?” Below is a summary of the responses received from the breakout sessions and the follow-up survey, as well as recommendations based on this feedback.

### ***Reconvene Group***

As a network of member hubs, the RFH-N cannot move forward without generating buy-in and building capacity. Regular meetings and conference calls will provide opportunities to facilitate communication among stakeholders, develop membership, and plan next steps as a group. Based on the feedback received, the Advisory Council recommends that the Network hold quarterly in-person meetings at rotating locations around the state so as to engage members from diverse regions.<sup>11</sup> In between these meetings, the Advisory Council further recommends that the group check in via teleconference to stay up-to-date and plan upcoming events. These meetings would initially be organized and facilitated by UEPI and members of the existing RFH Advisory Council.

### ***Form Advisory Board***

Bringing the RFH-N from the vision stage into reality will require leadership and strategic decision-making at each step. For that reason, the Advisory Council recommends that UEPI, with the support of other dedicated nonprofits, lead and facilitate the creation of a Network Advisory Board to oversee and guide the feasibility and planning stages of implementation. The Advisory Board would be a multi-stakeholder group consisting primarily of growers or representatives of existing or emerging hubs (future RFH-N members) but would also include nonprofit partners, government agency representatives, and other invested parties. The Board would be responsible for making all Network-related decisions and moving the project through the planning stages.

### ***Establish Network Mission, Vision, and Goals***

It is difficult to cultivate buy-in or move development forward without a clear sense of the Network’s purpose. Therefore, deciding upon a formal mission, vision, and goals should be one of the first steps in implementing the RFH-N. In addition to these guiding statements, the Network must also define any network-wide terms that might impact membership or marketing. A distinction must first be made between those terms that will be defined by the Network and those that will be defined by individual hubs. For example, the RFH-N will likely have to define *small* and *mid-sized* farms for membership purposes, but may be able to embrace individual hubs’ definitions of *local* within the state. To set the project in motion, the Advisory Council recommends that the Network Advisory Board prioritize the creation of these definitions.

### ***Secure Funding***

The RFH-N’s success will hinge upon outside funds for planning and implementation activities before it is able to support its basic operations through revenue alone. The Advisory Council therefore

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<sup>11</sup> A second meeting is being planned for January 2011.

recommends that the Advisory Board first seek funds to cover meetings, a feasibility study and business plan, board members' time (if/when applicable), the hiring of key staff, and incorporation. Once the RFH-N is formalized, staff can then seek funding for further implementation activities such as marketing, research, and capacity building.

### ***Develop Feasibility Study and Business Plan***

A viable business plan will be essential for the RFH-N to sustain its functions and thrive. This plan must assess all of the costs associated with the RFH-N's creation and develop a strategy for long-term economic sustainability. It must also include a method for supporting very small growers and hubs as well as larger operations. Finally, it must calculate the role of membership fees and other income sources in creating a dependable revenue stream to cover basic operating costs. Before the business plan is developed, it will be important to determine whether the project is feasible or if it should be modified before moving forward. Because these planning steps are so fundamental to the Network's success, the Advisory Council recommends that the Network Advisory Board secure funds to develop a feasibility study and business plan as one of its first objectives.

### ***Formalize Organization***

Once the RFH-N's feasibility is established and a solid business plan is in place, the planning phase will be complete. The Network's next steps will be to incorporate as an association operating on a nonprofit basis (possibly as a public benefit or mutual benefit organization), hire key staff, appoint a board of directors, and formally invite members to join. At this point, the Advisory Board will no longer drive the project.

### ***Create Marketing Campaign***

The RFH-N's ability to reach new markets and attract customers will ultimately define its success, and a well-designed marketing campaign will significantly increase the Network's chances. As a first step after incorporation, the Advisory Council recommends that the RFH-N design and launch a marketing campaign that includes developing a label and brand, promotional strategy, marketing materials geared toward diverse audiences, and an online presence.

### ***Research and Information Sharing***

In the Network's beginning stages, research on existing RFH projects and target regions throughout the state will inform its strategies for outreach to new members and capacity building. As it grows, the RFH-N should record its research findings and other data in a format that is both accessible to its members and can support other Network functions including coordination of supply and grant writing.

