

North State Jobs First – Agriculture Sector Activation Plan Strategic Overview Narrative

Target Sector Strategy Brief Overview

Agriculture Sector: Supporting mission-driven, food-focused organizations to enhance financial and community vitality and resiliency against economic and climactic shocks. Developing and scaling farmer-producer networks that improve connectivity and collaborative opportunities for small- to medium-sized agricultural operations.

The North State region is home to significant agricultural productivity for California and beyond. Although large-scale operations control a large portion of the market, small- to medium-sized producers and manufacturers are the backbone industry for many communities, especially in geographically isolated areas. The agricultural industry makes major contributions to the economy in terms of employment, wages, and value-added production. Roughly one in five jobs in the region is linked to agriculture either directly or through indirect and induced effects. Thus, the sector was identified as a priority sector in the Plan. Most recently, agricultural production increased 6.2 percent from 2022 to 2023, with the highest value commodities being rice, almonds and walnuts. In mountain-dominant counties, hay and nursery plants/products represent the highest valued commodities.

The agriculture sector also faces challenges, particularly due to extreme weather, disasters, and other impacts arising from the changing climate. Access to capital and other financial resources are limited. Small-scale producers, who are already under-resourced, face the costly and time-consuming burden of accessing markets and product distribution. Industrial-scale producers, meanwhile, are challenged by the fact that processing and distribution is fossil-fuel dependent and is subject to (and contributes to) climate change vulnerabilities. Other challenges include the need to integrate technology and training into operations, succession planning, filling farm-field positions, and marketing.

Overall jobs for the sector are projected to increase by 2.4 percent between 2024 and 2029. Between January and March of 2024, 154 unique jobs were posted within the North State; of those, 132 did not list education requirements. Expanding the types of jobs within the agriculture sector is important for recruiting younger, skilled employees. Younger workers may be more inclined to participate in the job market if they can be made aware of positions in accounting, marketing, technology, and regenerative practices. Many farmers have requested hands-on training that allows for internships, apprenticeships and best practices for small and large-scale farm production. Training needs also are expected to increase as regenerative and climate-mitigation practices increase in the future.

The North State Strategic Plan includes five strategies to advance the Agriculture sector:

Strategy AG–1: Develop and scale regional food systems collaboratives to improve efficiency, sustainability, and productivity of local food systems.

- Convene and connect sub-regional food producers.
- Develop a value-based brand promoting the North State’s geography and producers as stewards of natural resources and essential contributors to the health of individuals, families and communities.
- Assess capital needs for small- to medium-sized producers, and work with local and regional lenders to enhance Revolving Loan Funds and other financial resources. Explore and build relationships with potential statewide partners such as California Farmlink to connect resources such as trainings and financial services to the North State.
- Increase access to and flexibility of capital for land acquisition, technology upgrades, equipment purchases, and other expenses.
- Expand Partnerships such as the USDA Southwest Regional Food Business Center) with technical assistance providers and community-based organizations to provide resources to smaller, historically underserved farmers and ranchers.

Strategy AG–2: Build a vibrant market that internalizes the costs and benefits of local, regenerative production systems.

- Explore the best model for connecting producers with customers, including farmers markets, community markets, food hubs, and cooperatives. Advance understanding and overcome barriers to success.

- Develop consumer partnerships with durable organizations, such as schools, hospitals, housing facilities, and community colleges and universities.
- Assess employer needs and cross-walk with existing curriculum, training, and available workforce to address worker shortages and challenges with succession planning and increased outreach for all agricultural positions.
- Use regenerative agricultural best practices to expand consistent year-round crop production, mitigate climate challenges, and determine appropriate crops to withstand changing weather conditions and challenges including extreme heat, drought, flood, and fire.

Strategy AG-3: Pursue economies of scale and operational resiliency by coordinating procurement and supply chains and the transportation of inputs and products.

- Identify a lead organization or consortium that can facilitate these activities.
- Conduct a feasibility study to assess supply chain and logistical challenges.
- Assess technology opportunities and identify barriers for implementation.
- Develop action plan to improve supply chain logistics: transportation, cold storage, technological advancement/integration, and disaster preparedness.
- Integrate technology to improve food safety, reduced application of crop inputs, increased profits, and environmental benefits including reduced chemical use and soil runoff.
- Develop and adopt uniform standards to support interoperability between different precision agriculture technologies where applicable.

