

**Sierra Nevada Conservancy-Progress Report**

**Sierra Nevada Conservancy Grant Program  
Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control  
River and Coastal Protection Act of 2008 (Proposition 84)**

**Grantee Name:** Yosemite/Sequoia Resource Conservation & Development Council

**Project title:** Agriculture and Nature Tourism Workshops

**SNC Reference Number:** SNC 070310

**Submittal Date:** October 30, 2012

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**Check one:**

**6-Month Progress Report**

**Final Report**

**6-Month Progress Reports** should reflect the previous six months. **Final Reports** should reflect the entire grant period.

\*\*\* It should be noted that throughout this document the Yosemite/Sequoia Resource Conservation and Development Council is referred to as the 'Council'.

\*\*\* It should be noted that throughout this document the Sierra Nevada Conservancy is referred to as the 'SNC'

\*\*\* It should be noted that throughout this document the Central Valley Business Incubator is referred to as "CVBI"

**A. Progress Report Summary:** *(Please provide a general description of work completed during this reporting period.)*

We have spent ample time following up with workshop participants to make sure that a multi-level business counseling services were made available for their specific needs. The Virtual Incubator Program (VIP) continues to be utilized by agriculture and nature tourism entrepreneurs throughout Fresno and Tulare Counties. This service was made possible through the creation of a MOU with the Central Valley Business Incubator (CVBI). It provided 100 free spots to entrepreneurs within Fresno and Tulare Counties – ultimately giving them detailed access to a business planning program, business readiness assessment, idea feasibility workbook and marketing protocols. Furthermore, we have been distributing educational materials regarding the Think Local First Campaign. This Campaign was designed after much research within the Ag/Nature Tourism field was conducted and a common theme of consumer education was pinpointed. This campaign, which was developed in partnership with the Sierra Business Council, has help educate consumers on the positive effects of supporting local farmers, ranchers and others.

**B. Deliverables or Outcomes completed during this Reporting Period or Milestones Achieved:** *(Include specific information, such as public meetings held, agency participation, partnerships developed, or acres mapped, treated or restored.)*

The workshop participants hand book as well as the Think Local First campaign has been passed on to a variety of partners both in person and via internet. Specifically, these items have been highlighted at Council meetings (4), the Central Sierra Watershed Committee, Sierra Resource Conservation District meetings, Eco Farm Conference, University of CA Cooperative Extension, Fresno County Farm Bureau, Chamber of Commerce's and more.

Most recently the program was highlighted at an Economic Forum in North Fork CA which has regional players present. The overwhelming response of the program has been positive – and both the public and the Council are looking forward to its expansion.

Lastly, it should be noted that our AmeriCorps volunteer (and project manager) was able to assist with the Welcome to the Country and Tomato Fest events that occurred locally. This effort was to further support a variety of small-scale agriculture and tourism entrepreneurs in the area.

**C. Challenges or Opportunities Encountered:** *(Please describe what has worked and what hasn't; include any solutions you initiated to resolve problems. If your project is not on schedule, please explain why here.)*

Engaging small Agriculture and Nature Tourism entrepreneurs was difficult at first. The variety of tourist seasons and growing seasons made scheduling the workshops and confirming attendance difficult. It was only after attending several events (CA Small Farms Conference, US Small Farms' Growing Ag workshops, World Ag Expo, Fresno Food Expo, etc) and making several new partners (Fresno/Clovis Convention and Visitors Bureau, Central Valley Business Incubator, Small Valley Business Development Cooperation, Eco Farm, etc.) that the Council had the resources to better know and understand this community. Once this was acquired, the outreach plan was further developed and amended to be a success including several print articles, internet articles, calendar additions and two radio interviews.

Another opportunity was when we were asked to participate in the ECO Farm Annual Conference as a partner instead of as a participant to promote Ag Nature Tourism and further develop a network for our area workshop participants. Eco Farm provided partial funding for our attendance at this event.