As one of the Network's first research projects, the Advisory Council recommends that phase II of the mapping study (described in the *Visualizing a Growing Network* section above) be carried out. This assessment, coupled with localized research on the specific needs of the target communities, will provide the Network with a strategic direction for outreach efforts.

**Capacity Development**

Once the RFH-N has done a survey of existing RFH projects and identified target communities to bring into the Network, it must then conduct outreach to these areas. It will be important to target not only growers and hub operators, but community leaders and policy makers as well. As the Network grows and develops capacity, it will be strategic to position regional staff in these areas to facilitate development and communication.

**IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

As a guide to move the project forward, the Advisory Council has condensed the findings from the previous section into a step-by-step implementation plan, which is featured below.

<b>CALIFORNIA REGIONAL FOOD HUB NETWORK IMPLEMENTATION PLAN</b>			
	<b>TASK</b>	<b>TIMELINE</b>	<b>OVERSEEING PARTY</b>
<b>1</b>	<p><b><u>Establish regular meetings</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Quarterly in-person meetings</li> <li>▪ Quarterly planning meetings over the phone (in between)</li> </ul>	2010 - 2011	UEPI + RFH Advisory Council members
<b>2</b>	<p><b><u>Form RFH-N Advisory Board</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Responsible for decision-making and overseeing implementation until Network organization is formed</li> </ul>	2011	UEPI + RFH Advisory Council Members + interested stakeholders
<b>3</b>	<p><b><u>Establish Network mission, values, &amp; goals</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Formalize mission, values, goals and objectives</li> <li>▪ Distinguish terms that will apply to the entire Network vs. individual RFHs</li> <li>▪ Define network-wide terms</li> </ul>	2011	Network Advisory Board
<b>4</b>	<p><b><u>Secure initial funding</u></b></p> <p>Initial funding will cover:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Meeting costs</li> <li>▪ Feasibility study and business plan</li> <li>▪ Board member time (if/when applicable)</li> <li>▪ Key staff hires</li> <li>▪ Formalizing organization</li> </ul>	2011	Network Advisory Board

5	<p><b><u>Develop feasibility study &amp; business plan</u></b></p> <p>The study should develop plans to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Determine services and their costs</li> <li>▪ Determine revenue sources and financing methods</li> <li>▪ Have a sustainable revenue stream</li> <li>▪ Include strategies to support the smallest growers as well as mid-sized farmers</li> </ul>	2012	Network Advisory Board + hired consultant
6	<p><b><u>Formalize organization</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Incorporate as a nonprofit entity</li> <li>▪ Establish a board of directors</li> <li>▪ Hire key staff</li> <li>▪ Formalize membership</li> </ul>	2012	Network Advisory Board
7	<p><b><u>Secure implementation funds</u></b></p> <p>These will cover:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Marketing</li> <li>▪ Continued research</li> <li>▪ Outreach efforts</li> <li>▪ Other operation costs not yet covered by revenue</li> </ul>	2012-2013	Network staff + board of directors
8	<p><b><u>Launch marketing campaign</u></b></p> <p>This will include development of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Brand, label, logo, and marketing materials</li> <li>▪ Promotional strategy</li> <li>▪ Website</li> </ul>	2012-2013	Network staff + board of directors + hired consultants
9	<p><b><u>Ongoing research and information management</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Conduct phase II of mapping study</li> <li>▪ Conduct localized research in target communities/regions</li> <li>▪ Establish systems for information collection and sharing</li> </ul>	2012-2013	Network staff + board of directors + members
10	<p><b><u>Ongoing capacity development and outreach</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Outreach to target communities</li> <li>▪ Outreach to policy- and decision-makers</li> </ul>	2012-2013	Network staff + board of directors

## **CONCLUSION**

It is the belief of the RFH Advisory Council that creating a network of Regional Food Hubs in California is both possible and attainable within the coming years through the combined efforts of dedicated project champions, RFHs, and growers throughout the state. Members of the Advisory Council look forward to continuing to guide the Network's implementation through the steps laid out in the above plan and seeing their vision of a sustainable regionalized food system transformed into reality.

## GLOSSARY

**Agriculture of the Middle:** This term refers to a disappearing sector of mid-scale farms/ranches and related agrifood enterprises that are unable to successfully market bulk commodities or sell food directly to consumers.

