

Capay Valley Vision

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Production Agriculture in the Capay Valley Region

By Ann Scheuring

In many ways the Capay Valley-Esparto Region is a microcosm of greater Yolo County, with a variety of soils and conditions supporting a diversified agriculture, from upland ranges to creekside terraces and flat plains. Livestock, field and row crops, and orchard and vineyard crops are all produced successfully, reflecting local opportunities and broader market conditions.

In the Capay Valley itself the physical scale of farming tends to be generally smaller than in the Sacramento Valley at large, and local agriculture is differentiated within a relatively compact area. One of the distinctive features of the valley's farming activity, in fact, is its heterogeneity and mix of types within short distances. While conventional growers from other parts of Yolo County continue to lease land in the Capay Valley, many relatively small-scale farming operations are centered here. Field and row crops, orchards, vineyards, livestock, and nursery plants are all commercially produced in the area.

Major Crops in the Capay Valley

In recent years, **organic agricultural production** in and around the Capay Valley has made great strides. Twenty-four local organic growers are registered with the Yolo County Agricultural Commissioner's office. Reported revenues from the approximately 700 intensively farmed acres of organic production in the Capay Valley alone have soared from approximately \$976,228 in 1995 to approximately \$3,179,232 in 2001.

Reasons for this trend include a growing public interest in organic foods of all kinds; relative lack of common agricultural pests associated with the monoculture of very large fields; favorable opportunities to purchase and lease land for small-scale producers; and convenience to markets in and around Sacramento and the Bay Area. Several successful local organic producers have ongoing relationships with upscale restaurants and large Farmers' Markets in the Bay Area, besides operating custom weekly produce delivery services for individual and group subscribers.

Recent consumer trends suggest that alternative farming systems such as organic farming will comprise at least 20 percent and as much as 60 percent of all California cropland in 2025, up from only about 2 percent in 2000. Experienced organic growers in the Capay Valley region should be in a good position to take advantage of these trends.

California's expanding wine industry has also reached into the Capay Valley. Several small vineyards have recently been planted, and a young local winery is expanding production. A few miles north of Esparto, in the Hungry Hollow area, lie the vineyards of one of the largest wineries in the state, RH Phillips.

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Increasing traffic along State Highway 16, the only arterial into the Capay Valley, poses some threat to current agricultural activities—for example, the movement of farm machinery—yet significant opportunities exist for expanding and diversifying ag-related economic activities. Some land in the region is currently under-utilized, and the available labor pool could serve new ventures. Efforts are underway to assess the potential for value-added farm products utilizing year-round area production. Growers have established the Capay Valley as an appellation area for both wine grapes and produce, to recognize the area's uniqueness as an agricultural ecosystem and production source.

Excerpted from the Capay Valley Atlas published by Capay Valley Vision (CVV). To order a copy send a check for \$15 to CVV, PO Box 799, Esparto CA 95637 or call (530) 796-4160.

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