**D. Unanticipated Successes Achieved:** *(Please describe any additional successes beyond completing scheduled tasks or meeting scheduled milestones.)*

Between the day of the workshop (November 10, 2012) and the two Farm Tours (one in Tulare County and one in Fresno County) 50 agriculture and nature tourism entrepreneurs were present. This does not include the approximately 25 speakers, panelist and farm hosts. The information provided at the workshops was very information and diverse, but the network that was obtained is priceless. We have continued to link this network by creating and utilizing an ‘ag/nature tourism’ contact list where relevant information is distributed.

It should be noted that a multitude of relationships and partnerships have originated or evolved throughout the life-span of this project. These efforts will ultimately allow the Council to continue to work within the Ag/Nature Tourism Community here on out. Furthermore, the Council was able to create and execute two MOUs. The first was with the Small Valley Business Development Cooperation, a local lender providing small loans to agriculture and nature tourism entrepreneurs in the region, in anticipation of workshop participants future needs. The second was with the Central Valley Business Incubator. This MOU established 100 spots for workshops participants to utilize a Virtual Incubator Program for free (more details about the VIP in “A. Program Report Summary”).

**E. Compare Actual Costs to Budgeted Costs:** *(Please refer to your grant agreement to list your deliverables/budget categories and budgeted costs compared to actual costs incurred during this reporting period in the table below.)*

<b>PROJECT BUDGET CATEGORIES</b>	<b>Budgeted SNC Dollars</b>	<b>Actual Dollars</b>
Business Consulting Services	\$10,000	\$10,427.24
VISTA Program Costs	\$3,000	\$3,072.63
Presenters Fee/Travel	\$1,000	800.00
<b>Indirect/Overhead</b>	<b>\$2,000</b>	<b>\$1880.00</b>
Vol. & Staff Travel	\$1,500	\$1,251.46
Workshop Materials	\$2,500	\$2,493.96
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>\$20,000</b>	<b>\$19,925.23</b>

**F. Do you have information to report on the project-specific Performance Measures for your project?** *(If so, please list the Performance Measures below and describe your progress.)*

All of our performance measures have been completed in full – although we continue to leverage them when possible. Please see pages 11-12 for a detail explanation of each.

**G. Were there any other relevant materials produced under the terms of this Agreement that are not a part of the budgeted deliverables? If so, please attach copies. (Include digital photos, maps, media coverage of project, or other work products.)**

The project produced 75 hard copies of a detailed participant handbook (binder) which were distributed to workshop participants and panelists. Additionally, we made electronic copies of the hand book that has continued to be distributed on an as needed basis. These materials were also made available on the Council's website ([www.ysrcandd.org](http://www.ysrcandd.org)) and offered to partners throughout the region. The "Think Local First" stickers were created and produced under this grant ultimately increasing consumer education and supporting local operations across the region.

**H. Next Steps: (Work anticipated in the next 6 months, including location and timing of any scheduled events related to the project.)**

We will continually provide the electronic copies of the workshop participant handbook and encourage others to post this information on their website. Meanwhile we have a handful of entrepreneurs that we will continue to assist with their business endeavors. Lastly, we will continue the Think Local First campaign in full force and look for ample opportunities to expand it in the future.

## **Please Complete this Section for FINAL Report ONLY**

### **Capacity-Building Results and Collaboration and Cooperation with Stakeholders:**

*(What partnerships did you initiate or strengthen as a result of this project? How did they affect the project outcome? If applicable, how did this grant increase your organization's capacity? What is your plan to sustain this increase?)*

The project did increase the Council's capacity – during the lifespan of this grant a variety of internal changes occurred (more in # 7) and the Council had the opportunity to re-organized and become more sustainable. The projects executed during this time frame, three of which were SNC grants, served as the Council's new 'poster children' aiming to establish a new 'normal' that best utilizes all resources to maximize public good. The Council has now applied these means of creative thinking and detailed budget analysis to all of its projects.