**Common Carrier:** A person or company who can be hired by the general public to transport goods, generally over a definite route and according to a regular schedule.

**Community Supported Agriculture (CSA):** A method of supporting small farming operations through direct sales in which a community of individuals pledge support to growers at the beginning of a season and share the risks and benefits of food production.

**Cross-docking:** The practice of unloading materials from one transport vehicle directly into another with brief or no warehousing in between.

**Direct Marketing:** When growers market their products directly to end consumers, thus eliminating the “middle man.”

**Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT):** An electronic system that allows SNAP recipients to authorize transfer of their government benefits from a Federal account to a retailer account to pay for products received.

**Food Security:** A term describing the availability of food and one's access to it. A household is considered food-secure when its occupants are not hungry, malnourished, or in fear of starvation.

**Foodshed:** A defined area from which food is grown, processed, purchased, and consumed.

**Good Food Movement:** The growing social movement for a new food system that rewards sustainable production, treats growers and workers fairly, and improves the health of families and the wealth of communities through healthy, green, fair, and affordable food.

**Identity Responsibility and Quantity codes (IRQ):** Refers to California commodity labeling requirements.

**Inter-hub Brokerage:** Buying and selling between Regional Food Hubs

**Less-than-Truck-Load (LTL):** The transportation of relatively small freight that does not fill a full truck-load. Semi trailers are typically between 26 and 53 feet, requiring a substantial amount of freight to make transportation economical.

**Regional Food Hub (RFH):** An integrated food distribution system that coordinates agricultural production and the aggregation, storage, processing, distribution, and marketing of locally or regionally produced food products.

**Regional Food Hub Network (RFH-N):** A network that will serve and support autonomous Regional Food Hubs through inter-hub brokerage, access to infrastructure, technical assistance, and networking related hub operations in order to bolster the scale, predictability, and success of regional food production, sales, and consumption.

**Regionalized food system:** A food system that supports long-term connections between local farmers and consumers while meeting the economic, social, health and environmental needs of the communities within a region.

**Socially Disadvantaged Producer:** An individual agricultural producer who is a member of a group whose members have been subjected to racial, ethnic or gender prejudice, without regard for their individual qualities.

**Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP):** The federal-assistance program historically and commonly known as the Food Stamp Program, which provides assistance to low- and no-income people and families living in the U.S.

**Terminal Market:** A central site, often in a metropolitan area and near a transportation hub, that serves as an assembly and trading place for commodities.

**Underserved Communities:** Communities lacking adequate access to affordable, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food options.

**WIC:** A special federal assistance program providing healthcare and nutrition to low-income pregnant or breastfeeding women, infants, and children under the age of five.



# APPENDIX 1: REGIONAL FOOD HUB NETWORK SUMMIT NOTES

## FIRST MEETING OF THE CALIFORNIA FOOD HUB NETWORK

24 August 2010

*A project of UEPI and the Regional Food Hub Advisory Council  
with support from Roots of Change and USDA RMA*

### WELCOME & BACKGROUND

**Advisory Council's definition of Regional Food Hub (RFH):** *An integrated food distribution system to coordinate agricultural production and the aggregation, storage, processing, distribution and marketing of locally or regionally-produced food products.*

- RFHs emphasize aggregation, distribution, and wholesale but can include wide variety of other components: *(light processing, retail grocery, permanent farmers' market, food access offices / services, mobile vending "green carts," community spaces etc...)*.
- Definition is broad to capture and include the diverse range of hub projects in the state.

**Vision of a Regional Food Hub Network (RFH-N):** *The Regional Food Hub Network will provide assistance in business management and services that will amplify the success and impact of individual hubs. This Regional Food Hub Network will serve and support autonomous Regional Food Hubs through inter-hub brokerage, access to infrastructure, technical assistance and networking related hub operations in order to bolster the scale, predictability and success of regional food production, sales and consumption.*

### Why create a Network?

- Unite disjointed RFHs or hub projects to amplify the effectiveness and power of these individual hubs through increased efficiency and support services.
- Develop regional distribution models that increase access to new markets for farmers and access to quality regionally-produced foods for consumers.
- Create lasting food systems change.

