



*CONNECTING COMMUNITIES  
AND THE LAND*

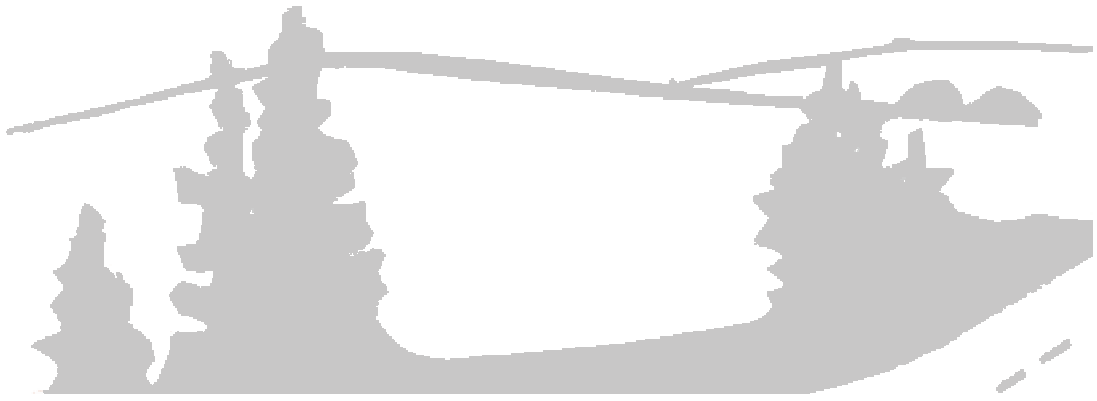
**STRATEGIC PLAN**

**2009-2013**

**Fostering a Whole & Healthy Sonoma County through  
Connecting Communities and the Land**

**February 2009**





## I. BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY

The District operates under voter-approved initiatives, Measure A adopted in 1990, which created the District, and Measure C adopted in 1990 and Measure F adopted in 2006. Measures C and F fund the District's activities under a ¼ - cent sales tax, and include an approved Expenditure Plan, which outlines District activities that may be funded. The voter-approved Expenditure Plan is the underlying framework for the District's Acquisition Plan, "Connecting Communities and the Land," and lays out specific expenditure categories for use of sales tax revenues. The Acquisition Plan sets forth the specific priorities that implement open space categories outlined in the Expenditure Plan. Furthermore, the Acquisition Plan is a long-range planning tool, similar to a County or City General Plan, which helps guide the District in its land conservation activities. The Expenditure Plan requires that both the Acquisition Plan and the Strategic Plan be consistent with the Sonoma County General Plan.

The District's Strategic Plan, the focus of this document, is a near-term five year planning document that is designed to focus the District on emerging trends, challenges, and opportunities. Rather than replacing the Acquisition Plan or any of the District's on-going activities, the Strategic Plan complements these efforts by establishing nine initiatives that both build on existing activities and define new efforts for the District. These initiatives were developed as a strategic response to emerging trends and challenges, and will allow the District to implement its mission in the context of current realities. The Acquisition Plan will continue to guide the District in its land conservation activities and ongoing programs, while the Strategic Plan identifies areas of specific focus over the coming five years.

The District proposes to adopt a five-year Strategic Plan with specific initiatives and implementation actions that will be described in detail and updated on an annual basis as part of the District's overall budgetary process. The District will work collaboratively with its partners throughout the County to ensure that its strategic initiatives are well coordinated with related programs, and result in multiple benefits to the region.

### Acquisition Plan

In June 2006, the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (the District) released its updated Acquisition Plan, "Connecting Communities and the Land." The Acquisition Plan provides a blueprint for District land conservation and resource stewardship projects. District staff use the Plan as the guiding policy document for all District activities and initiatives. The Acquisition Plan is organized into the following four categories. Within each category, the Plan identifies policies for implementation.