Strategy AG-4: Coordinate across sectors to connect steward-based producers to travelers and visitors.

- Develop agritourism activities to bring travelers and visitors to the region while highlighting local food production.
- Identify opportunities to bundle, package, and market products from each subregion and distribute across North State to cross-market products and the area of origin for destination experiences.
- Support efforts to modernize fairgrounds and develop Community Resilience Centers to provide continuous community benefits that enhance community resilience through civic, social, educational, and economic development programming.

Strategy AG-5: Promote sustainable production practices and scale across small-, medium-, and large-sized farms.

- Develop subregional networking and mentoring cohorts supporting small, local producers.
- Encourage farming practices and diversify crop production to reduce dependency on single commodities.
- Support farmers in adopting technology for efficient water use and soil conservation to enhance productivity and environmental sustainability.
- Encourage collaboration between large producers to mitigate transportation challenges, increase export opportunities, and promote worker trainings and educational curriculum.

Tactics

To advance these strategies, the North State Jobs First collaborative will work to (a) build capacity for functioning together as a region across sectors and geographies and (b) nurture specific assistance to individual projects where needed and feasible.

The region will deploy the following Agriculture Sector tactics over the next 12–18 months:

1. Activate regional leadership.

- The collaborative intends to build on the momentum of the Jobs First planning process to foster support and communicate a regional vision for improved economic, social, and climate resiliency. Convenings and convening capacities will be nurtured to continue building trust across communities and their leaders about the value of working collaboratively as a region and to explore potential structures for ongoing collaboration. North State Together, for example, is an already vibrant regional network focused on education and workforce. The EPIC group of small- to medium-sized producers on the eastern side of the region is an example of a framework that can be scaled across the region. The Center for Regenerative Agriculture at CSU, Chico is also ready to lead various initiatives for the North State.

2. Promote a shared vision.

- The North State team will conduct follow-up meetings with elected officials and key stakeholders across the 10 counties to share information about Jobs First initiatives and progress in the Agriculture Sector, and to explore means of

- communicating as a region about the North State’s agricultural assets, opportunities, and needs.

3. Inventory agricultural initiatives in the pipeline and identify technical assistance needs.

- The team will develop an inventory of food system and agriculture projects in the region, identifying planning and progress as well as common technical assistance needs.

4. Foster project-focused support where needed and feasible.

- Based on the inventory of projects in the Agriculture Sector pipeline, the North State team will work to identify common challenges and needs that could benefit from additional technical assistance and work to identify ways to provide such assistance.

5. Foster connections and interaction across the Plan’s four priority sectors, including Healthcare, Tourism, Agriculture, and Natural Resources.

- Partners in the North State Jobs First journey have consistently stated they do not want to work in “silos” and seek to work together. Despite working in different sectors, they know they have challenges in common ranging from supply chains to marketing to workforce to technological advancements, as well as opportunities that could be leveraged and scaled. Their desire to find meaningful ways to tap best practices, share progress, leverage joint opportunities, celebrate milestones, and learn from one another will be nurtured through outreach, communications, field trips, expos, workshops, or other convenings.

Operating Structure

The region is exploring a twin path to (a) building capacity for functioning together as a region across sectors and geographies and (b) nurturing technical assistance to individual projects where needed and feasible. Staff members from the North State Jobs First convenors – Sierra Institute for Community and Environment and the North State Planning and Development Collective – are exploring options for advancing these two pathways.

This will be an evolving approach because the region has not benefitted from the substantial public and civic funding and infrastructure enjoyed by other parts of the state, such as dedicated and ongoing funding for regional planning of multi-county Metropolitan Planning Organizations, substantial philanthropic investment, access to federal financial support through Community Development Financial Institutions, and support through the California Organized Investment Network. In short, the North State faces a notable lack of investment in its nonprofit and business communities as its starting point.

The Catalyst Projects for the Agriculture Sector offer connecting points for this work around regional capacity building and technical assistance. They include:

- Good Jobs Pit River Tribe Greenhouse Complex
- Modoc County Meat Processing Facility Marketing the Project
- Epic Harvest: Building a Resilient Regional Food System in Remote NE CA
- Local Area Revitalization Project Urban Agriculture and Composting Project
- Siskiyou Farm Co. Business Incubator
- Scott Valley Composting and Green Waste Facility.

