

Regeneración/Regeneration

PÁJARO VALLEY CLIMATE ACTION



Highlights

- Existing frameworks for climate adaptation planning do not describe how to support or engage agricultural communities, including that they should include farmers, farmworkers, and community members in an integrated way
- When these groups were engaged in thinking about climate adaptation in the Pájaro Valley, all had concern for heat and heat waves, work stoppages, and health
- Small farmers, community members, and farmworkers were interested in increasing access to organic food and local food distribution to mitigate climate change and promote healthy eating
- All groups were interested in stronger accountability for climate change mitigation

Introduction

Climate adaptation planning for communities and for agriculture tend to occur in isolation from each other. This results in a planning gap within agricultural communities because all stakeholders do not participate in the same processes within a community. Such isolation can increase vulnerabilities, particularly for farmworkers. California's Climate Smart Agriculture programs focus on water management, soil structure, carbon emissions and sequestration but do not address labor, health, or vulnerable populations. On the other hand, California's climate adaptation planning does include vulnerabilities but lacks guidance for how to plan in agricultural communities or account for worker health. While both of these approaches are useful, they occur independently from one another, leading to a planning gap.

In the Pájaro Valley of California, increases in heat waves put farmworkers at risk for heat illness while unpredictable weather creates uncertainty in crop production for farmers. It is important to hear the voices of those being affected so that local governments can build resilience within the community. Knowing this, Regeneración sought to amplify the voice of the farm working community by conducting surveys to community members, including farmworkers, in 2017, and to farm operators in 2019-2020.

Method

Both surveys consisted of Likert-Scale (ranking from 1 being lowest to 5 being highest) and open-ended questions. Questions focused on environmental experiences of climate change, how these changes are affecting individuals or farms, and interest in initiatives to mitigate climate change. The community survey was completed by 324 individuals; the farm operator survey was completed by 6 individuals. While we recognize the disparity in sample populations, we present common themes among community members, farm workers, and farm operators to reflect potential areas of shared interest and for additional outreach.

Results & Recommendations

Community, farmworker, and farmer concerns strongly link to the types of initiatives that they are interested in. Outreach that gathers community experiences of change, concerns, and interest in initiatives is an effective way to identify local strategies for climate action plans in agricultural communities.

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Concern for Societal Impacts & the Impacts of High Heat

Many in the community are most concerned about the overall societal impacts from climate change. Locally, people were concerned about high heat, heat waves, drought, and health. Farmworkers and farm operators were also concerned about work stoppages due to heat. High heat and the impacts on crops and farmworkers are locally situated; however, thresholds for safety have been set at a state level, with temperatures more appropriate to inland climates. We recommend:

- Determining local health and safety guidelines for coastal climates and hoop houses, to protect worker health
- Considering local or regional adaptation measures for the economic and health impacts of work stoppages due to extreme heat or wildfire smoke
- Advocating for amendments to AB 2043 (or new legislation) to address: i) work stoppages; ii) the cost of health care to treat heat related illnesses; and iii) that consider the cumulative health risks farmworkers face (including from working during pandemics and with wildfire smoke).

Interest in Initiatives

Interests in initiatives cut across multiple sectors, from transportation, to more business accountability, to opportunities to learn about healthy diets. Responses demonstrate that while people recognize that change must happen, they also are aware that to be just and effective, change cannot solely rely on individuals but also needs institutional and business accountability.

Farm operators emphasized that they are also part of the community but do not feel connected to community planning and do not feel they have opportunities to share their concerns about the local community. One of the farmers mentioned that “to jump into something new, we really need to see somebody doing it at our scale.” Therefore we recommend:

- City and non-profit partnerships can support the gathering of these perspectives *as well as* the integration of results into the city’s climate action planning.
- Better outreach to farmers about initiatives already in place would help local farm operators connect to existing climate change mitigation programs. Many farmers stated that they were unfamiliar with existing programs.
- Local, model demonstration programs that are situated within the context of agriculture of the Pájaro Valley would help farmers learn about initiatives and be more inclined to adopt them.

Overall, the community and farmworkers had strong concern about pesticides, pesticide drift, and health. Small farm operators were also interested in local food distribution. Some of the small farmers stated that they are selling some produce to community members who have said that they can no longer grow food in their backyards.

- Mechanisms to enhance local food distribution, including a list of local farms, their products, and locations, would help community members and farmers connect while also reducing greenhouse gas emissions from transportation.

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