### Network's Primary Functions & Services Include:

- (1) Coordinating regional food supply
- (2) Services and support for RFHs
- (3) Marketing
- (4) Incubating new technologies and pilots
- (5) Policy advocacy

### PRESENTATION OF FOUR CALIFORNIA RFH CASE STUDIES

#### Existing Regional Food Hubs

**Lisa Brenneis:** Ojai Pixie Growers - Ojai Valley, CA

*(Association of growers and packers of Ojai Pixies)*

- Very small operation - maybe 400 trees - not enough to sell to a mainstream supermarket.
- Pixie Tangerines were first sold in a small market- all by one grocer and at a good price.
- More growers in the Ojai Valley began to grow pixies, so developed informal association of Ojai Pixie growers to protect all of the growers.
- Growers work together to try to coordinate the harvest and leverage existing infrastructure of the group- began packing in a regional packing house and were able to make deals because of networking.
- There is no formal entity managing the OPG- their relationships are built on trust and they happen to be in the same small region.
- A RFH-N could start to connect the dots between Ojai other places besides LA and SF. It could help them connect to existing markets and to other growers in similar situations.

**Brett Melone: ALBA Organics - Salinas Valley, CA**

*(Wholesale fruit and vegetable operation)*

- Important not to get too caught up in the definition of a Hub- ALBA is essentially an in-house customer for small-scale farmers who are looking to get into wholesale markets.
- ALBA works with about 30 growers, the majority of whom have graduated from their training program.
- Through networking with other farmers and organizations they keep going during slow parts of the year, which really helps to hold them up through winter- This is where a more formal networking system such as a RFH-N might be helpful.
- A RFH-N could also be useful in developing larger wholesale food orders and help build on available market channels.

### **Emerging Regional Food Hubs**

**Jonathan Reinbold: San Diego Growers/Tierra Miguel Foundation Farm - San Diego County**

*(Group of growers developing RFH)*

- Majority of San Diego Growers' farms have about four acres.
- Institutions increasingly want good local food to serve, but there is a lack of distribution infrastructure for farmers to make deliveries and most schools do not have the capacity to chop or prepare the foods – Therefore, we are looking at incorporating light processing into our hub to make their purchasing easier.
- Started with a grant from UEPI to start an Ag co-op in San Diego - Farmers in the area wanted a permanent market so moved over to that model to serve their wants and needs.
- Now working through the County of SD with a CDC grant - from the definition of a RFH, we are already acting as an integrated market.
- One of the biggest steps is coordination of crop production so that we grow based on market demand and move in direction of aggregation to best serve the markets.
- Use of a RFH-N for them: recognition that with a local food system, you can't draw a line around it. A RFH-N could expand opportunities and markets outside of SD County.

**Eric Cárdenas: Orfalea Foundation - Santa Barbara County**

*(Working on behalf of SB schools to move good food from small local farms to schools)*

- Came to the hub backwards- was working with a cook doing a scratch cooking school program with the school food initiative.
- Trying to figure out what to do about the infrastructure that has been pulled out- of both schools and the small farms where food is grown.
- Solution- can help schools be able to prepare foods as well as provide infrastructure for the farmers to be able to process their foods in a shared place where it could be more easily sold to schools or institutions.
- There is a place where food is being dropped off by farmers and then the distributor is taking the food within the county- this is a form of a Hub: aggregation.
- In Santa Barbara County, the infrastructure for light processing already exists- It's important to pay attention to things that already exist, and ways that they can be used.
- The challenge is how do we make a hub efficient- how do we pay the farmers a fair price for their food and get the food to those people with fewer resources? – a RFH-N could assist with this.

## VISUALIZING A GROWING NETWORK

This mapping study is designed to:

- Identify where RFHs should be located/strategically developed throughout CA based on:
  - (1) Supply or the abundance of small and mid-sized farms (defined using number of farms and farm size by county).
  - (2) Demand for regional food products (population).
  - (3) Proximity to transportation infrastructure (freeways).
- Show RFHs throughout the state that are “up and running” or developing
- Compare RFHs that are organically emerging to the study’s results to identify gaps and targets for outreach.



(final map from presentation)

Primary take-aways from the study:

- There are no RFHs, as we define them, that we know of in the central valley – the RFH Network should reach out to these communities.