The North State and Redwood Coast recently submitted an application to the Jobs First Implementation fund in the Ag-Tech sector. The North State-Redwood Ag-Tech Activated Alliance is an inter-regional collaborative partnership supporting innovative approaches aiming to improve and revitalize agricultural ecosystems through climate smart technology-driven farming and ranching practices, regenerative agriculture educational curriculum and training, workforce development programs, and agricultural business technical assistance. The alliance strengthens the rural network of stakeholders and service providers across the North State and Redwood Coast while aligning with statewide ag-tech objectives further ensuring the competitiveness of California. Both regions will continue to build upon this alliance furthering innovative strategies and solutions.

Resourcing Across the Strategy

Farmers and producers should actively explore and apply for:

- USDA programs (ECAP, EQIP, CRP, SARE, VAPG, RBDG, FMPP, LMPP)
- State-level grants—especially climate or infrastructure-linked
- Specialized urban- and value-added agriculture grants
- International or mechanization subsidies, if relevant

Dependencies and Risks

1. Natural Resources

- Water access – Irrigation from surface water and aquifers is critical due to dry climate.
- Soil health – Varies by region; essential for crop yield and carbon sequestration.
- Climate conditions – California's climate zones enable diverse crops but are vulnerable to drought and wildfire.

2. Inputs

- Seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides – Quality and availability affect productivity.
- Feed and animal health supplies – Key for dairy and livestock sectors.

3. Infrastructure

- Irrigation systems – Vital in drought-prone areas.
- Cold storage & transportation – Crucial for fresh produce and perishables.
- Processing facilities – Needed for value-added goods (e.g., almonds, wine).

4. Workforce

- Skilled and seasonal labor – California agriculture relies heavily on migrant and local workers.
- Workforce training – Needed for emerging technologies and climate-smart practices.

5. Technology & Innovation

- Ag-tech tools – Precision irrigation, soil sensors, drones, and automation.
- R&D – UC system and CSU campuses support innovation in crops and climate resilience.

6. Markets & Economics

- Market access – Domestic and export markets drive production choices.
- Capital & insurance – Access to financing and risk protection is essential.

7. Policy & Regulation

- Water rights & SGMA compliance – Govern water usage.
- Labor, land use, and emissions rules – Affect production practices.
- Incentive programs – CDFA, USDA, and CARB support for climate-smart ag.

8. Community & Support Systems

- Cooperatives & farm bureaus – Provide shared services and advocacy.
- Extension & technical assistance – Delivered by RCDs, UC ANR, and nonprofits.
- Public-private partnerships – Drive innovation, workforce development, and resilience.

Risks

1. Climate and Environmental Risks

- Drought and Water Scarcity – Reduced snowpack, overdrawn aquifers, and limited surface water allocations.
- Wildfires and Heatwaves – Increased frequency and intensity damaging crops, infrastructure, and air quality.
- Soil Degradation – Erosion, salinity, and nutrient depletion reduce productivity and resilience.
- Pest and Disease Pressure – Climate change expands pest ranges and resistance.

2. Economic and Market Risks

- Commodity Price Volatility – Fluctuating market prices impact profitability.
- Labor Costs and Shortages – Rising wages and limited access to skilled farm labor.
- Global Trade Disruptions – Tariffs, export bans, and geopolitical instability.
- Rising Input Costs – Fuel, fertilizer, and insurance cost spikes.

3. Regulatory and Policy Risks

- Water and Land Use Restrictions – SGMA and environmental regulations can limit production.
- Shifting Climate Policy – Transition to climate-smart practices may increase short-term costs.
- Immigration Policy Uncertainty – Impacts farmworker availability and planning.

4. Technological and Infrastructure Risks

- Slow Tech Adoption – Limited broadband, capital, or training to adopt precision ag tools.
- Aging Infrastructure – Irrigation systems, roads, and energy grids need upgrades.

5. Social and Workforce Risks

- Aging Farmer Population – Lack of new entrants into farming.
- Workforce Housing and Services – Shortages in rural areas hinder retention.