### FARMS AND RANCHES

- (a) Protect lands vital to maintaining ranching and dairy operations.*
- (b) Work to link large contiguous areas of protected agricultural lands.*
- (c) Protect agricultural lands near the urban edge.*
- (d) Protect lands important to local agricultural heritage.*
- (e) Provide incentives for farmers and ranchers to remain in agriculture.*
- (f) Facilitate the continued agricultural use of farms and ranches.*



## **GREENBELTS AND SCENIC HILLSIDES**

- (a) Protect contiguous lands that separate cities to help maintain their distinct individual qualities.*
- (b) Protect scenic lands that are visible from highly traveled roads and highways and that contribute to the County's rural character and sense of place.*
- (c) Protect lands with prominent natural features that contribute to the unique identity of communities, or that signal an entrance to a community.*
- (d) Facilitate agricultural and recreational uses of lands within greenbelts.*

## **WATER WILDLIFE AND NATURAL AREAS**

- (a) Protect lands with diverse plant communities that support multiple wildlife species.*
- (b) Protect lands with large, unfragmented oak woodland and forest areas.*
- (c) Protect lands that are important for supporting healthy aquatic habitat in rivers and streams.*
- (d) Protect lands critical to water recharge.*
- (e) Protect habitats important for the conservation and restoration of rare, threatened or endangered species including serpentine, streams, vernal pools, tidal marshes, and wetlands.*
- (f) Protect areas critical to watershed function.*
- (g) Identify and conserve key habitat linkages.*
- (h) Encourage management of District-protected lands to ensure the conservation of natural resources.*

## **RECREATION AND EDUCATION**

- (a) Partner with city, county, state and federal agencies, and non-profit organizations to establish and expand parks and preserves that protect Sonoma County's unique natural habitats, scenic areas, and other open space values of regional importance.*
- (b) Expand recreational partnerships to acquire, develop and manage lands for new parks, multi-use trails, and preserves.*
- (c) Acquire or protect lands that promote public access in proximity to urban communities.*
- (d) Work with partners to provide a network of multi-use trails that connect urban communities and recreational lands.*
- (e) Work with partners to provide timely public access to District-protected lands.*
- (f) Work with partners to expand volunteer opportunities for stewardship and restoration of natural resources on District-protected lands.*
- (g) Coordinate efforts with non-profit partners and landowners to expand the District's public outings programs and other initiatives that offer guided access to District-protected properties.*
- (h) Ensure sound stewardship of District-protected lands by encouraging recreational use compatible with resource management recommendations.*



After passage of Measure F, the *Open Space, Clean Water, and Farmland Protection Measure* in November of 2006, the District General Manager initiated a strategic planning process among District staff and a group of strategic advisors to more deeply and specifically investigate the trends that will have a major influence on Sonoma County over the next 20 years; define the District's vision in light of those trends; specifically define the District's core values and core competencies; and out of that dialogue build a "strategic roadmap" for the next 5 years.

In late summer 2007, the District undertook this strategic planning process with the assistance of a facilitation team from the Center for Collaborative Policy, a program of California State University, Sacramento.

A "strategic advisor" group, several of them current or former members of the District's Advisory Committee and Open Space Authority, participated in a visioning retreat in early September 2007. District staff also held a retreat in late September 2007. Both groups continued to meet periodically through the end of the year, culminating in a joint retreat in January 2008. At that retreat, District staff and the advisors collectively defined a bold twenty-year vision for the District, and agreed on core values, core competencies and a set of recommended strategic initiatives for the District over the next 5 years.

These strategic initiatives:

- ✓ Are consistent with the 2006 voter-approved Expenditure Plan
- ✓ Complement the policies and objectives identified in the Acquisition Plan
- ✓ Respond to the emerging trends in the County
- ✓ Reflect the District's core values
- ✓ Build on the District's strengths

## II. CURRENT AND EMERGING TRENDS FACING THE COUNTY AND THE DISTRICT

The strategic advisors group and staff identified numerous trends (see Attachment 1) that will influence the County and the District over the next 20 years.

Some of the most significant trends include:

- Competition for land and rising land values will continue to put pressure on local agriculture.
- The County's growing population will increase the importance of maintaining Urban Growth Boundaries and providing urban open space.
- Integration of water availability and water quality considerations into land conservation and stewardship projects is needed.
- Demographic changes will result in increases in both the senior citizen and Hispanic communities.
- Climate change will impact the County's water supply and natural resources and require adaptive management and stewardship of District-protected lands. Increasingly, funding agencies are developing guidelines and/or requirements that mandate grant recipients to address climate change through grant-funded projects (Coastal Conservancy, Department of Water Resources, and State Water Resources Control Board).