- Due to California’s abundant agricultural resources and infrastructure, along with existing hub projects, there is significant potential to develop and expand the state’s regional food systems through a RFH-N.
- This was a rapid assessment— As a next step in strategically developing the Network, the RFH-N should conduct a more complex and thorough analysis that accounts for (1) food insecurity, (2) specific consumer demands, (3) farm products, and (4) disadvantaged farmers.

**BREAKOUT SESSION I (*Area of Interest*) – [SUMMARY OF GROUP RESPONSES]**

**1. Why would you support the development of a RFH Network and in what ways might a Network be most helpful to individual RFH projects?**

***Coordination of Sales & Infrastructure***

- Reach new markets and get better prices for farmers
- Coordinate production, sales (including online ordering), and possible cooperative buying- addressing both ends of the market (i.e. Farmers & schools)
- Tap into existing buying and selling networks (Ex/ ethnic markets and groceries)
- Create a new frame for distribution through shared resources and infrastructure (joint warehousing, trucking etc...)

***Research & Information Sharing***

- Share information, knowledge, expertise, and best practices— learn about similar projects, successful models and challenges and how to connect with or learn from them
- Avoid duplicating efforts or common mistakes

***Financial & Technical Support***

- Help secure funding and assist with business planning
- Training and technical assistance for farmers, educators, and buyers
- Lowering fixed costs through cost sharing and centralization of services (ex/ billing, infrastructure, insurance, food safety/traceability certifications etc...) – increased negotiating power

***Outreach & Networking***

- Connect stakeholders from throughout the food system and facilitate communication

***Marketing***

- Create a name/ branding – Sets food standards across hubs and lends credibility and legitimacy
- Certify value of food- to show that it is “regional” and comes from a small or mid-sized farm
- Increase awareness of regionally-produced foods and farmers’ issues
- Helps those who cannot afford own marketing campaign

***Political Advocacy***

- Larger voice for small farmers and RFH stakeholders
- Push for policy changes and initiatives that benefit RFH Network members across the state.
- Tie together a shared vision for strong regional food systems

## 2. What would a Network need to provide in order for you to invest in its development?

### *Clarity*

- Clearly defined mission, vision, goals, and leadership and governance structure
- Articulate various levels of engagement and corresponding support offered
- Identify unclear assumptions

### *Planning*

- Viable business plan: including timeline and plan for economic sustainability without grants
- Cost assessment - where are the costs and what would it cost?

### *Research & Information Sharing*

- Identify assumptions – what is most needed by stakeholders?
- Test assumptions and create plan to deal with results accordingly - address what's not working
- Localized research on growers and a specific region's needs

### *Financial & Technical Support*

- Help to secure funding
- Opportunities for cost sharing including legal, accounting, certifications, infrastructure, etc...
- Provide staff support - including educated field support and dedicated regional staff
- Technical Assistance (i.e. training etc...)

### *Outreach & Networking*

- Roster of members and stakeholders
- Facilitate opportunities for networking and communicating among stakeholders
- Outreach to growers
- Build a transparent environment of trust: acknowledge sometimes conflicting needs of growers and buyers

### *Policy Advocacy*

- Policy development that legitimizes hub efforts and issues on a larger scale

## 3. What do you think would pose the biggest challenges for RFHs wanting to participate in the Network?

### *Financial*

- Initial financial investment
- Network's financial independence without grant funding
- Today's economy

### *Participation & Buy-in*

- Time investment
- Outreach tools that fit farmers' needs
- Participation from local producers and other stakeholders including food hub managers

### *Clarity to Move Forward*

- Strong leadership and membership defining body- (i.e. steering committee/ advisory board)

- Clear sense of Network values and vision

***Cohesion- Working Together***

- Scale: CA is huge and there is much diversity across regions, cultures, and RFH projects
- Building and encouraging trust between the different food hubs
- Meeting diverse stakeholder needs: i.e. food access, farm income, individual vs. community mindset, larger distribution firms, and smaller (nonprofit) projects
- Addressing inherent competition in industry
- Inclusion- economic and cultural
- Aligning this with other food movements

***Political & Regulatory***

- Gaining political will
- Regulations: (ex/ food safety, infrastructure and buildings, restrictions on nonprofits)

