



San Diego County Local Agency Formation Commission

Regional Service Planning | Subdivision of the State of California

5C

AGENDA REPORT
Business | Discussion

October 17, 2025

TO: Special Districts Advisory Committee

FROM: Michaela Peters, Local Government Analyst II
Meghan Traynor, Local Government Analyst I

SUBJECT: Update on Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Grant (SALC 2.0)

SUMMARY

The Special Districts Advisory Committee (“Committee”) will receive an update on the Commission’s ongoing Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation (SALC) planning grant, known as “SALC 2.0.” This project is being conducted in partnership with the County of San Diego’s Planning and Development Services and builds on findings from the initial SALC grant to analyze economic challenges facing small-scale agricultural operations and identify policy solutions. SALC 2.0 is currently in its fifth phase to develop a strategic plan for incentives, technical assistance, regulatory improvements, and other support mechanisms for small-scale agriculture. Staff seeks Committee input on two key topics: incorporating agricultural analysis into the municipal service review program and establishing a regional working group to promote affordable water access for farmers and potential special district participation.

BACKGROUND

Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program

SALC was created in 2014 as a component of the California Strategic Growth Council and administered by the Department of Conservation. The SALC program is primarily funded through California Climate Investments, a statewide program that provides cap-and-trade

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funds through agricultural conservation acquisition and planning grants for programs intended to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The principal goals of SALC are stated as:

- Protect at-risk agricultural lands from sprawl, promote growth within existing jurisdictions, maintain open space, and support a healthy agricultural economy.
- Further the purpose of Assembly Bill 32 by avoiding increases in greenhouse gas emissions associated with conversion of agricultural lands to higher-emission uses.

SALC 2.0 | San Diego LAFCO and County of San Diego PDS

In September 2022, San Diego LAFCO, in partnership with PDS submitted a planning grant application under SALC to perform a market analysis for existing and emerging crops – with a focus on small farms – while identifying government opportunities to bridge economic gaps. The Commission – notably – authorized the grant proposal as lead applicant. LAFCO was subsequently awarded a two-year grant in the full amount of \$500,000 with work commencing in June 2023 and through May 2026.¹ San Diego LAFCO has since formally partnered with two consultants – Agricultural Impact Associates and Rick Engineering – in collaboration with PDS on the SALC grant and relative to its six main tasks and deliverables:

1. Grant Management
2. Market Analysis
3. Gap Analysis
4. Outreach & Education Plan
5. Strategic Plan
6. Final Report – “Cultivating Solutions”

Tasks 2 and 3 are now complete. The Market Analysis identified key cost drivers and profitability trends across the county, while the Gap Analysis highlighted the "profitability gap" in four targeted crops: strawberries, lemons, tomatoes, and avocados. These findings are now guiding the development of the Strategic Plan.

Information on public engagement to date is provided in the accompanying footnote.²

¹ San Diego LAFCO and PDS signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in August 2023 following the Commission’s approval of a draft MOU at its August 7, 2023 meeting. The MOU formalized roles and responsibilities in proceeding with SALC 2.0 and highlighted by bisecting and designating specific tasks to San Diego LAFCO and PDS. The grant was originally scheduled through September 2025 and has since been amended to reach completion by May 2026.

² As part of the SALC 2.0 process, three public workshops have been conducted to engage stakeholders and gather input. The first workshop was held virtually on November 14, 2023 and served as a kickoff to provide an overview of the initiative and approach for the Market and Gap Analyses. The second workshop was held on July 24, 2024 as an in-person open house at the San Diego County Farm Bureau and featured a presentation of market analysis findings and discussion of gap analysis opportunities. The third workshop was held on January 27, 2025 at the Farm Bureau and brought together producers, industry experts, County staff, and community members to review major Gap Analysis findings.

DISCUSSION

The Committee will receive an update on the progress of SALC 2.0 and its focus on the economics of sustaining current and future small farming in the County – including draft strategic recommendations that are developed to date presented as an appendix. Committee feedback is requested with LAFCO staff seeking input on two specific policy topics:

- 1) Feedback on LAFCO’s draft contents for an agricultural analysis to be incorporated into the municipal service review program.
- 2) Feedback on establishing a regional working group to promote affordable water access for farmers – including potential special district participation.

ANALYSIS

San Diego LAFCO – in partnership with PDS – is making steady progress on SALC 2.0 activities as described in the preceding section. This progress is marked by remaining on pace to complete all work by Spring 2026. The current phase of the grant (Task 5) focuses on identifying actionable strategies and potential policy recommendations to mitigate profitability shortfalls identified in the Gap Analysis. The final Strategic Plan Report is scheduled for completion by October 2025 with the full SALC 2.0 report anticipated for presentation to the Board of Supervisors in Spring 2026.

RECOMMENDATION

Review and discuss as requested.

ALTERNATIVES FOR ACTION

None.

PROCEDURES

This item has been placed on the Committee’s agenda for discussion as part of the business calendar. The following procedures are recommended in the consideration of this item:

- 1) Receive verbal presentation from staff and any comments from the audience.
- 2) Discuss item and provide feedback as requested.

Respectfully,



Michaela Peters

Local Government Analyst II

Cities Advisory Committee

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Appendix:

A) LAFCO Draft Strategic Plan Recommendations

Attachments: (Online Only)

- 1) [SALC 1.0: Final Report](#)
- 2) [SALC 2.0: Market Analysis](#)
- 3) [SALC 2.0 Gap Analysis](#)

Appendix A LAFCO Draft Strategic Plan Recommendations

The Strategic Plan is being developed collaboratively by San Diego LAFCO staff and the County of San Diego PDS, with support from contract consultant RICK Engineering. Based on feedback from the Market and Gap Analyses, LAFCO has identified three draft recommendations for inclusion in the Strategic Plan:

1. Integrating an Agricultural Analysis into Municipal Service Reviews:

- Highlight the economic contributions of agriculture within an agency’s boundaries, including vendors and agritourism.
- Map agricultural acreage within jurisdictions to highlight communities with meaningful agricultural activity for contextual analysis. In urbanized areas, consider urban agriculture and local food systems.
- Review jurisdictional policies that support agriculture, such as water conservation, recycled water, crop swap programs, and climate-smart practices.³
- Review city general plans and specific plans for relevant land use policies related to agriculture, such as the promotion of farmworker housing.

2. **Water Affordability:** Supporting the establishment of a regional working group focused on promoting affordable water access for farmers.

3. **Ongoing Reporting:** Incorporate an annual report into San Diego LAFCO’s workplan to update the Commission on the progress and status of SALC 2.0 Strategic Actions.

³ The SALC 1.0 policy inventory may serve as a valuable framework for assessing local participation in best practices, including land lease programs and other ag-supportive policies. A copy of the final report is provided as Attachment One.

Cities Advisory Committee

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