This project help to build the capacity of the Council by strengthen relations with many organization, some of the *key* groups were; Central Valley Business Incubator, Valley Small Business Development Corporation, University of CA Cooperative Extension, Natural Resource Conservation Services, AmeriCorps, Fresno County Farm Bureau, Tulare County Board of Supervisors, Tourism and Film Commissioner of Tulare County, Economic Development Council of Fresno County, and many agriculture and nature tourism entrepreneurs in the region. These key relationships allowed for a detailed outreach plan and coverage area as well as a diverse speakers and panelist base.

### **Description of Project Accomplishments:**

#### **1. Most Significant Accomplishment**

*Describe in one concise, well-written paragraph, the most significant accomplishment that resulted from this grant.*

By cautiously utilizing project funds we were not only able to host a well-attended two county workshop but we also were able to conduct two farm tours (one in each of the two counties), link a network of like-entrepreneurs in the region, recruit a diverse field of expertise to serve as speakers and panelist, conduct ample outreach efforts, integrate with the target audience as needed, obtain a variety of in-kind contributions to support these efforts and create a consumer education based campaign (Think Local First). The Council feels that the most significant accomplishment was the amount of work that was able to be completed in the allotted budget. Specifically the MOU's that were created to help leverage the overall project goal (outlined in "D. Unanticipated Successes Achieved").

#### **2. WOW Factor**

*If applicable, please describe anything that happened as a result of the project or during the project that is particularly impressive.*

The “WOW factor” of this project was the lengths at which outreach was able to occur which ultimately lead to a successful workshop and farm tour series in Fresno and Tulare County. The Council has conducted like-workshops in Madera and Mariposa Counties in the past – both of which have led to annual and bi-annual events in those counties. This grant allowed for the Council to reach out to a like-community but within two counties that had not yet seen this type of workshop before. This initial project (workshop) is only the beginning for the ag/nature entrepreneurs in Tulare and Fresno County – as this area is now seeing more and more attention. This would not have been feasible if the media outreach strategy was not met. A variety of news sources picked this up including; the Fresno Bee, Recorder Online, Appeal Democrat, Valley business Times, University of CA, Valley Voice, Hispanic Times, Visalia Time Delta – as well as others.. This is complemented by the creation of the Think Local First campaign which continues to educate consumers on their purchasing power and how to best support these agriculture and nature tourism endeavors.

### **3. Design and Implementation**

*When considering the design and implementation of this project, what lessons did you learn that might help other grantees implement similar work?*

It is very important to get integrated in the community that you are targeting. To do so you must attend a variety of events anywhere from conferences to one-on-one farm visits. The information you learn while immersing yourself in this community will allow you to effectively choose a date, time and location that works with a large portion of the target audience – keeping in mind that no one time will work best for everyone.

After learning everything we could about this community we proceeded to work with key partners to develop; a generic press release, 2,000 post-cards with event information, a flyer containing both the workshop and farm tour information, and a save the date graphic that was utilized as an electronic outlet (mass emails). Content was sent to a variety of mass email list serves including; Fresno County Farm Bureau, Fresno/Clovis Convention and Visitors Bureau, UC Small Farm Cooperative Extension, Eco Farm, Fresno County Economic Development Council, and the Tulare County Film Commissioner and Board of Supervisors. Meanwhile a media outreach plan was conducted in which approximately 20 hits were obtained including two on-air radio interviews. Chambers were contacted throughout the region to get the workshops and farm tours added to online and paper calendars alike. Additionally, 13 certified farmers markets were given the event post cards to distribute to vendors and the public alike. A Facebook page was activated and updated daily in order to ensure that all means of outreach had been conducted and that a diverse demographic group would be reached. Lastly, a survey was conducted at the end of the full-day workshop

in order to analyze the day's success and where improvements could be made in the future.

#### **4. Indirect Impact**

*Please describe any indirect benefits of the project such as information that has been developed as a result of the project is being used by several other organizations to improve decision-making, or a conservation easement funded by this grant that encouraged other landowners in the area to have conservation easements on their property.*

The industry of agriculture and nature tourism is one that has been going on for a while in both Fresno and Tulare Counties but it has not traditionally been highlighted as the industry that it could be. By continually getting media coverage about the event, many articles popped up regarding, "What is ag/nature tourism and what it could mean economically for the region?" It is our hope that this event, along with other like efforts, are helping to pave the way to a more transparent thriving industry. The Think Local First campaign is taking this to the next level by also educating consumers directly. Furthermore, by continuing to have a Facebook presence we are hoping that the younger generation will further support these endeavors.