**4. What should be the first steps in implementing a RFH Network? Can you think of any resources that might support RFHs or the development of a Network?**

***Continuing Dialogue***

- Share contact info of participants
- More opportunities for meetings and networking – both within smaller regions and periodic roundtable discussions and/or formal meetings with larger network

***Secure Funding***

- Secure funding for implementation
- Look into CA Endowment and other funders

***Clarification & Planning***

- Develop a clear mission and vision
- Identify leadership and create a membership defining body (i.e. steering committee/ advisory board) to provide structure and set standards for the Network.
- Develop a business plan
- Identify assumptions and build plan accordingly

***Research/ Assessment & Outreach***

- Localized research on growers and their needs
- Assessment of RFHs and managers throughout the state - promote examples and best practices
- Revisit mapping study and conduct a more in-depth RFH needs assessment
- Look into similar networks (best practices) in other states or regions

***Policy Advocacy***

- Align Network goals with existing efforts and government initiatives
- Look into related legislative initiatives that are working for food policy
- Cultivate political will

**BREAKOUT SESSION II (Region) – [SUMMARY OF GROUP RESPONSES]**

**1. Why would you support the development of a RFH Network and in what ways could a RFH Network be most helpful to RFH projects (developing or existing) in your region?**

***Research & Information Sharing***

- Share and manage information (about markets, distributors, product availability, innovations, best practices etc...)
- Track innovations, best practices, and outcomes – showing evaluation metrics and if needs are met.
- Provide a database of resources

***Financial & Technical Support***

- Get better prices for small producers
- Consistent supply for large institutions
- The larger entity can help share risks and liability across all RFHs (and share costs)
- Provide education, technical assistance (skill development/ trainings), and other services
- Support innovations

***Outreach & Networking***

- Convene a larger community through outreach and relationship building and improve communication across sectors of the food system.
- Link small farms and small organizations “allied small businesses”
- Tap into existing “networks” (i.e.- ethnic grocery & markets)

***Marketing***

- Standardization: similar standards across hubs
- Branding: that represents **values** and value of regionally-produced foods including generic crops
- Promote a uniform standard of purchase

***Community Benefits***

- Regional economic development through green jobs that do not require college education (warehouse, truck drivers, office, bookkeeper, etc.)
- Bridge gap between “excluded” farmers and food insecure and/or underserved communities
- Increase direct access to regionally-produced products
- Potential to improve standards and wages for farm workers

***Political Advocacy***

- Political leadership and buy-in (legitimacy)

**2. What would a Network need to provide to RFHs in your region in order for you to invest in its development?**

***Coordination of Sales & Infrastructure***

- Transportation and logistics services

***Clarity***

- Clearly defined mission , assumptions, and guidelines

- Clarification of definitions and restrictions - small farm, regional/local, hub vs. terminal market,
- Clear leadership and governing structure

**Planning**

- A plan to be financially stable without grant funding
- Identify markets

**Research & Information Sharing**

- Assessment of existing RFHs: determine unmet needs for farmers
- Identify resources that might be utilized or shared (ex/ existing infrastructure, cross-docking, trucks, markets, distribution and other partners etc.), and determine how will fit into existing system
- Cost assessment- Is it more profitable to ship locally?
- Develop uniform/standardized information streams- so that there is similarity between hubs

**Financial & Technical Support**

- Cost sharing
- Support with traceability

**Outreach & Networking**

- Connection and outreach to farmers – have regionally-specific trainings and resources, recognizing that there is much diversity even within a region
- Have someone facilitating relationships within the network

**Marketing**

- Stamp of Approval – that communicates verification, quality, and values
- Provides a story for farmers
- Education- needs to be ongoing education/outreach/marketing to ensure customer demand.

**Values/Equity**

- Equity as a Network value
- “Value chain equity” - Examine assumptions about who benefits: Consumers, farmers, job creation/communities – who are the beneficiaries?
- Must examine some of the contradictions - Is access for low-income and underserved populations compatible with farmers’ needs? How can this be resolved? Will competition from mid-sized farmers push small farmers out?

**3. What do you think would be the biggest challenges for RFHs in your region interested in joining a Network? What would be needed to overcome these?**

**Financial**

- How develop a revenues stream?

