SAN LUIS OBISPO'S COMMITMENT TO AGRICULTURAL LAND CONSERVATION

City Farm SLO

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Located just a couple miles south of the restaurant lined streets of downtown San Luis Obispo California, adjacent to the recently constructed neighborhood marketplace known as SLO Ranch Farms and Marketplace, sits the Calle Joaquin Agricultural Reserve. The City of San Luis Obispo's 1994 General Plan preserved roughly half of the 180-acre prime agricultural land to make up the reserve. Over time, various development endeavors have reduced the area owned by the city of San Luis Obispo, to just 25 acres. In San Luis Obispo's 2011 Agricultural Master Plan, a majority portion of these 25 acres were intended to be stewarded in agricultural production by a local, recognized nonprofit. San Luis Obispo executed a lease with a nonprofit in January of 2013 known as City Farm SLO (or just City Farm).

The approval of a lease amendment in 2022 cemented City Farm's status as stewards of the reserve land for 40 years, until 2062. This amendment also updated the nonprofit's operational abilities and allowances thus placing further restrictions (mainly related to environmental policy compliance) on the operations of the organization. In 2025, the nonprofit was approved to annex over an acre in contiguous acreage in land that was historically seasonal wetland, bringing the organization's total acreage to X acres. These agreements have created more responsibility for the nonprofit and provided numerous opportunities for City Farm to continue to advance their mission. Taken together, these expanded responsibilities and opportunities invite a critical examination of how City Farm can diversify their activities, stabilize funding, and strategically plan for compliance and stewardship over the duration of their lease.

The Mission

Pursuant to their agreement with the City, the main goals of the nonprofit, according to their Strategic Plan updated in 2021, are to

1) provide affordable land for small sustainable farmers,

2) offer farm-based education for at-risk and underserved youth,

3) foster a diverse community focused on food and farming, and

4) model and implement regenerative agricultural practices.

The Goals

The first of these 4 explicit goals, providing affordable land for small sustainable farming, is accomplished through the nonprofit's subtenant farmer program. Approximately 13 acres of the roughly 20 acres under City Farm's responsibility are subleased to 6 small farms, who practice organic and regenerative farming. Though only one of these farms, Blosser Urban Garden, is certified organic through California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF), all tenant farmers at City Farm are required in their agreement with the nonprofit to produce using these ecologically conscious techniques and practices. Below is a list of tenant farmers as of 2025.

- MG Farms produce a wide variety of fruits, vegetables, and herbs to be sold to local schools and at local farmers markets, via SLO Veg, a local produce delivery service.
- Aviator Acres Family Farm sells their produce in two small grocery stores on the Central Coast, and via Harvestly.com, an online farm-to-door produce service with whom CFS and other tenant farmers use as an intermediary to sell produce.
- Our Global Family Farm, is a community-based demonstration permaculture farm,
- Monarch Hills Education, a nature-based enrichment program for children TK-6th grade run by a nonprofit.

Support for this tenant farmer program was bolstered in 2024 through a Farmers Market Promotion Program USDA Grant, titled *Scaling and Expanding San Luis Obispo County Farmer Collaborative Partnerships*, which helped fund what is known as the City Farm Collaborative. The Collaborative provides training, technical assistance, and marketing services for the tenant farmers, and makes twice a week delivery to the neighboring shopping center and restaurants at SLO Ranch Farms and Marketplace.

The second of these goals, to offer farm-based education for youth in the community, is accomplished through numerous educational programs and events where local youth of all ages visit the farm and learn about the importance of sustainable food systems, regenerative farming, and get hands on experience learning about food and fiber production. Examples of these events and programs include the Sheep Shearing Shindig, the Farm Games Hoedown, Junior Farmers

Thanksgiving Break Camp, and Family Cooking Nights. This educational programming has garnered support from the community, increased grant opportunities, and serves in certain cases as a source of revenue.

