



Contra Costa County

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NEWS RELEASE

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Contra Costa County Identifies Strategies for Using the Land to Fight the Climate Crisis

(Martinez, CA) – The Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors today took an important step to address the climate crisis by identifying strategies that use farms, gardens, parks, and open spaces to capture and store greenhouse gas emissions. The Healthy Lands, Healthy People study, funded by a Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation grant from the California Department of Conservation, finds that there is significant potential in Contra Costa County to use these natural and working lands to store greenhouse gas emissions, a practice also known as carbon sequestration. Land in well-managed agriculture and healthy open space sequesters up to 70 times more carbon than any form of urban development.

The County worked closely with the Contra Costa Resource Conservation District and the University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE) on the Healthy Lands, Healthy People study. Rincon Consultants provided technical analysis and project management.

The Resource Conservation District developed plans for two urban farms, one in North Richmond and one in Pittsburg, that identify practices the farms can adopt to better capture and store carbon.

“Contra Costa County is leading in our work to look at how we can use all our lands - from prime agriculture to parks to our more urban areas - to reduce harmful emissions,” said John Gioia, Chair of the County Board of Supervisors. “We’re especially interested in helping urban farmers in our historically underserved communities produce food for themselves and their neighbors.”

The climate smart practices with the greatest potential include:

- Applying compost to all land types
- Nutrient management – managing the rate, source, placement, and timing of nutrients to improve soil health
- Urban Forestry – maintaining existing healthy trees and planting new trees
- Alley Cropping (planting trees or shrubs between rows of crops) and
- Riparian Forest Buffer – conserving, maintaining, and restoring forested areas next to streams, lakes, ponds, and wetlands

Ben Weise, Agriculture Conservation Manager with the Resource Conservation District, says, “It’s expected that if the farmers follow the recommendations in the carbon farm plans, they will see better soil quality and productivity, and potential opportunities to generate revenue through participation in emerging markets for carbon offsets from farms.”

The farm plans identify potential funding sources to implement the different practices recommended. The Resource Conservation District also looked at the potential to sequester carbon on all the agricultural lands in the county.

The University of California Cooperative Extension led the community engagement process for this project, which included focus groups across the county in person and online, as well as a survey. UCCE also developed a video that is available in both English and Spanish.

“Land managers across the county, whether involved in farming, parks management, or conservation, are clearly interested in climate smart practices. Many already employ them where they can and most would do more if there were more economic incentives,” said Kamyar Aram, UCCE Specialty Crops Advisor. The study also shows that urban farmers would benefit from access to funding and land for urban farms.

The final report can be found at <https://www.contracosta.ca.gov/8465/Healthy-Lands-Healthy-People---A-Carbon->.

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