**Clarity to Move Forward**

- Broad definitions – Definition of Hub is broad– for branding: local/regional, small farms (who participates – is there a cut off? what is role of large growers?)
- Unclear/different assumptions- stakeholders must be on the same page, can’t go forward with different assumptions
- Products: more than fresh fruits and vegetables- dried meat, grain, preserves



***Cohesion/ Working Together***

- Internal Competition – among growers and established distributors etc...
- Achieving equity
- Food security: intent to improve access

***Marketing***

- Achieving consistency – in terms of products and messaging
- Major food buyers (institutional) may not share RFH values and must be convinced to buy products
- Do enough consumers care?

***Political & Regulatory***

- Regulatory requirements and barriers
- Issues of traceability when aggregating small farm product.

**4. What would be the most important first steps in implementing a RFH Network? Can you think of any resources in your region that might support RFHs or the development of a Network?**

***Continuing Dialogue***

- Continued Meetings – both regionally and with larger Network

***Secure Funding***

- Apply for grant funding to begin project and develop strategy for future economic sustainability

***Clarification & Planning***

- Must develop a sustainable revenue stream and business plan
- Clearly define mission, goals, and strategy

***Research/Assessment & Outreach***

- Research to demonstrate market demand
- Talk to farmers to understand their needs- where are they currently shipping? is there a demand?
- Outreach to major buyers- they must believe this is important
- More in-depth needs assessment for hubs/hub locations and Network

***Policy Advocacy***

- Reach out to government and policy makers for support

**GENERAL Q&A**

**Q:** Is the idea to have the RFHs be publicly owned?

**A:** RFH ownership varies depending on the situation and that is part of the reason that we define RFHs so broadly- they cater to the needs of their own communities. The purpose of the RFH-N is to create an entity that all types of Hubs can be a part of.

**Q:** How do you differentiate between RFHs and terminal markets?

**A:** The primary difference is the focus and emphasis on a specific audience and products. A terminal markets is just a sales mechanism and there is no restriction on what kind of foods are bought and sold there. A RFH has a distinct focus on locally/regionally-produced foods.

**Q:** Define small and midsize farms?

**A:** Small is a relative term. There are many definitions and in this case it depends on how an individual RFH chooses to define it.

**Q:** What is the goal of the initiative? To create new hubs or to work with hubs that already exist?

**A:** The overarching goal is to support the development of a regional food system that is efficient, supports small local farms, and provides food to underserved communities. But in answer to your question: both. The idea is coordinate existing hubs to increase efficiency and offer support to developing hubs. (Jonathan R.) – Also to provide infrastructure for farmers.

**Q:** Is the idea that there is going to be funding coming into this network or is it taking what already exists?

**A:** The RFH-N will need funding to get started. After that, hubs – particularly the larger and more established ones – should expect to pay some level of membership fees for participation in order to sustain the Network, keeping in mind that one of the Network’s primary functions is to help hubs, especially small or emerging hubs, secure funding for their development.

**Q:** Are we trying to start an association here or a business?

**A:** The individual RFHs support farmers and their businesses. The Network is an entity that facilitates this process but is not a business itself. (Vanessa Z.) There are lots of hubs that exist around the state- the point of Network is to connect those interested that are currently operating in isolation. We want to find ways to connect them that ultimately have the potential to change the food system. The point of this summit is to get feedback from different areas of the food production line to make the Network effective.

## **OVERVIEW OF NEXT STEPS**

- Share contact information of 8/24 summit attendees
- Continue to gather input from attendees and stakeholders on the RFH-N vision and next steps
- Complete RFH-N Vision Paper
  - This will integrate feedback from summit attendees
- Complete RFH-N Implementation Plan (within vision paper)
  - This will lay out next steps and strategy for moving forward with the development of the California RFH Network and will be informed by feedback from summit attendees
- Share completed vision paper and implementation plan with attendees and other stakeholders by October, 2010