The pursuit of the third goal, fostering a diverse community focused on food and farming, is evident in the educational farm model, as well as numerous community engagement opportunities the organization puts on. Community events include farming-based events, community work days, and the recent addition of a pay-what-you-can farmstand. The farmstand is funded by partners Harvestly.com, encouraging the community to engage with regenerative farming and the organization. Their Therapeutic Horticulture Program also advances the inclusive aspect by ensuring that the farm is accessible and adapted for everyone, including youth with disabilities.

The fourth goal, modeling and implementing regenerative farming practices, is exemplified in a few ways. First, the acreage (~3.5 acres) directly farmed by the nonprofit is farmed using regenerative practices, including cover cropping, reduced till, compost production and other organic soil amendment applications, the integration of animals, and diverse cropping systems. The inclusion of these types of practices is a factor considered by the nonprofit when selecting subtenant farmers. Additionally, the Calle Joaquin Agricultural Reserve is one of the parcels included in the City's Carbon Farm Plan, authored and monitored by the San Luis Coastal Resource Conservation District, furthering the regenerative tenets of carbon sequestration and climate change reduction and resilience. Finally, City Farm hosts workshops for other local producers who want to learn more about regenerative farming implementation and serve as a model to present the practice associated with regenerative production systems on the California Central Coast.

Regenerative Agriculture

Though the term has recently gained more widespread attention from the farming, regulatory, and academic communities in the past decade, the practices associated with the terms "regenerative farming" and "regenerative agriculture" have roots in Indigenous practices of food and fiber production since time

immemorial (Durgude et al., 2025; Wilson et al., 2025). The term was first introduced to modern farming and academia in 1979, and was quickly adopted by the Rodale Institute, global leaders in the organic and regenerative movements (Giller et al., 2021; Khangura et al., 2023; Sher et al., 2024). By the 1980's papers were being published giving more explicit meaning to the terms, establishing it as both a set of practices and a philosophy. The movement gained more traction in the 2000s, with the adoption of programs and third party certifications that have been embraced by agrifood giants of the likes of General Mills, Danone, and Kellogg's (Giller et al., 2021).

While the movement is continuing to gain traction in the United States, its relevance is substantiated from transitions to regenerative agriculture globally, from India to Europe, New Zealand, and beyond. The specific practices vary depending on needs and applicability for various production and cropping systems. But across these locations and the agricultural industry, the main tenets do not stray far from the ten points of Regenerative Agriculture Philosophy established by Richard Harwood, former director of the Rodale Research Institute, in 1983 (Giller et al., 2021).

To summarize, Harwood envisioned regenerative agriculture to produce high yield nutritional food, free from synthetic chemicals like pesticides, herbicides, and fungicides. The specific term regenerative might come from several social or physical manifestations but likely refers in modern application to the regeneration of soil, in terms of soil health, depth, fertility, and productivity, as well as physical characteristics, specifically in the most agriculturally relevant upper layers (Khangura et al., 2023; Sher et al., 2024). Harwood envisioned nutrient flow systems that integrate entire ecosystems at every level, from soil microorganisms to the integration of livestock, and the basis of crop production supported by biological systems. Substances like artificial fertilizers should not be used, and instead the system is ideally fully integrated. This often means the system is more labor intensive, generating jobs. Regenerative agriculture, to Harwood, also precludes the use of hormones and prophylactic antibiotics in animal husbandry. While planning at the national level is required for a successful transition to regenerative farming, the philosophy hinges on regional and local self-reliance to close nutrient-flow loops (Giller et al., 2021; Lal, 2020).

