

Preface

The unique history and nature of Suisun Valley has been described in many reports. Possibly the best description of the valley was created in the American Farmland Trust's report *Agricultural Vision and Economic Innovation For Suisun Valley*, submitted to the Solano Agricultural Department in March 2007. The introduction from this report is excerpted below, with permission:

Suisun Valley is a relatively small but fertile and historic agricultural district in California's Solano County. Six miles long and two miles wide, with an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 acres, it is nestled between two coastal mountain ranges, the Vaca Mountains on the east and the Mt. George Range on the west. Geologically, the valley is an alluvial fan that drains from highlands in the north to Suisun Marsh in the south.

The federal government classified Suisun Valley as an American Viticulture Area (AVA) in 1982, the second such classification in the nation and just a year after the famous Napa Valley AVA to the west. Like Napa Valley, Suisun Valley is officially recognized as part of the North Coast Appellation, which also includes Sonoma, Marin, Lake and Mendocino counties, and is renowned for ultra premium wines.

Agriculture in Suisun Valley produces nearly \$20 million in sales annually. In addition to wine grapes, the area also is recognized for its farm-fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as nuts, legumes and flowers. This production takes place on rich, fertile soils that consist of Brentwood clay loam, Sycamore silty clay loam, San Ysidro sandy loam and Rincon clay loam. The productive soil, mild climate and good water quality and availability make Suisun Valley a unique and important agricultural area.

Along Suisun Valley's southern and eastern edges is the growing City of Fairfield. Famous for being home to the Jelly Belly world headquarters, Fairfield also claims an Anheuser-Busch brewery, Travis Air Force Base and a current population of more than 106,000.¹ The valley is easily accessible to San Francisco and Sacramento, both less than an hour away via Interstate 80. This proximity to urban populations and infrastructure has the potential to create niche and high value market opportunities. At the same time, however, farmers express frustration about rural residential development pressures and high land prices from land speculation. Competition from global and domestic markets, including better known growing regions nearby, also has farmers concerned about the future viability of agriculture in Suisun Valley.

Agriculture in Suisun Valley contributes more than money to the local economy; the vineyards, orchards and farms are a fundamental part of the larger community's heritage and character. Some land has been farmed by the same family for generations, and the



scenic vistas created by the vineyards and orchards add to the quality of life and bring tourists from nearby cities.

For many years, land use controls have restricted urban expansion in Suisun Valley. In an agreement executed in 1974 (and expiring at the end of 2010), the neighboring City of Fairfield and Solano Irrigation District (SID) decided not to provide potable water to Suisun Valley. Further, Solano County's "Orderly Growth Initiative," which voters passed in 1984 as Proposition A, [in 1994 extended through the year 2010, and in 2008 extended through the year 2028 as Measure T], generally prohibits conversion of unincorporated agricultural land (such as Suisun Valley) to other uses without a vote of the people. Finally, in 2003, Fairfield's voters established an Urban Limit Line that prohibits City annexations in Suisun Valley through 2020. While these land use controls have curbed urban expansion in the valley, none are permanent, and farmers in Suisun Valley face increasing pressures and an uncertain future.

Recognizing these challenges to Suisun Valley's agricultural industry, the County of Solano (the County) treated Suisun Valley as a special study area within the 2008 General Plan Update and incorporated programs to further plan for the long-term agricultural viability of the valley. This strategic plan is the outcome of those programs and builds upon recommendations found within the American Farmland Trust's report *Agricultural Vision and Economic Innovation For Suisun Valley*, Citizen's Advisory Committee agricultural subcommittee outreach, the *Solano GP Background Report for Agriculture*, and the UC Davis Agriculture Extension's *Solano Agricultural Futures Project*.