Activation Plan: Tactical Workplan

| Tactic and Overview | Task | Responsible Party | Timeline |
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| <p>Tactic 1 Activate regional leadership.</p> | <p>Convene subcommittee for the agriculture sector and include additional practitioners and partners to deepen working relationships, review funded projects, and expand tactics for implementation of the Regional Strategic Plan.</p> <p>Hosting regular meetings (HRTC, subcommittees, advisory committees).</p> <p>Facilitating peer-to-peer introductions and networking opportunities.</p> | <p>Co-convening Team with sub committees</p> <p>Convening of full HRTC</p> <p>Meetings with key agriculture sector stakeholders</p> | <p>Quarterly through September 2026</p> <p>As needed</p> |
| <p>Tactic 2 Promote a shared vision.</p> | <p>Build upon the community capacity workshops completed throughout the planning process. Host workshops in each of the 10 counties to engage the Regional Strategic Plan, connect funded awards with existing and new partners, seek assistance to improve unfunded projects to move toward eligibility for funding or to collaborate with other projects.</p> <p>Develop regular cadence of outreach to entire North State region; newsletter, social media, video projects.</p> | <p>Advisory Committee and HRTC with co-convening team support</p> | <p>Beginning June 2025</p> |
| <p>Tactic 3 Inventory agriculture projects in the pipeline</p> | <p>Through the community capacity workshops and HRTC meetings, conduct an inventory of needs of individual counties, subregional areas and the entire region.</p> | <p>Advisory Committee and HRTC with co-convening team support</p> | <p>Beginning June 2025</p> |



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| and identify technical assistance needs. | Identify scalable/replicable solutions to share in best practices expo. | | |
| <p>Tactic 4 Foster project-focused support where needed and feasible.</p> | <p>Assess funded projects needs and growth opportunities. Identify expertise within the co-convening team, advisory committee, and HRTC members. Review unfunded projects to determine needs and connect with resources.</p> <p>Develop a mechanism for sharing best practices, connecting projects and initiatives to subject matter experts. For example, a Community Resilience Handbook.</p> <p>Develop templates or tool kits, for example, getting through permitting processes.</p> <p>Assemble teams of on-call experts or consultants with subject-matter expertise in financing, marketing, grant opportunities, wood species and feedstock supply, business development, and other needs identified by the inventory.</p> <p>Facilitate interaction with official entities such as CDFA, USDA, economic development, and workforce.</p> <p>Organize field trips to successful models.</p> | Advisory Committee and HRTC with co-convening team support | Beginning June 2025 |
| <p>Tactic 5 Foster connections</p> | Complete a best practices expo with regional projects from all key sectors convening in person to share best | Advisory Committee and HRTC with co- | Fall 2025 - in person best |



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| <p>and interaction across the Plan’s four priority sectors, including Healthcare, Tourism, Agriculture, and Natural Resources.</p> | <p>strategies, programs and practices that can be shared and retooled across sectors. This is a request from our region and breaking silos and sharing best practices that are working within the north state context is a goal of our continued efforts. This expo will be an in person day long gathering.</p> <p>Complete in person convenings including the full regional HRTC.</p> <p>Identify key leaders to facilitate relationships between sectors, for example, natural resources partners focused on tourism or recreation who can also partner with health sector for multi benefit outcome (e.g. healthy community development, tourism sector growth, improved natural resource management.</p> <p>Identify project with cross sector impact and coordinate regional expertise and capacity to elevate project impact for example community resilience hubs that serve as deployment hubs for natural disaster response and serve as regional healthcare and health promotion hubs.</p> | <p>convening team support</p> | <p>practices expo</p> <p>In person HRTC mid-summer</p> |
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Goals and Metrics Across the Strategy

Sector-level outcomes

1. Expansion of ag-tech sector
2. Number of regional funding applications submitted
3. Number of quality primary and secondary jobs
4. Growth in agricultural education programs and graduates
5. Training and upskilling programs initiated within the region
6. # of cross regional agricultural training partnerships
7. # of cross regional agricultural projects and/or partnerships

Shorter term progress measures

1. Number / percentage of technical assistance needs adequately met
2. Number and progress of projects in the pipeline (based on inventory)
3. Number and median income of project-related jobs.

Expectations for reporting progress on measures

1. Quarterly stakeholder gathering
2. Newsletters and storytelling strategy
3. Annual regional in-person meeting of cross-sector leaders (linked with a quarterly regional convening meeting)