More concrete definitions have been developed in the decades since the conception of Harwood's philosophy. Lal (2020) provides a more modern basis for regenerative agriculture; to manage soil fertility and acidification using ecosystem services like those from compost and mycorrhiza as opposed to chemical inputs, improving water cycle metrics like infiltration and reduced runoff, controlling erosion by covering the soil, and sequestering the most carbon allowed by the soil for climate change mitigation. Some of these and other definitions are based on processes (i.e. cover cropping, animal integration, restriction in use of pesticides and synthetic fertilizers), some on outcomes (i.e. carbon sequestration, soil health improvement, reduced need for inputs), and some on both. Nonetheless, regenerative production systems current ambiguity leads to various problems and opportunities. The bases of these problems stem from lack of definitions for use in policy, allowing capable firms to coopt and greenwash the term. However, smaller, less advantaged firms can implement groups of practices without paying certification fees and potentially receive a premium for their products. On one hand, the philosophy encourages the adoption of the models associated with regenerative farming more freely, enabling voluntary managers to implement systems that enhance environmental sustainability and long-term land health. On the other hand, without a concrete definition, the term can be absconded with by large firms who claim one thing when in reality the impact of their practices may not truly accomplish what they claim (Burns, 2021; Newton et al., 2020; Wilson et al., 2022, 2025).

Some of this ambiguity has led to adoption of practices that accomplish the goals laid out in the various philosophies and definitions. Luckily for regenerative agriculture advocates and practitioners, science is becoming increasingly convinced that regenerative farming can be adopted to create food systems that benefit producers, consumers, and the environment with which they both interact (Durgude et al., 2025; Lal, 2020). There is a growing body of research associating regenerative practices with greater climate, flooding, drought, and pest resilience. When correctly implemented, benefits of regenerative practices as an alternative to conventional practices include reduced reliance on expensive inputs (i.e. herbicide resistant seeds, synthetic fertilizers, water), potential for increased profits via diversification (i.e. livestock integration providing additional marketable products) and higher quality products (i.e. more nutrient dense food, food

produced responsibly that can fetch a higher price from consumers) (Burns, 2021; Durgude et al., 2025; Giller et al., 2021; Khangura et al., 2023; LaCanne & Lundgren, 2018; Lal, 2020; Sher et al., 2024; White, 2020).

While no model of production is a panacea, through research and anecdote, regenerative agriculture has proven its many benefits may not just sustain but enhance soil and greater environmental quality, leading to long-term improvement in soil, produce, and community health. While the limitations may include high initial costs (as transitioning can be a large undertaking), increased labor requirements (which can be positive depending on perspective, as job creation is sometimes considered a benefit of the model), and no official recognition in the form of certification, these costs and impacts may be mitigated with a truly sustainable food and fiber system (Burns, 2021; Durgude et al., 2025; Lal, 2020).

Regenerative Agriculture in Policy: Opportunities and Restrictions

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has codes and definitions for several Conservation Practice Standard, so there are clear definitions of individual practices that have been recognized by the Federal government. However, no official list of practices from the Federal government stipulates what may be considered regenerative agriculture, like there are with the USDA's National Organic Program. In March of 2025, California Agricultural Secretary Karen Ross wrote a letter to the State Board of Food and Agriculture which included the *Final Definition of 'Regenerative Agriculture' for State Policies and Programs* (Appendix A). The state defined regenerative agriculture for consideration by State Agencies and Departments as "an integrated approach to farming and ranching rooted in principles of soil health, biodiversity and ecosystem resiliency leading to improved targeted outcomes." The letter stressed that the definitions are "unlikely to be static" as the topic of regenerative agriculture is rapidly evolving and as science advances understanding, the definition may be updated. Ross also stated that while the CDFA has adopted the definition, it is not intended to be used in statute or certification (Ross, 2025).