#### **5. Collaboration and Conflict Resolution**

*If you worked in collaboration or cooperation with other organizations or institutions, describe those arrangements and their importance to the project. Also, describe if you encountered conflict in the project and how you dealt with it, or if there was conflict avoided as a result of the project.*

This project, like many of the Council's projects, utilized the expertise of our Council. The Council, which is a unique make-up of 30-plus partners (collaborative) conducts all projects in a way that will maximize various options, opinions, expertise, ideas, etc. Specifically, this project utilized the expertise of the following key organizations; Central Valley Business Incubator, Valley Small Business Development Corporation, University of CA Cooperative Extension, Natural Resource Conservation Services, AmeriCorps, Fresno County Farm Bureau, Tulare County Board of Supervisors, Tourism and Film Commissioner of Tulare County, Economic Development Council of Fresno County, and many agriculture and nature tourism entrepreneurs in the region.

Furthermore, the in-kind support was key to this project. Executive Committee members of the Council spent ample time (volunteer) creating these key relationships. Furthermore the local printer which created the Think Local First stickers donated her time as she felt the consumer education component was much needed in this region. On the day of the event we had Starbucks donate coffee and a local organic farmer in Fresno County donate all the produce for lunch. The venue was provided by planning committee member Eric Coyne in order to ensure equal driving distances for Tulare and Fresno County participants. This accompanied by the time of key volunteers,

including our AmeriCorps VISTA who managed this project, directly impacted the success of this event. Lastly, a variety of workshop and conference scholarships were obtained to off-set costs – these events allowed us to better know and understand the target audience.

Regarding conflict resolution, whenever we work with partners and/or in collaborative settings there are a variety of techniques we utilize as preventatives to decrease chances of potential conflict. We executed full project transparency, ask for assistance and utilized suggestions while conducting direct communication regarding project goals. We worked to teach our AmeriCorps volunteer these practices and found that sometime it can be difficult to do so under their specific circumstances. Circumstances include; not being involved with the project from the start; and only being in the area one year – thus, making it difficult to establish and evolve relationships continually – and, while not having the opportunity to do as much follow-up work as what could have been done if their term was two years for example.

#### **6. Capacity-Building**

*SNC is interested in both the capacity of your organization, as well as local and regional capacity. Please describe the overall health of your organization including areas in need of assistance. SNC is interested in the strength and involvement of your board, significant changes to your staff, size and involvement of membership. In addition, describe how your project improved capabilities of partners, or the larger community.*

The Y/S RC&D Council is a unique non-profit organization for three reasons; (1) we are a regional 501c3, serving the rural and foothill communities of four counties, (2) we have a diverse semi-governmental (four county Board of Supervisors) board consisting of 30-plus partners and supporters, and (3) we not only work to conserve and preserve natural resources and cultural resources – our goal is to link these opportunities with means of sustainable economic development throughout the region. Like many non-profit organizations, we have a small general budget as over 90% of project dollars go to on-the-ground work. In the last year and a half the Council has conducted an internal change (please see details in #7) that has increased the health of our organization greatly. Specifically we have two additions to our Executive Committee and have hired a total of three part-time employees (more than the organization has had in its ten-plus years of operation). We have also increased our partner outreach and transparency as it is them whom we serve. That said, the work that needs to be done throughout the rural foothill communities of Madera, Mariposa, Fresno and Tulare counties is immense and could utilize additional staff to maximize opportunities and assistance. Our coverage area includes a variety of ‘disadvantaged/underserved communities,’ ‘food deserts’ and Tribal communities that are often overlooked. We continue to rely on our Council (30 plus partners throughout the region - collaborative) to help define projects and community needs.