### III. THE DISTRICT'S VISION, MISSION, CORE VALUES AND COMPETENCIES

#### A TWENTY-YEAR VISION

***By 2031, the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District is a recognized national and international leader in helping to create livable communities through conservation of land and natural resources.***

Examples of the types of accomplishments the group envisioned that the District will have achieved to bring this vision to fruition include:

- ✓ Nine vibrant cities are framed by scenic open space, trails and parks.
- ✓ Small farms are thriving on the edge of cities, and local foods are produced through a strong agricultural economy.
- ✓ All major rivers and streams are protected through innovative programs and partnerships.
- ✓ The future of family farming in Sonoma County has been assured in perpetuity.
- ✓ Park acreage in the County has doubled.
- ✓ Eighty percent of Sonoma County children can name 10 local plants, animals, or crops.
- ✓ Public outdoor recreation areas are accessible by public transit and trails.
- ✓ Fish and wildlife populations are healthy.
- ✓ Abundant, clean water and diverse habitat support fisheries in the Russian River, Sonoma Creek, Petaluma River and all tributaries.

#### THE DISTRICT'S MISSION

*“The Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District permanently protects the diverse agricultural, natural resource and scenic open space lands of Sonoma County for future generations.”*

The District's mission reflects the values of the people of Sonoma County and provides the foundation for the District's efforts to lead, inspire, and educate citizens about the links between land and water conservation and healthy communities.

#### THE DISTRICT'S CORE VALUES

*The District embodies the following core values in its work:*

- Honors the County's farming history and rural character and enables diverse agriculture to thrive.
- Protects and enhances the beauty and natural diversity of our county, including its waterways and natural areas.
- Demonstrates and promotes responsible stewardship of the County's lands.
- Fosters positive and enduring working relationships.
- Connects Sonoma County's people to the land.



## THE DISTRICT'S CORE COMPETENCIES

*District staff embodies the following core competencies:*

- Design creative projects.
- Convene partnerships for innovative conservation.
- Provide exemplary stewardship for conservation easements.
- Acquire land and conservation easements and successfully complete real estate transactions.
- Inspire, educate and involve our public.
- Lead the region in setting conservation priorities.

## IV. STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

Over the next five years, the District will focus on the following set of strategic initiatives that build on the District's mission and Acquisition Plan, respond to and address emerging trends, honor its core values, and build on the staff's current and growing core competencies.

In all of these initiatives, the District will continue to strengthen its traditional partnerships and continue to build and support non-traditional partnerships throughout the County. Under each initiative key partners have been identified for each implementation measure that will work with the District to achieve the measure. For each initiative, implementation measures are organized into the following three categories:

- Ongoing Programs – outlined in brown;
- Program Augmentations – outlined in green;
- New Projects and/or Activities – outlined in blue.

For each new project or activity approved by the Board, the District would return to the Board with an implementation plan for Board consideration and review.

## V. IMPLEMENTATION

Plan implementation will begin immediately upon Board approval. The District intends to incorporate the Strategic Plan into all aspects of the District's ongoing programs and operations, and will revise and update the Plan as part of the District's yearly budgetary process.

Internally, for each initiative, a leader will be identified to oversee implementation. The leader will be responsible for identifying an implementation team (to include District and non-District staff), developing an implementation work plan, and developing milestones and required budgetary outlays.

For implementation actions that represent a new programmatic direction (e.g. Implementation Measures outlined in blue above), the District will present an implementation plan to the Board for consideration. Implementation plans will include a work plan with detailed description of activities, the District's proposed role, estimated costs, potential grant programs, and key milestones.

Periodically, the District will report back to the Board on Plan implementation, including any recommended changes to the Strategic Plan. The District may also employ tools such as focus groups, public opinion surveys, and other public input processes including a County-wide action oriented advisory group to measure performance, guide Plan updates, and strengthen partnerships with both traditional and non-traditional partners.