Though these definitions are not intended to be used in policies or certifications, the mission of City Farm is in line with the "Ag Vision" of the CDFA. There are 5 strategic priorities on the CDFA's Ag Vision website, all which City Farm

directly or indirectly advances with their programs and mission. These are: Enhance understanding of agriculture, drive next generation talent and tools, build healthy local community, collaborate on smarter regulations, and foster climate-smart, resilient, and regenerative food systems (*CDFA - California Agricultural Vision*, n.d.). This consistency of City Farm's operation with the vision of the state agriculture department provides potential opportunities for City Farm to advance their operation. There are opportunities, such as grants and other programs made possible by policies at the local, state, and federal levels that provide funding for operations that City Farm has taken advantage of or is qualified to take advantage. There are also policies that limit their ability to achieve their mission due to permitting costs and requirements, environmental regulation compliance, and other agricultural policies and regulations.

City Farm and their Regenerative Practices

Implementation

In order for City Farm to meet City lease agreements, accomplish their goal as laid out in their Strategic Plan (2021), and to be able to receive premiums on produce from the operation, the organization must model and implement regenerative practices. Despite the ambiguity surrounding the term, City Farm employs many practices and manages for outcomes aligned with regenerative agriculture.

On the approximately 3.5 acres farmed directly by the nonprofit, the practices used include: practices intended to improve soil health, like cover cropping, compost application, biochar application, no till, diverse intercropping systems and crop rotation. Additional practices that impact soil health but are more holistic and directed at biodiversity improvement include hedgerow/windbreak planting, synthetic free farming and development of management plans that encourage biodiversity maximization, including plans to create bioswales that encourage healthy riparian areas and buffers.

What goes into the decision of crop selection? How does this influence practice selection?

What are the main difficulties or limitations faced surrounding implementing regenerative practices?

How do relationships, like those with Cal Poly students (ag engineering/CM etc.), or with other community groups support the use of regenerative practices?

Practices for Soil Health and Regeneration

The soils of the site are Cropley clay and Salinas silty clay loam, which are both clay heavy. These soils are difficult to cultivate when wet but are considered by the NRCS to be prime farmland if irrigated. City Farm uses several regenerative practices to improve the soil's fertility. These include application of organic fertilizers like feather meal (a known organic fertilizer which allows for slow nitrogen release, an important nutrient in plant production), gypsum (a soil structure enhancer and toxicity reducer, as well as a sulfur and calcium rich amendment which does not alter pH), and compost (increasing soil organic matter levels, enhancing the clay heavy soils). Additionally, the farm integrates livestock into their operation, uses biochar application (an amendment gaining popularity in regenerative systems that improves soil structure, soil microbiome health and diversity, and water cycle metrics like infiltration and water holding capacity), and planting of cover crops which are terminated with roller crimping (another technique that improves nitrogen availability) to address soil health, reduce their need for synthetic inputs, and establish themselves as regenerative producers (Ashford & Reeves, 2003; Campion et al., 2023; *CarbonFarmPlan*, 2022; Hadas & Kautsky, 1994; Hopkins, 2013).

Modeling Regenerative Farming

Apart from simply implementing these practices, the farm models regenerative farming for their subtenants and local farmers alike. In terms of subtenant farmers, the City Farm Collaborative offers a network of tenant farmers who practice organic and regenerative farming on their plots, allowing for knowledge and resource sharing, and the dissemination of information on a site-specific context. Farmers in the Collaborative, with plots on the property, can learn from and share information with their fellow subtenants, as well as the nonprofit themselves, who are all engaging in regenerative models of farming, enhancing a model of a community based in farming. This type of knowledge sharing is crucial to the successful development of regenerative models.

In terms of other local and regional producers, workshops and “farmer gatherings”, are hosted at City Farm. In 2025, 87 regional farmers and technical assistance providers gathered at City Farm for such workshops. One workshop hosted in February of 2025 by a local resource conservation district, the NRCS, and the Community Alliance with Family Farmers promised networking as well as information on complying with, and finding grants related to, the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act. Another workshop in 2025 was hosted by the CDFA at City Farm, aimed at helping small scale producers prepare for regulatory inspections for food safety regulations. These peer-to-peer networking and workshop opportunities offer local farmers chances to both be educated on the workshop specific curriculum but also see firsthand regenerative farming in action. These programs further facilitate knowledge sharing and regenerative farming education. Another example of modeling of regenerative farming that City Farm provides is weekly tours of their operation, providing opportunities to the public to come and learn about the practices implemented on the nonprofit managed land.