#### **7. Challenges**

*Did the project face internal or external challenges? How were they addressed? Describe each challenge and any actions that you took to address it. Was there something that SNC did or could have done to assist you? Did you have to change any of your key objectives in response to conditions “on the ground”?*

The Y/S RC&D Council has traditionally been funded through the USDA – Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS). Through these funds Resource Conservation and Development Council across the County (approximately 300) have had all overhead (rent, phone, supplies) paid for in full. Additionally, the NRCS provided one full-time employee to each Council to further leverage and execute projects. In April of 2011 the U.S. Congress made a decision that pulled this resource out overnight. The Y/S RC&D Council, as well as all other RC&D’s across the nation, had to reconfigure itself internally and develop a sustainable strategy. The Sierra Nevada Conservancy staff worked with us to recreate the purposed project keeping within the original scope of work. The Council ended up doing “more for less” than what was originally purposed. It was with the cooperation and support of the SNC as well as the creative thinking and leveraging of Council staff that this was completed successfully. This was key due to a variety of internal changes at that time such as; staff, office location, funding sources, board involvement and internal structure.

#### **8. Photographs**

*Grantees are strongly encouraged to submit photos, slides or digital images whenever possible. These images will be used for SNC publications such as annual reports or on the website. Please make sure you clearly identify location, activity, and your project with each submitted image. Images will be credited to the submitting organization, unless specified otherwise.*

A binder has been created and submitted with the final report that contains the following; (1) electronic files of the workshop participant handbook, (2) a CD with a selection of pictures, (3) a variety of samples of the media coverage obtained, (4) a list of attendees, speakers, panelist etc. (5) a Think Local First sticker, (6) an event flyer, save the date, postcard and generic press release utilized (7) a copy of the MOU’s created during the life span of this project, (8) information on the business counseling services (Valley Incubator Program) obtained, and (9) a sample of the workshop questionnaire.

#### **9. Post Grant Plans**

*What are the post-grant plans for the project if it does not conclude with the grant? Include a description of the following (if applicable): (1) Changes in operations or scope; (2) Replication or use of findings; (3) Names of other organizations you expect to involve; (4) Plans to support the project financially, and; (5) Communication plans?*

Post-grant plans include; continuing to assist agriculture and nature entrepreneurs as appropriate, distribution workshop materials, informing the public about the free business counseling services available to these entrepreneurs and the continuation (and hopefully expansion) of the Think Local First campaign. Additionally, the Council will also continue to assess needs and see if a future project may be appropriate.

**10. Post Grant Contact**

*Who can be contacted a few years from now to follow up on the project? Please provide name and contact information.*

Steve Haze, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President [stevehaze007@gmail.com](mailto:stevehaze007@gmail.com)

**SNC-approved Performance Measures:** *(Please list each Performance Measure for your Project, as identified in your Grant Agreement, and the results/outcomes.)*

1. **Performance Measure:** Review previous research/content/budget  
**Result/Outcomes:** Completed. The budget was amended with SNC staff assistance in order to rearrange funds into categories that would allow for the most significant project impact.
2. **Performance Measure:** Initiate outreach to potential partners  
**Result/Outcome:** Completed. The Council not only utilized the expertise of their direct partners but also outreached to a variety of new partners in the appropriate field. Meanwhile, the Council attended multiple events to further network with key players in the ag/nature tourism field. A media plan and other outreach efforts were executed successfully to obtain 20 media hits and 50 workshops participants. Two MOU's were created to assist with business counseling services after the workshops were completed.
3. **Performance Measure:** Form a planning committee  
**Result/Outcomes:** Completed. A planning committee was formed when the grant was original obtained. Due to bond freezes and the extensions needed on the project a new committee was created. Ultimately we utilized as many partners as possible to ensure project success.
4. **Performance Measure:** Scheduled workshops and secure venues  
**Result/Outcomes:** Completed. Workshops were scheduled for November 10, 2012 after much research was conducted regarding tourist season and growing seasons. The date was reached after the planning committee and other stakeholder's recognized that it was the best time of year for the target audience. A venue was obtained, with the support of planning committee member Eric Coyn, at the Tulare County Board of Supervisor Chambers. This location was chosen as it was in a central location for participants in both Fresno and Tulare Counties. In addition we scheduled and executed two farm tours – one in Fresno County and one in Madera County.
5. **Performance Measure:** Secure media  
**Result/Outcomes:** Completed. A number of media outlets were contacted. These included online, print, radio and TV outlets. In the end we had approximately 20 direct hits. We found that many times, not only was the day of the events information covered, but a lengthier article that outlined what ag/nature tourism is, was featured. Additionally, event details were features on a variety of online and print calendars throughout the region.
6. **Performance Measure:** Schedule presenters for workshops  
**Result/Outcomes:** Completed. The Council was able to identify and select a diverse range of speakers and panelist by networking directly with experts in the field and sending out a "Call for Participation" through the Fresno/Clovis Convention and Visitors Bureau.

