

LAFCO MEMORANDUM

SANTA BARBARA LOCAL AGENCY FORMATION COMMISSION

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September 3, 2026 (Agenda)

TO: Each Member of the Commission

FROM: Mike Prater
Executive Officer

SUBJECT: REPORT ON STATUS UPDATE FOR SALC GRANT

This is an Informational Report. No Action is Necessary

DISCUSSION

This status report is to bring the Commission and public up-to-date with regard to the Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation planning grant (SALC) for the “The Santa Barbara County Agriculture and Natural Resource Initiative” being prepared by various interested countywide partnerships. The Commission adopted Resolution 25-05 authorizing Santa Barbara County LAFCO to serve as lead applicant for the sustainable agricultural lands conservation planning grant with the Department of Conservation. On February 5, 2026, LAFCO entered into the grant agreement to perform the 2-year work program. This report provides a status update for each task underway.

The Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation (SALC) program was created in 2014 as a component of the California Strategic Growth Council and administered by the Department of Conservation. The program is primarily funded through the California Climate Investments, a statewide program that provides cap-and-trade funds through agricultural conservation, acquisition, and planning grants for programs intended to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. *SALC seeks to protect at-risk agricultural lands from sprawl development to promote growth within existing jurisdictions, ensure open space remains available, and support a healthy agricultural economy.*

The Santa Barbara County Agricultural & Natural Lands Initiative seeks to develop a regional framework that supports sustainable growth while protecting agricultural lands, natural resources, rural character, and community wellbeing, while considering best growth opportunities near existing cities. Our goal is to build understanding across interests and create shared ownership of the resulting conservation priorities and mapping framework to be able to come to agreement on a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between interested agencies.

TASK 1 | Policy Review – Status Update

Accomplishments:

- Convened all participating jurisdictions to discuss approach to policy analysis and review
- Uploaded all relevant policy documents into matrix and confirmed last update and related links (Note: several jurisdictions are currently updating elements of their GP).
- Reviewed and uploaded applicable General Plan elements and related documents for policies related to project goals (all jurisdictions)-85% complete-deadline 8/31
- Prepared matrix template for policies to be added (by jurisdiction and policy categories)-85% complete
- Formed policy subgroup to review/refine policy matrix once populated
- Met with task team leads to review progress (mapping and outreach team)

Activities (April- July 2026):

The Task 1 team, comprising various representatives from participating jurisdiction's, met to discuss and refine the approach to policy review needed to support the project. Applicable General Plan elements relevant to the project goals were uploaded and reviewed, mostly by participating jurisdictions, and for non-participating jurisdictions, added by the LAFCO team. Policies deemed relevant to the project were uploaded to the matrix by category.

Next steps:

Once the policy review/upload to the matrix is completed, all policies will be assessed by the policy subgroup to ensure that no important items were overlooked. The subgroup will also meet to refine the matrix and glean policies to ensure the most streamlined matrix possible. The team will then use the matrix to conduct an analysis to rank each jurisdiction's strengths and weaknesses. This information will be used by the project outreach team to further refine the approach to the project.

TASK 2 | Mapping & Spatial Analysis – Status Update

Accomplishments:

- Initiated the mapping and spatial-analysis work in June 2026
- Began developing the technical scope of work with the National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis (NCEAS)
- Held coordination meetings with SBCAG, The Nature Conservancy, WAF, and other project partners to help define the scope and approach
- Developed an initial framework for updating the Conservation Blueprint and completing the SALC grant mapping and analysis

Activities (June-August 2026):

The Land Trust worked with LAFCO and project partners to begin defining the technical approach for updating the Conservation Blueprint. This included identifying relevant natural-resource, agricultural, land-use, and planning data; discussing how existing regional mapping efforts can inform the project; and beginning to structure the parcel-level analysis of areas within

1.75 miles of the included cities' spheres of influence. The team also began working with NCEAS on a scope of work for the technical analysis and considering how agency, conservation-partner, and community input will help shape the mapping.

Next steps:

During the remainder of 2026, the team expects to finalize the technical scope, establish the project's steering and working-group structure, begin data collection and organization, and confirm the criteria for the SALC analysis. Initial mapping and analysis are expected in 2027, followed by stakeholder engagement, refinement, and completion of the SALC deliverables. Conservation Blueprint 2.0 is envisioned as a broader, iterative countywide effort continuing through approximately May 2028, subject to final contracting and supplemental funding. The longer-term goal is a maintained, accessible decision-support resource that can inform LAFCO decisions, conservation priorities, and regional land-use planning.

TASK 3 | Community Engagement – Status Update

Accomplishments:

- Formed community engagement implementation team
- Developed FAQs and general information document to help inform the community about project and our strategies
- Co-created a Community Engagement Plan (final draft)
- Conducted Phase I 'key informant' interviews (80% completed)

Activities (April- July 2026):

The Task 3 team made up of CEC, SBBG, LegacyWorks and community engagement consultants conducted 19 one-on-one interviews of key leaders, influencers and connected stakeholders representing agriculture, natural resources and conservation, housing, energy, under-represented communities, and wildfire Resilience. The goal of the interviews is to identify:

- Priorities, tensions, and concerns common to the sector related to preservation of agriculture, open space and resources, and growth and development of the region;
- Sector engagement strategies and additional questions we should be asking;
- Data layers for draft mapping and analysis that will be used in next phase engagement

Next steps:

The team will shift from one-on-one interviews to engagement with key stakeholder groups and networks including SBCAG, Ag Advisory Committee, Sustainable Ag & Land Stewardship Committee, Equity Advisory & Outreach Committee, Biodiversity Working Group, and others. We will then compile the data from the initial interviews and these stakeholder group listening sessions on suggested mapping data layers and policy-related themes and turn over to the policy and mapping task leads for consideration/incorporation. We anticipate sector-specific focus groups and workshops will take place in early 2027.

TASK 4 | MOA Framework – Status Update

Accomplishments:

- This task will begin once Outreach, Policy base, and Mapping nears completion

Activities (April- July 2026):

The Task 4 team, comprising various representatives from participating jurisdiction's, met to discuss interest in support of the project and engage in future MOA.

Next steps:

Hold dialogue between Cities and County regarding intent and development of potential areas and develop outline of MOA.

Please contact the LAFCO office if you have any questions.