Modeling Via A Carbon Farm Plan

Due to their location, City Farm is part of the San Luis Coastal Resource Conservation District. This organization has created what is known as a Carbon Farm Plan for the farm. The plan was crucial in securing the future of the organization on the Calle Joaquin Agricultural Reserve. Carbon sequestration on this land is a part of the City’s Climate Action Plan, and City Farm’s commitment to the climate action plan helped secure their lease extension in 2022 (*City of SLO CAP Appendix B*, 2020; Purrington, 2022).

Carbon Farm Plans are based on the USDA NRCS Conservation Planning process, using carbon and carbon capture as the driver for plan design. Consistent with many facets of regenerative agriculture, plans are designs for farms that maximize their carbon stored and reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. These plans thereby enhance working land carbon, resulting in beneficial changes including soil health attributes and climate resilience, as well as climate change potential reduction (*CarbonFarmPlan*, 2022). The plan included maps and plans for carbon sequestration on City Farm’s land, highlighting history, current management practices, and environmental conditions (i.e. climate, topography, hydrology, soil, and land use and ecology).

The Carbon Farm Plan identified numerous management practices that either could be implemented more frequently across the farm or had not yet been adopted when the plan was published in 2022. These are listed, with a table from the plan quantifying practice acre extent and expected Carbon Sequestration (in MT of CO_2 eq per year).

The Carbon Farm Plan further legitimizes City Farm's operation as a regenerative model by stating,

> "City Farm offers additional carbon farming strategies and could be a key element in demonstrating the applicability of these practices to farms throughout the County and region, and could accelerate the adoption of regenerative farming"(*CarbonFarmPlan*, 2022)

The Resource Conservation District's calculations estimate that if compost application was incorporated on all of City Farm's land, 83 $MTCO_2eq$ would be sequestered annually. Although this is unrealistic, as some of the land is not farmed, and not all of it is suitable for this practice (further stressing the point that context relevant planning is crucial in applications of carbon farm planning) it emphasizes the potential for carbon sequestration when regenerative practices like compost application is implemented at scale.

The Non Profit Context

The term nonprofit, like the term regenerative agriculture, is a term that has many meanings to many people. Officially however, US Internal Revenue Code section 501(c)(3) applies to charitable organizations and grants them exemption from federal income tax. It also encourages public support, as contributions to these IRS-recognized nonprofits are generally tax deductible for donors. To qualify as a 501(c)(3) organization, the organization must not be organized or operated for benefit of private interests, and no part of the organization's earnings may be to the benefit of any individual or private shareholder (Internal Revenue Service, 2025a, 2025b). This does not mean that nonprofits cannot earn a profit. They can and should have some revenue above operating costs to put towards accomplishing their goals and can provide employees with reasonable compensation for providing services (National Council of Nonprofits, 2025).

City Farm is a recognized 501(c)(3) nonprofit because of their commitment to their goals, and their use of revenue to advance these goals. While nonprofit farms have been described as nonprofits whose primary activity is the growing of food, nonprofit farms are usually multifaceted organizations, often aimed at accomplishing many goals in their communities. Nonprofit farms are established for agriculture, education, alternative food systems, social welfare, and environment and farmland preservation (from most common to least common respectively) (DuPuis & Christian, 2023). City Farm is involved in all of these through their various operations and programs.

