



September 3, 2020

## **CAFF Sonoma County Vision for the Sonoma Developmental Center**

### **VISION**

The Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC) presents a unique opportunity for thoughtful land use planning given the unique challenges that continue to arise in recent years, our perception of future needs, and past uses of this property. The many crises we have recently been experiencing have shown us the weakness of long-distance food supply chains, and we must take steps now to increase local food security. The SDC land has produced food for the local community in the past and could do so again, while simultaneously helping to mitigate the climate crisis, reduce fire fuel loads, and provide housing and other needed community services.

Here in Sonoma County we are blessed to have our food supply augmented by highly innovative, hard-working, and ecologically-conscious farmers and producers. Yet, high land prices and access to affordable housing for workers are two of the most formidable challenges facing these farmers, and those aspiring to farm. Most farmers operate under tight margins, and stay with their craft as long as they can for the love of farming and the land. If we want to ensure that local food production—particularly by small farms engaging in regenerative land stewardship—has a future here, we need to be aware of these challenges and help ease the burden where we can, by providing opportunities that address these constraints.

When carbon farming practices are used to grow and raise food and create a regenerative farm ecosystem, complex natural processes are restored. Carbon is drawn down from the atmosphere, soils become healthier and have increased capacity to absorb water, and microbes essential to nutrient cycling and the production of nutritious food abound. We envision SDC land becoming part of the regenerative agriculture solution.

### **OUR ORGANIZATION**

Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) is a statewide organization that has been advocating for family farmers and sustainable agriculture since 1978. Our mission is to build sustainable food and farming systems through policy advocacy and on-the-ground programs that create more resilient family farms, communities, and ecosystems.

Our local Chapter leaders have extensive experience with farming, ranching, ecological restoration, land use and other policy issues, including climate change, water management, and food equity. We have a history of collaboration with both agricultural and environmental organizations, as well as engagement with local and state government.

Our suggestions draw from this experience, and we hope they will be of value as a plan for this incredible property is crafted. We would be happy to be part of future discussions and to offer referrals for technical support and potential funding sources as well as examples of projects and techniques that may be relevant and beneficial.

## **HOLISTIC APPROACH TO DESIGN**

A holistic approach to the overall design of the site should be utilized, with goals in mind for each aspect of the site. These goals should include:

- Climate crisis mitigation, including positive impact on greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions
- Landscape management for ecological diversity enhancement, fire risk reduction, groundwater recharge, and water conservation
- Allocation of land for food production using regenerative practices
- Decision-making that reflects engagement from all sectors of the community

## **SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS**

### ***Undeveloped, Upper Section of the Property***

The oak woodlands and grasslands should be preserved and grazed using restorative grazing practices, such as those developed and researched by [Sonoma Mountain Institute](#). These actively-managed grazing practices help to regenerate and support the vitality of natural systems by stimulating biodiversity, reducing brush and invasive species, re-activating water cycling, and fertilizing depleted soils with organic matter and minerals. Planting trees in pastures will sequester carbon and provide shade for the grazing animals.

### ***Developed, Lower Section of the Property***

#### 1) Farmland for Lease

We envision the historic row crop and orchard sites being returned to that beneficial purpose, as well as considering other flat, uncontaminated areas for use as farmland. These plots could either be leased out to local farmers directly or could become part of an incubator farm. Incubator farms train aspiring farmers by teaching them skills, providing experience, and offering short-term, low-cost on-site leases to help them start their careers.

*Row crops and orchard:* Vegetables, fruits and nuts could be grown on-site, with carbon farming techniques encouraged.

*Hedgerows and other perennials:* These plantings would increase carbon sequestration, enhance biodiversity, and provide additional habitat for beneficial insects and birds.

#### 2) Eco-village with Affordable Housing

CAFF supports the idea of an eco-village and the provision of affordable housing to be available for those in need such as farm workers. Affordable housing might also include hook-ups for trailers and RVs for long-term use. The “eco-village” could include components such as:

- Native vegetation and community gardens in the areas proximate to buildings
- A micro-grid for energy generation and transfer, with bikes and electric shuttles encouraged for transportation
- New buildings that meet sustainability criteria, i.e. LEED standards, low-energy appliances, sustainable sourcing of materials
- Pedestrian walkways, retention and additional planting of shade trees, and communal gathering spaces
- Water conservation and re-use, e.g. rainwater catchment and grey water use
- Accommodations for children and elders
- Food hub– a distribution and cooperative processing center
- Community services – educational and/or research facilities related to agriculture and ecology; internships with housing; farm camps for children; live-work programs for people to live on the land and learn to farm

We understand that an important challenge of moving forward with the SDC re-design is the high cost of removing the current infrastructure. We are hopeful that a solution may be found that meets this requirement but still prioritizes the community’s long-held needs for this site. We also hope that materials re-use and waste diversion are taken into consideration in the process of removing and replacing buildings. Re-use of existing buildings and materials, where possible, saves substantial energy that would go into cement and other building materials for new buildings. Buildings are the number one source of carbon emissions today.

We look forward to learning about the visions of other community members for the SDC property and hope that food production using carbon farming, regenerative agricultural practices, and holistic design principles will be part of the plan for this wonderful site.

Please let us know how we can help move this vision forward.

Sincerely yours,

Wendy Krupnick, Vice president

wlk@sonic.net

CAFF Sonoma County