# 1

## Open District Recreational Lands to Public Access

Acquisition Plan Category: Recreation and Education

Expand and expedite public access opportunities that connect County residents to District-owned lands.

### Implementation Measures

#### 1. Identify District lands that can be transferred to appropriate parks and recreation agencies.

**Key Partners:**

- State Parks
- Sonoma County Regional Parks
- Cities

#### 2. Partner with other County agencies and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to construct new public access and trails on District-owned properties.

**Key Partners:**

- State Parks
- Sonoma County Regional Parks
- LandPaths
- Bay Area Ridge Trail Council
- Sonoma County Trails Council
- Sonoma County Water Agency

#### 3. Partner with State Parks, other County Agencies, and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to prepare management plans that balance the conservation and recreational uses of the properties.

**Key Partners:**

- California Coastal Conservancy
- State Parks
- Sonoma County Regional Parks
- Cities
- Sonoma Ecology Center
- Resource Conservation Districts
- Sonoma Land Trust
- Consulting professionals

#### 4. Implement a recreational user permit program for properties that are held by the District and are pending transfer to other agencies.

**Key Partners:**

- State Parks
- Sonoma County Regional Parks
- LandPaths
- Sonoma Ecology Center
- Sonoma County Trails Council





# 2

## Provide Support for Local Agricultural Production

Acquisition Plan Category: Farms and Ranches

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Provide assistance to allow farmers to continue to process their products locally.

### Implementation Measures

#### 1. Conserve/acquire lands that allow for appropriate siting of secondary agricultural services that benefit local farmers and preserve and/or enhance agricultural land uses.

##### Key Partners:

- Resource Conservation Districts
- Sonoma County Farm Bureau
- California FarmLink
- Community Alliance With Family Farmers (CAFF)
- Agricultural organizations, traditional, and niche farming industries

#### 2. Work with the Cities and County to investigate the potential for mitigation bank lands to allow for agricultural uses subject to Federal and state Endangered Species Acts.

##### Key Partners:

- County of Sonoma
- Cities
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- National Marine Fisheries Service
- California Department of Fish and Game



# 3

## Expand the Small Farms Initiative

**Acquisition Plan Categories:** Farms and Ranches, Greenbelts and Scenic Hillside

Broaden and expand the District’s small farms initiative to take advantage of opportunities to support local food production and the local and regional agricultural economy.

### Implementation Measures

#### 1. Strategically protect and/or acquire properties to support local food production.

**Key Partners:**

- County of Sonoma
- Cities
- Sonoma County Agricultural Commissioner
- Sonoma County Farm Bureau
- Farmers Market Association
- California /CAFF/Roots of Change/Sonoma County Farm Trails
- Foundations

#### 2. Target farm property acquisitions on the edge of cities to take advantage of favorable real estate conditions, and support Urban Growth Boundaries.

**Key Partners:**

- County of Sonoma
- Cities
- Real estate brokers

#### 3. Lease or consider re-sale of current District-owned properties to support local agriculture.

**Key Partners:**

- California FarmLink
- Community Alliance With Family Farmers (CAFF)
- Sonoma County Farm Bureau
- Real estate brokers

#### 4. Participate in regional efforts to promote local food production and support locally sustainable agriculture.

**Key Partners:**

- Fork and Shovel Initiative
- California FarmLink/CAFF/Roots of Change/Sonoma County Farm Trails
- American Farmland Trust
- Urban-Rural Roundtable
- Farmers Market Association
- Foundations



**5. Partner with farm service organizations to increase opportunities to promote, attract, and incentivize new farmers.**

- Sonoma County Farm Bureau
- Sonoma County Agricultural Commissioner
- U.C. Cooperative Extension
- Resource Conservation Districts
- Community colleges
- 4-H Clubs
- California FarmLink
- Community Alliance With Family Farmers (CAFF)
- Sonoma County Farm Trails



# 4

## Be a County, Regional, and Statewide Leader for Stewardship of Land and Natural Resources

**Acquisition Plan Categories:** Farms and Ranches, Greenbelts and Scenic Hillside, Water Wildlife and Natural Areas, Recreation and Education

Provide support to landowners and coordinate with partners to improve stewardship of natural resources and to actively manage District lands.