Nonprofit farming is somewhat unique, DuPuis & Christian (2023) identified just 295 nonprofit farms in the US that brought in at least 50,000 USD annually. Nonetheless, these organizations are part of a greater movement in which nonprofit farms aim to provide alternative, local food system infrastructure, by making use of their nonprofit status and alternative modes of governance, ones not simply motivated by profit, but by accomplishment of missions. These nonprofits have come to fruition due to many different causes. One main driver is the disconnect of consumers to farmers. Another is the degradation of the environment and soil. The modern food system is saturated with highly processed foods, awarding mass production food systems that are more focused on manufacturing food products and profit generation as opposed to healthy, natural, and locally beneficial practices. These nonprofits create a space where farmers are enabled to advance local, healthy, and environmentally sustainable food systems. Still, it is necessary that farms like City Farm make a profit. Revenue generation is crucial to their ability to operate and advance their mission of supporting these local, health driven systems in the long term (DuPuis & Christian, 2023; Worosz & DuPuis, 2024).

How the money is made

City Farm makes money in two main ways: The first is operational revenue, like revenue coming from their educational programs, camps, and produce sales. The second is external funding, like grants and donations. The funding for the farm at its conception was made possible by donations, private grants, and public government grants. In 2024, over a decade into their organization’s deal with the City of SLO, 57% of revenue came from grants. Generally, this reliance on grants is

consistent with most nonprofit farms (DuPuis & Christian, 2023). It does create a problem however, especially when there are numerous examples of USDA and other federal grant money being put in jeopardy due to shifting administration priorities.

The shift away from government policy that supports climate smart farming, the recognition of climate change altogether, and the funding of programs that support diversity equity and inclusion (major pillars of City Farm's mission and goals being challenged by the federal government), has created uncertainty in funding streams (Ladd, 2025; Timsit, 2025; Torres, 2025). This uncertainty is exemplified in the cancelling of over 1 billion USD in grants for schools and food banks that supported groups similar to those that City Farm have business relationships with. This is an example of a reduction in indirect financial support from the Federal government. In terms of direct risks, the Farmers Market Promotion Program grant, which helped create the City Farm Collaborative, was paused by the USDA during the Federal auditing of grants. It was later reinstated, but these manifestations of shifting priorities show how federal policy settings threaten City Farm's operation, especially when grants like this have been so crucial to supplementing their revenue (Brooks, 2025). In 2024, individual donations made up 26.3% of revenue, making external funding 83.3% of total revenue. In the 2025 fiscal year, their revenue saw a reduced share of profits from grants (57% in 2024 to 46.4% in 2025) and an increased share from individual donations (26.3% in 2024 to 33.9% in 2025). Given this slight reduction in support from grants, their operation is heavily reliant on the willingness of the community to support their mission.

City Farm also have their Corporate Sponsorship program. They partner with corporations who share values and missions with the organization to receive funding for operations, for example, natural capital firm Nuveen donated $90,000 over three years for the expansion of the Therapeutic Horticulture Program.

In terms of operational revenue, 16.7% of revenue in FY 2024, and 19.7% in FY 2025 came from program income. This includes fees collected for educational programs, field trips, and events. This also includes revenue from produce sales in the form of community supported agriculture (CSA) boxes, sales to adjacent SLO Ranch Farms Marketplace and to local restaurants, and sales via Harvestly.com, an

online farmers market platform where the City Farm Collaborative markets produce. As of mid-2025, City Farm has also operated their pay-what-you-can farmstand, in part sponsored by corporate sponsors Harvestly.com, who donate up to 30$ per person per week for free produce.

What is the money used for

Like most nonprofits, revenue is used to accomplish goals and run the operation. City Farm is enabled by the support from grants and donations to advance programs like their Youth Empowerment, Therapeutic Horticulture Program, and Field Trip offerings. While some of their field trips bring revenue, others are free (or offered at discounted rates) for lower income individuals and schools. Most of these grants have specified purposes, as do the donations like Nuveen's. However, the operation's holistic interconnected approach to production and education allows them to spend some of this grant money to advance production, which is directly used for educational programming.

