



FOOD SYSTEM ALLIANCES: A QUICK OVERVIEW

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WHAT IS A FSA?

- A community effort to deal with food and farming issues
- Brings together broad mix of stakeholders
- A place for learning, finding common ground, and taking action



Photo: San Mateo Co. FSA members

WHO PARTICIPATES?

- *All affected interests!*
- Farm bureaus
- Commodity groups
- Growers
- Labor/farm workers
- Processors
- Retail/distribution
- Environmentalists
- Community leaders
- Health advocates
- Chefs
- Consumers

WHAT ARE THE GOALS?

- To create a food system that reflects the best aspirations and desires of the community
- To protect the long-term viability of American agriculture and the resources upon which it depends
- To reconnect food and farming to the community at large

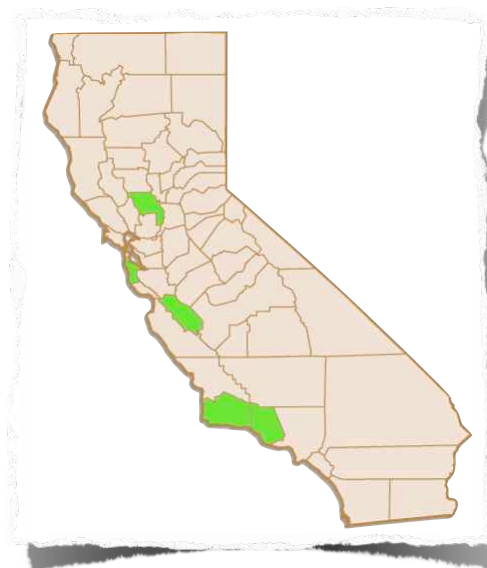


Photos: Ventura Co. farmworker housing

RESULTS FROM THE FIELD

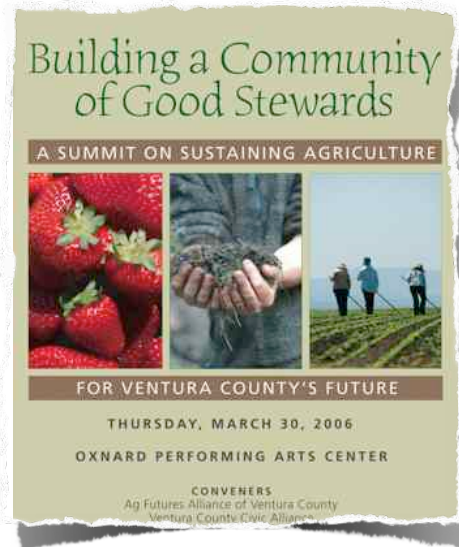
WHERE WE ARE TODAY

- Alliances running in 5 California counties
- Statewide counterpart
- Over 150 active participants
- Working every major issue in CA ag



VENTURA COUNTY

- Operating since 2000
- 5 citizen white papers
- Community farm worker housing advocacy project
- Drew 300 citizens to stewardship forum



SAN MATEO COUNTY

- Broadest coalition
- Farm bill reform with mayors
- School health/nutrition education
- Why ag matters in county



Photo: San Mateo Co. FSA members signing their "Constitution"

YOLO COUNTY

- Ag land mitigation principles
- General plan
- Right to farm law
- New processing capacity



Photo: Yolo Co. FSA fundraiser invite

CALIFORNIA ROUNDTABLE

- State-level group
- 30 members from ag, environment, and government
- Working big issues:
 - Farm bill
 - Invasive pests
 - Food safety





WHY AN FSA?