# APPENDIX 2: REGIONAL FOOD HUB NETWORK SUMMIT INVITEE LIST

California Regional Food Hub Network: 8.24.2010 Summit Attendees				
Last	Name	First	Organization	Email
Becker	Alison		CRA/LA	abecher@cra.lacity.us
Bilal	Muya		Somali Bantu Org.	muya.bila@gmail.com
Boston	Susanne		San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency	susanne.boston@sdcountry.ca.gov
Brenneis	Lisa		Ojai Pixie Growers	lisabee@earthlink.net
Butler	Naomi		San Diego County Public Health	Naomi.Butler@sdcountry.ca.gov
Cardenas	Eric		Orfalea Foundation	eric@orfalea.org
Cech	Sharon		UEPI	cech@oxy.edu
Cleveland	David			
Corshen	Bob		CAFF	bob@caff.org
Colpaart	Ashley		F21 Tierra Miguel Foundation	ashley@tierramiguelfarm.org
Cowley	Jessica		Hollywood Community Studio	jessica@hollywoodcommunitystudio.org
Daniels	Paula		LA City Commissioner of Public Works	paula.daniels@lacity.org
Delwiche	Alexa		LA Food Policy Task Force	alexadelwiche@gmail.com
Dorsey	Alex		Equitableroots	adorsey@worksusa.org
Feenstra	Gail		UC SAREP	gweenstra@ucdavis.edu
Firestein	Karen		CA USDA KYF	karen.firestein@ca.usda.gov
Frohnmader	Sophie		Equitableroots	sfrohmader@worksusa.org
Gross	Jenn		San Mateo County Health System	kgross@co.sanmateo.ca.us
Guajardo	Melissa		Soil Born Farms	mgujardo@soilborn.org
Lint	Amy		International Rescue Committee	amy.lint@theirc.org
Mahoney	Alejandra		Blosser Urban Garden	alejandramahoney@aol.com
Melone	Brett		ALBA	brett@albarfarmers.org
Monte	Joseph		Wildwood Farm Nursery	gcl.monte@gmail.com
Nolan	Sarah		South Central Farmers Abundant Table	csa@southcentralfarmers.com
Overdorf	Jill		Coosemans Shipping	jill.overdorf@coosemans.com
Pasciuto	Kimberly		CCAN	senzapensieri@sbcglobal.net
Reinbold	Jonathan		Tierra Miguel	jonathan.reinbold@tierramiguelfarm.org
Sanchez	Francisco		La Bodeguita	francisco.sanchez@lachiquita.com
Schmidt	Karen		Ag Futures Alliance/ SOAR	karenschmidt@sbcglobal.net
Sierra	Luis		CA Center for Cooperative Development (CCCD)	isierra@cccd.coop
Smith	Leah		Marin Farmers' Market Association	leah@marinagrulturalinstitute.org
Visher	David		UC SAREP	visher@comcast.net
Weinstein	David		Heath and Lejuene	david@soulyorganic.com
Lejeune	Rick		Heath and Lejuene	rick@soulyorganic.com
Zajfen	Vanessa		San Diego USD	vzajfen@sandi.net

## APPENDIX 3: POST-SUMMIT SURVEY QUESTIONS

### REGIONAL FOOD HUB NETWORK SUMMIT SURVEY

1. From what you saw and heard at the meeting, do you feel that a Regional Food Hub Network could be of value to you?  
  
If yes, how? If not, why not?
2. What would encourage you to participate in the next RFH Network meeting? Is there anything that you think would encourage others to join?
3. Did you learn anything from the group breakout sessions that you didn't already know?
4. Did you make connections with other people in your field or region that you had not met before?
5. Based on discussions, do you have plans to return to your region and implement any next steps on a RFH project?  
  
If yes, what are they?
6. Would you be interested in representing your region at a future RFH Network meeting?
7. What do you think should be the Regional Food Hub Network's first priorities?
8. How often should the CA RFH Network convene?
  - Twice a year
  - Once a year
  - Other  
If other, please specify.
9. How should the CA RFH Network meet in the future?
  - In Person
  - Teleconference calls
  - A combination of in-person and teleconference calls
  - Other  
If other, please specify.
10. Who should be included in future RFH Network meetings who was not present on August 24th? Do you know of RFH leaders that we overlooked? Please indicate why you feel that they are leaders or would be interested and include contact information.
11. Do you have any other comments? Please share them here.

**For information on future events or to support  
the creation of the Regional Food Hub Network,  
please contact Sharon Cech at [cech@oxy.edu](mailto:cech@oxy.edu)**