### Implementation Measures

#### 1. Develop resource management policies for the District including: Climate Adaptation; Grazing; Forest Management; Exotic Species Control; Fire Management; Native Grasslands; Watersheds.

**Key Partners:**

- Resource Conservation Districts
- California Department of Fish and Game
- National Marine Fisheries Service
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- U.C. Cooperative Extension
- San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board
- North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board
- Consulting professionals
- Sonoma State University
- University of California

#### 2. Publish a Landowner Handbook on Conservation Easement Stewardship.

**Key Partners:**

- Resource Conservation Districts
- Consulting professionals
- Conservation easement holders

#### 3. Work proactively with resource agencies and local watershed groups to provide technical assistance for improved land and natural resources stewardship.

Explore developing a grant program for activities, projects, and/or programs that result in direct benefits to District lands and/or holdings and/or direct benefits to targeted areas as identified in the District's Acquisition Plan.

**Key Partners:**

- Resource Conservation Districts
- Local watershed groups
- Non-profit organizations
- Consulting professionals
- U.C. Cooperative Extension



# 5

## Support Sustainable Water for Sonoma County

Acquisition Plan Category: Water, Wildlife, and Natural Areas

Link District land stewardship and land acquisition with watershed management through direct participation in County-wide integrated water management projects.

### Implementation Measures

#### 1. Target acquisitions to protect headwaters, riparian corridors and floodplains, and groundwater storage basins.

##### Key Partners:

- Sonoma County Water Agency
- County of Sonoma
- Cities
- County Flood Control Districts
- National Marine Fisheries Service
- Watershed groups
- Other County water providers
- Sonoma Ecology Center
- Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation

#### 2. Participate in cooperative programs to improve local watersheds, including riparian areas, water resources and quality, and fisheries where there are direct benefits to District lands and/or holdings and/or direct benefits to targeted areas as identified in the District's Acquisition Plan.

##### Key Partners:

- Sonoma County Water Agency
- Salmon Coalition
- Fishnet 4c
- North Coast/Bay Area Integrated Regional Water Management Plan
- Watershed groups



# 6

## Actively Participate in County and Statewide Efforts to Address Climate Change

**Acquisition Plan Categories:** Water, Wildlife, and Natural Areas, Recreation and Education, Greenbelts and Scenic Hillside

Through District activities, launch or support activities that address climate change, promote sustainable water supply and natural resources management, and assist the County in achieving its carbon reduction goals.

### Implementation Measures

#### 1. Participate in County-wide carbon emissions reduction efforts including the Regional Climate Protection Coordination Plan.

**Key Partners:**

- County of Sonoma
- Cities
- Sonoma County Transportation Authority
- Sonoma County Water Agency
- Sonoma County Climate Protection Campaign
- Air Resources Board
- California Climate Action Registry

#### 2. Assist the Bay Area Open Space Council in publication of a Transit Outdoors Map to help reduce automobile emissions by increasing public awareness of available public transportation to trailheads, parks, and open space.

**Key Partners:**

- Bay Area Open Space Council
- Sonoma County Transportation Authority
- Sonoma County Transit
- Sonoma Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART)
- Sonoma County Regional Parks
- State Parks
- Cities

#### 3. Partner with the California Resources Agency on mitigation and adaptation to climate change, which includes ensuring that the resource values of District lands are protected.

**Key Partners:**

- Sonoma County Water Agency
- California State Resources Agency
- County of Sonoma



**4. Update the District's Acquisition Plan and develop tools to assess how the District manages its land and natural resources to address climate change and the climate benefits of District land acquisition and natural resources management activities.**

**Key Partners:**

- Sonoma County Water Agency
- California State Resources Agency
- Local and regional universities
- California Climate Action Registry
- U.C. Cooperative Extension
- Consulting professionals

**5. In accordance with pending requirements of major funding agencies and entities, register the District with the California Climate Action Registry. Develop a program to reduce the District's carbon footprint.**

**Key Partners:**

- California Climate Action Registry
- Consulting professionals

**6. Provide and/or seek financial incentives to assist cities in developing projects resulting in multiple benefits to the local community (i.e. projects that include urban greening, sustainability projects, affordable housing, educational opportunities, community gardens, natural resources protection, and preservation), and include urban open space, and/or urban parks. A project example is the acquisition of property for recreation along Colgan Creek through the District's Matching Grant Program for a project that included affordable housing, an urban greenway, and recreational path.**

**Key Partners:**

- County of Sonoma
- Cities
- State and Federal funding agencies
- Foundations





# 7

## Expand District Programs to Connect Underserved Communities to the Land

**Acquisition Plan Categories:** Recreation and Education, Greenbelts and Scenic Hillside, Farms and Ranches, Water, Wildlife, and Natural Areas.