BUILDING A FOOD SYSTEM FOR A VIABLE FUTURE

A TROUBLED FOOD SYSTEM

- Unprecedented abundance and unenviable health
- Battles over growing practices
- Farm losses
- Plight of farm workers



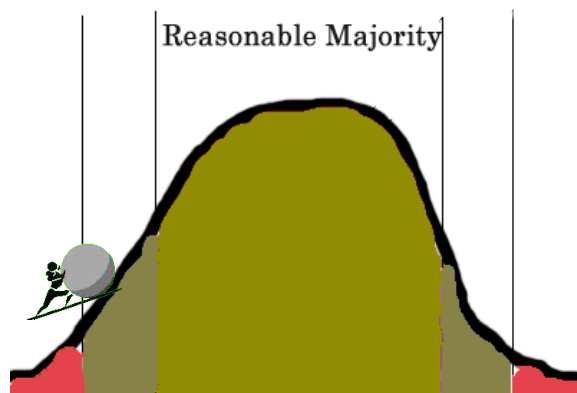
THE REAL CHALLENGE

- COMPLEXITY!
- No stakeholder has full view
- Uncoordinated efforts
- Debate and policy driven by the poles



THE LOST MIDDLE GROUND

The voices in the reasonable majority are downed out



A NEW WAY FORWARD

- Rather than isolation and conflict:
 - Build on the common interest for a healthy future
 - Develop relationships between polarized or disconnected stakeholders
 - Seek win-win solutions and projects
 - Work on actions that bond community



STARTING AN FSA
A ROADMAP TO A BETTER FOOD SYSTEM

FOUR STEPS TO AN FSA

- Convene
- Build trust
- Work issues
- Take action



CONVENING

- Find 2-3 key partners
- Identify all affected interests
- Invite to learn more
- Get commitment



BUILD TRUST

- Focus on listening
- Values not positions
- Foster openness to new ideas
- Make sure all voices are heard



Photo: FSA members participating in Statewide food system planning process

WORK ISSUES

- List and prioritize food system issues
- Learn
- Find consensus
- Most groups take on only 1 to 3 issues/year

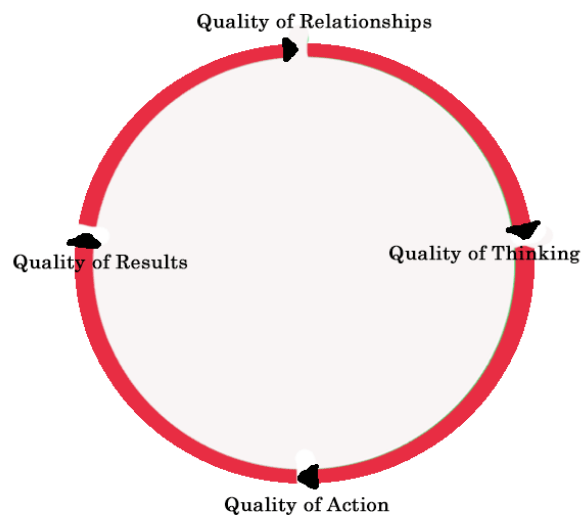


Photo: Habitat loss in Salinas Valley, CA.
Courtesy of Wild Farm Alliance

TAKE ACTION!

- Publish issue paper
- Distribute to community leaders
- Press release, press conference, op eds
- Advocate to city councils, Board of Supervisors, other leaders
- Further action: e.g. farm worker housing in Ventura
- Link with other groups that share similar positions

WHY IT WORKS



WHAT IT TAKES

- Right people
- Patience: 10 months to build trust
- Facilitation skills
- Modest resources if hiring facilitation



Photo: Yolo Co. FSA members

WHY NOW?

- Complexity of issues that face us are overwhelming our institutions
- Polarization is leading to gridlock
- We need powerful citizen “think/do tanks” capable of making real change
- FSAs offer a real alternative that work

FACILATION RESOURCES

- Isaacs, W. (1999). Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together. New York, Currency Doubleday.
- Schwarz, R. (2002). The Skilled Facilitator: Practical Wisdom for Developing Effective Groups, 2nd Edition. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass.
- Wheatley, M. (2002). Turning To One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future. San Francisco, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

LEARN MORE

- <http://foodsystemalliance.org>
- joseph@aginnovations.org
- THANKS!