7. **Performance Measure:** Develop and reproduce workshop materials  
**Result/Outcomes:** Materials were developed utilizing a variety of partner input. The Council's Americorp volunteer was able to review and analyze a series of information and pull the most appropriate information for the workshop. Topics include; considering ag/nature tourism, navigating legal restraints, coalition building, risk manage and marketing.
8. **Performance Measure:** Host workshops in location central to Fresno and Tulare counties  
**Result/Outcomes:** Completed. The workshops were located in Visalia CA. This was a central to Fresno and Tulare participants. There is a portion between Fresno City and Visalia that is rural and limited on venues. The venue chosen, Tulare County Board of Supervisors Chambers, was chosen also due to the type of roads and access to the venue itself. In addition we scheduled and executed two farm tours – one in Fresno County and one in Madera County. Participants visited Simonian Farms and Milla Vineyards in Fresno County and Naylor's Organic Family Farm Stay and Bravo Farm Cheese Factory in Tulare County.
9. **Performance Measure:** Survey to gauge workshop effectiveness  
**Result/Outcomes:** A survey was distributed to all workshop participants. Overall feedback was very positive. Attendees appreciate the diverse panel and the workshop participant handbook very much. Suggestions were made to have future workshop incorporate more officials present to discuss their individual needs. At the workshop we did have a variety of County officials present but have also made efforts to pair individual endeavors to the appropriate official after the workshops.
10. **Performance Measure:** Business development counseling services after workshop  
**Result/Outcomes:** Completed. Through the Council's partnership with the Ventral Valley Business Incubator all workshop participants as well as a variety of additional contacts made had full access to their Virtual Incubator Program for no cost. Additionally, Council staff visited a handful of ag/nature tourism endeavors as requested to further analyze future needs and development strategies. Other services such as Facebook presence development were offered as a bounce.

*Progress Reports are required periodically throughout the term of the Grant Agreement (Refer to Exhibit B of the Grant Agreement). These reports will allow you and the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) to see the degree to which the project is on track and achieving your projected outcomes. Your Progress Reports will further provide the SNC with information that will help us to explain your work to the Board Members and various other audiences. Timing of Progress Reports is specified in the Project Schedule included in Exhibit A of the Grant Agreement, but generally every 6 months until completion of the project.*

*A Progress Reporting Form is provided to Grantees on the SNC Website. **Six-month Progress Reports** should reflect the previous 6-month period; **Final Reports** should address each question for the entire grant period – looking at the project as a whole.*

*The form specifies the items you will need to report on. For the Six-Month Interim Report these include, but are not limited to: A Progress Report Summary of work completed, Deliverables or Outcomes Completed, Challenges or Opportunities Encountered, Unanticipated Successes Achieved, Actual Costs compared to Budgeted Costs, Any Additional Relevant Materials Produced, and Next Steps.*

*The Final Report will include additional information, such as: Resources Leveraged, Capacity-Building Results and Collaboration and Cooperation with Stakeholders, a Description of Project Accomplishments, and SNC Approved Performance Measures.*

*Please make sure that you submit complete reports by the dates requested in your Grant Agreement.*