The organization breaks up their spending in their fiscal report in 3 main categories. These are education programs (44.2%), farming programs (39%), and administration and fundraising (16.8%). In both 2024 and 2025, just over 82% of their expenses were direct program costs. This exemplifies their commitment to their mission but also represents a need for diversification of revenue sources to continue to support these programs in the face of shifting granting agency priorities.

The farming programs' main costs are labor and inputs. In terms of labor, the farm employees two people full time on the 3.5 acres directly farmed by the nonprofit. In terms of inputs, seeds, compost, feed for their sheep and chickens, and other amendments like biochar, gypsum, feather meal, and water are their main farming costs.

The educational programs main costs are ....what are the main costs for the educational programs?

Impact of stewardship vs ownership

Many nonprofit farms, including City Farm are on leased land. While the nonprofit has a 1$ per year agreement with the City, the lack of landownership is still a

limiting factor. Some nonprofit farms have high values because they own the land that they farm on (DuPuis & Christian, 2023). This lack of ownership reduces the total asset value of the farm and limits the freedom of the organization in certain regards. For example, a key part of the Strategic Plan is the provision of affordable land to small farmers. This part of their plan is what allowed them to renew their lease with the City but also means that they can only farm on a small number of the acres (3.5/~21) that they manage, and thus only produce a limited amount of food for sale. Another restriction of stewardship versus ownership is that City Farm must have City approval for development of any structures, on top of normal permitting restrictions. An example of a structure they want but have not yet had approved is a barn facility that would enhance food production, storage, and distribution. City Farm must also comply with all permitting and zoning requirements of the City, adding further regulatory hurdles to increasing food production. The need to comply with these additional requirements adds further hurdles to the expansion of the production side of the operation.

Partnership with other Nonprofits, Community Groups

A key to City Farm's success so far has been the partnership with other nonprofit organizations and local organizations, like Cal Poly San Luis Obispo programs. For example, food banks and local schools purchase food from City Farm with money from grants that they receive. This is related to the types of federal grants that have been canceled but also include local and state level programs that are still in place. These partnerships with schools and food banks represent indirect funding from grants that City Farm has benefited from. Additionally, nonprofit Slow Money SLO have partnered with City Farm partners Harvestly.com to promote sustainable small food and farming businesses, including City Farm themselves, helping get their food into farm to school programs. In terms of support from Cal Poly SLO, the on-farm produce cooler was donated by the Construction Management department at the University, representing the value in these collaborations in assisting the operation.

Another valuable partnership that City Farm have benefited from is the California College Corps program. City Farm are a host site for the program, which provides them with College Corps fellows, who provide assistance and labor at no cost to City Farm, while promoting their goal of engaging the local community, in

this case local college students, in regenerative agriculture. Since regenerative agriculture is a relatively labor-intensive system, this program partnership helps them source labor without paying out of pocket.

The Next 40 years

Since 2012, City Farm has been successful stewards of the Calle Joaquin Agricultural Reserve. To the City, success is tangible in that City Farm have continued to advance the purpose set forth in their lease agreement, to keep the land in sustainable agricultural production, and implement educational programming aimed at teaching the public about sustainable farming (Codron, 2011). To the operation, success is tangible in that they continue to increase revenue and community engagement by creating accessible farm-based learning environments for the public and modeling regenerative agriculture practices, all while promoting food security for local schools and food banks, and the community.

Their funding has been, as expected from conception, mainly supported by grants and donations. However, not all their growth was predicted since 2012. For example, it was not expected that on-farm sales would be implemented, yet in 2025 their pay what you can farmstand began selling produce, and even meat to the local community. This kind of increase in operations shows City Farm to be a dynamic, adaptable nonprofit organization. It was also not expected however, that important granting agencies like the USDA would stop funding programs like Local Farm to School, or removing the words “climate change” from their website. Changes like that challenge the mission and purpose of the nonprofit, for example what would a carbon farm plan be for if climate change in the context of agriculture is removed. The heavy reliance on donors and grants raises questions about financial security for the organization.