Expand recreational and educational access on District lands to underserved County communities.

### Implementation Measures

#### 1. Expand “In Our Own Backyard” and other youth environmental education programs to re-connect children to nature, and to support the next generation of conservation leaders through local educational opportunities.

##### Key Partners:

- State Parks
- Sonoma County Regional Park
- LandPaths
- School districts
- Sonoma County Department of Health Services
- Health organizations
- Foundations
- Sonoma Ecology Center
- Laguna Foundation

#### 2. Partner with entities to promote opportunities for youth and senior involvement in agriculture, land conservation, and natural resources management.

##### Key Partners:

- State, Regional, and City Park and Recreation departments
- LandPaths
- Social Advocates for Youth (SAY)
- School districts and local universities
- State and Federal funding agencies
- Foundations
- Council on Aging
- Community Action Partnership

#### 3. Partner with agencies and local non-profit organizations to increase open space opportunities in underserved areas of the County.

##### Key Partners:

- Health organizations
- Sonoma County Regional Parks
- City Park and Recreation departments
- LandPaths
- School districts
- Community leaders
- Sonoma County Department of Health Services



- United Way
- Community Action Partnership
- Human Development Corporation
- Migrant Education

**4. Utilizing the District's resources of agricultural land and outdoor recreational spaces, promote healthy eating and an active lifestyle in underserved communities by coordinating with the County's Health Action Initiative including Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) and Healthy By Design.**

**Key Partners:**

- Sonoma County Department of Health Services
- Permit and Resource Management Department
- Sonoma County Regional Parks
- Health organizations
- Community leaders
- Organizations that support physically and developmentally challenged individuals
- Council on Aging
- Foundations



# 8

## Establish a “Walk, Ride, and Roll the County” Program

**Acquisition Plan Category:** Recreation and Education

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Partner with local, regional, and state entities to connect County residents with local trails and open space, and to promote exercise and better health.

### Implementation Measure 8

**1. Work with park and recreation agencies, Sonoma County Health Services Department, and other partners to create and promote walking/hiking/biking/equestrian events and opportunities on District lands.**

**Key Partners:**

- Sonoma County Regional Parks
- Sonoma County Department of Health Services
- LandPaths
- Coastwalk
- City Parks and Recreation departments
- Other Recreational User groups and organizations

**2. Utilizing the District’s resources of agricultural land and outdoor recreational spaces, promote healthy eating and an active lifestyle in underserved communities by coordinating with the County’s Health Action Initiative...**

**Key Partners:**

- Sonoma County Department of Health Services
- Health care providers
- Health service organizations



# 9

## Partner with Local Entities on a Healthy Foods Initiative

**Acquisition Plan Categories:** Farms and Ranches, Recreation and Education

Partner/support efforts to promote healthy eating, educate children about local farming, and support local agriculture.

### Implementation Measure

**1. Utilizing the District’s resources of agricultural land and outdoor recreational spaces, promote healthy eating and an active lifestyle in underserved communities by participating in the County’s Health Action Initiative.**

**Key Partners:**

- Sonoma County Department of Health Services
- Health care providers
- Health service organizations