City Farm is attempting to mitigate the risk associated with their reliance on grant funding. Promoting direct sales through the Collaborative, event programming that promotes donations, charging fees to schools who can afford it for field trips or educational programming, and the outreach to corporate sponsor partners are a few strategies they have used so far. These attempts at diversification have appeared successful, though they still received just 19.7% of

their income from operational revenue in FY 2025, indicating that their reliance on grants is still high and somewhat limiting financial security.

The organization is set to be stewards of the Calle Joaquin Agricultural Reserve for the next four decades. There is no telling what is imminent in that span, in terms of regulatory, social, environmental, and economic change. It is clear, however, that if City Farm want to continue to promote their mission and continue to steward the prime agricultural land, they will need to identify and consider all viable diversification strategies. Strategies that can bring in revenue with the goal of maximizing their community reach, their sustainable production, and the greater promotion of their mission. Considering their past opportunities and limitations, what forms could diversification take for City Farm? How can City Farm combat the uncertainty of funding caused by a reliance on donations and grants? What strategies can City Farm employ to ensure they meet the requirements of their lease for the next 40 years?

Works Cited:

Appendix 1:

Grant Table

Grant Name	Year	Award Amount (USD)	Granting Agency/Group
AHEAD (Access to Housing and Economic Assistance for Development) Grant	2009-2011?	$$$	Federal Home Loan Bank of San Francisco
Henry Mayo Newhall Foundation Grant	2012	30,000	Henry Mayo Newhall Foundation
USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant	2013	255,237	CDFA via USDA
Access for All Grant	2022	5,000	Community Foundation of SLO County
Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP); USDA Grant, Scaling and Expanding San Luis Obispo County Farmer Collaborative Partnerships	2022	249,919.95 (with a 62,500 match from CFS)	USDA Agricultural Marketing Service via LAMP
SLO County Community Based Org and Preventative Health Grant	2022	5,000	SLO County
Sprouts Healthy Communities Foundation Grant	2022	5-10,000	Sprouts Healthy Community Foundation
Cultural Arts & Community Promotions (CACP) Grant Program of the City of SLO	2023	4,000-5,000	City of SLO
Rotary Club Youth Initiatives Grant	2024	5,000	Rotary Club San Luis de Tolosa
SLFRF (State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds	2024	155,000	SLO County via US Treasury Dpt. Funding (ARPA)
	2025	53,920	Ag West Farm Credit

Appendix 2:

Map of City Farm, with table of Practices. Costs of practices included and acreage of individual practices if available

Appendix 3:

Carbon Farm Plan Table (from RCDs Document)

Appendix 4:

City Farm Programs List; including Educational Programs

Program Name	Program Type	Year Began
Therapeutic Horticulture Program (SLCUSD Special Education)	Educational	2013
Pacific Beach High School "Farm" Class	Educational	2013
Youth Empowerment Program (YEP)	Educational	2021
Field Trips (K–5th Grade)	Educational	2018
College Corps Host Site	Educational	2021
Pay-What-You-Can Farm Stand	Community/Public Offering	2025
Cut Flower CSA Box – Dahlia Bouquets	Community/Public Offering	
Community Farm Tours (Private & Public)	Community/Public Offering	
Birthday Parties at the Farm	Community/Public Offering	
Private Events & Space Rentals	Community/Public Offering	
Saturday Volunteer Days	Community/Public Offering	
Harvest Volunteer Shifts	Community/Public Offering	2021
Sheep Shearing Shindig	Fundraiser	2022
The Farm Games Hoedown	Fundraiser	2025
Winter Crafting and Skills Series	Community/Public Offering	2024
Sheepskin Hide Tanning Workshop	Community/Public Offering	2025

Appendix 5:

Table/List/Diagram of partner organizations/businesses to illustrate community support

Include Slow Money SLO, Harvestly, School Districts, Local businesses, college corps, cal poly students, cal poly compost or organic farm, Nuveen other businesses etc.