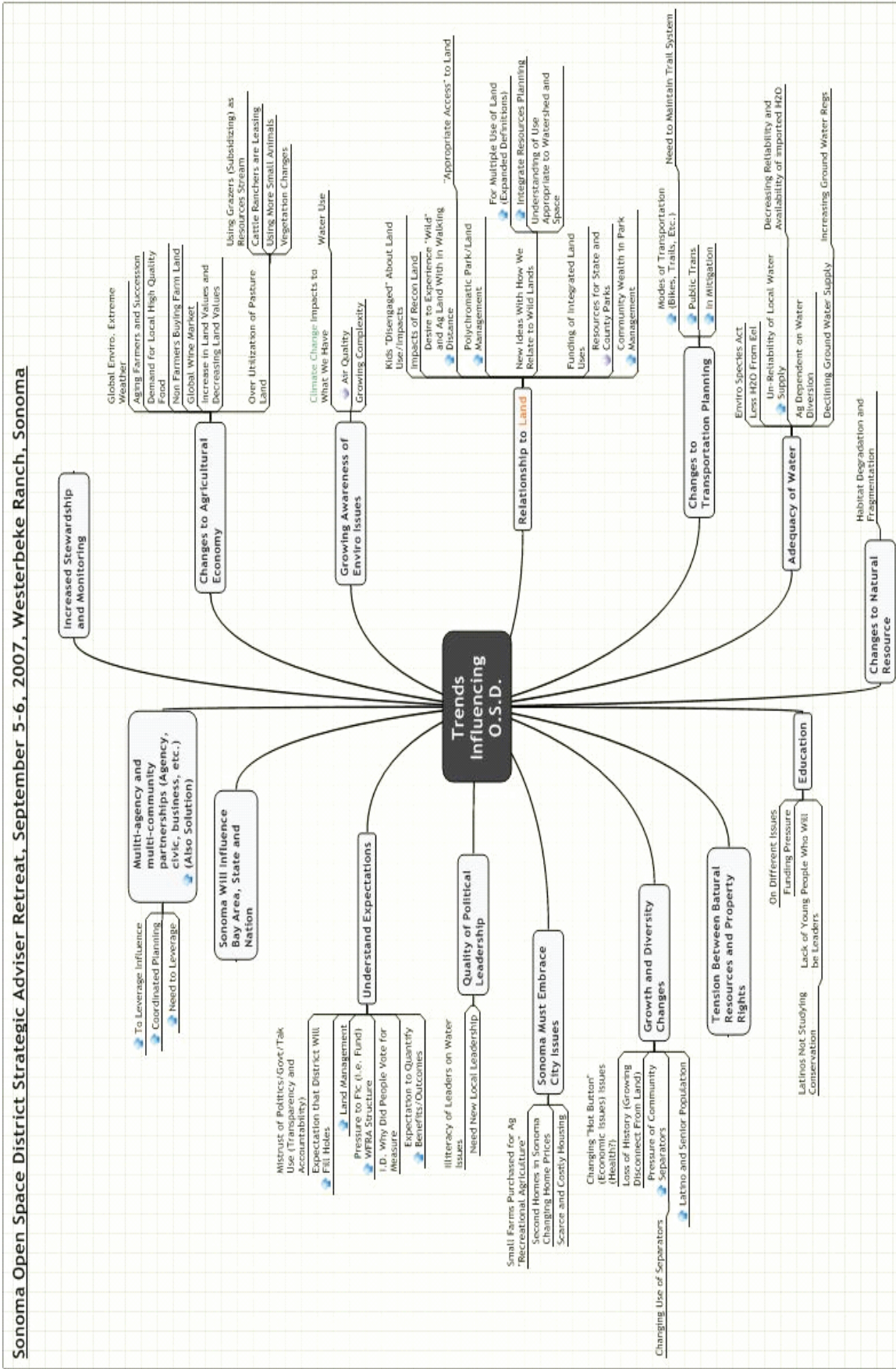
**2. Participate in efforts to link local farms and farmers with local schools, health organizations, and other interested groups to address the connection between land conservation and local food systems.**

**Key Partners:**

- FarmLink
- Fork and Shovel Initiative
- Urban-Rural Roundtable
- Community Alliance With Family Farmers (CAFF)
- Sonoma County Farm Bureau
- School districts
- Farmers Market Association
- Foundations
- Roots of Change
- Redwood Empire Food Bank
- Second Harvest Food Bank
- Sustainable Agriculture Education (SAGE)
- Universities



# Attachment 1: What Trends will Influence the Direction of the District in the next 20 years?



## **Acknowledgements**

### **Board of Directors**

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