



2020 Annual Report



**Building models for
resilient, thriving,
and inclusive
rural economies.**

Our Mission

We're working to strengthen our rural communities by supporting entrepreneurs and building our regional creative and economic resources.

**Progress is
our tradition.**

Our Team

A NOTE FROM OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

First, thank you! It goes without saying that 2020 has been an incredibly hard year for so many people around the world. Our entire team is grateful for your support this year. It's been a difficult year for our community in the Cuyama Valley, our nonprofit, and families we serve. This year definitely built up our resilience and challenged our team to creatively address new needs! We have come out stronger as a team and community but will continue to address many ongoing needs next year.

As a board of directors we are proud of our response to COVID-19, building two community relief funds to provide support to the most in need in the Cuyama Valley. We're proud of our small but mighty team that is agile, passionate, and dedicated to supporting our rural economy. We're also so excited about new projects and campaigns launching in 2021! You'll read more about our projects in upcoming communications. Your ongoing generosity and support for our vision behind the Blue Sky Center is greatly appreciated. Together, we can build models for resilient, thriving, and inclusive rural economies in the Cuyama Valley!

David Kietzman, President of the Board

Cecilia Lopez, Treasurer

Staff



EM JOHNSON,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

*May I be the tiniest nail in
the house of the universe,
tiny but useful.*
- Mary Oliver

Through measured and deliberate work, Em has been leading rural innovation through social enterprises and systems thinking with Blue Sky Center since 2016. She is motivated by holistic community investment that uses celebratory tools of art and creative community engagement, often bringing people together over food. In the Cuyama Valley, Em connects people to resources, developing a self-sufficient model by blending entrepreneurial initiatives to reclaim the power of rural resiliency.



JACK FORINASH,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

*Anything essential is invisible
to the eyes.*
- Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Jack first joined Blue Sky Center in 2017 as a consultant, providing and developing policies and systems for an expanding organization. Now in his fourth year as a Cuyama resident - and now in the role as co-executive director - Jack continues to refine systems and define methods we use as a community to communicate opportunities for our attention. With a background in architecture and twelve years of rural development experience, Jack advocates for rural communities as historic centers of progressive community ideals embedded in acts of durational civil discourse.



Sam Ihrig, Production Manager

Red, blue, green



Melanie Shaw, Hospitality Manager

Planner, nurturer, adventurer



Alicia Muniz, Community Coordinator

Optimist, supporter, mother



Corbin LaMont, Creative Director

Pepper jam, amarillo, wildflower



Sandra Uribe, Land Steward

Emprendedora, compromiso, reunión



Paul Schreiber, Food Systems Designer

Newcomer, observer, homosexual

Contractors and Consultants

Ami Keiffer, [Rural Community Assistance Corporation](#),
Made in Cuyama Consultant

Carolina Solorio, Housekeeper

Chris Cohen, [Sustainable Law Group](#), LLP, Lawyer

Clarence De Ramos, CPA, Accountant

Dennis Smith, Groundskeeper

Erika Holzhauer, [Rural Community Assistance Corporation](#),
Action Plan and Housing Consultant

Jensen Lorenzen, Blue Sky Ventures Consultant

Joal Stein, Action Plan Consultant

Julie Solorio, Housekeeper

Quail Springs, Cuyama Events Report Partner

Rob Wiener, [California Coalition for Rural Housing](#), Action Plan Consultant

Artists and Designers

Alex Guerrero, [Warrior Wagons](#), Woodworker

Alicia Toldi, Artist Residency Advisor

Carmen Sandoval, Cultural Educator

Garrett Gerstenberger, Cuyama Beverage Company Brand Designer

Ismael Garcia Moreno, Welder/Fabricator

Julia Warner, Action Plan Graphic Designer

Kelly Gregory, Visitor Trainer

Kiana Toossi, Cuyama Hotline Web Developer

Mary Welcome, Community Coordination Advisor

Michelle Glass, Desert Fellow

Noé Montes, Artist-in-Residence

Alumni

Dr. Paul Chounet, Board Member (Former Superintendent of the Cuyama Joint Unified School District)

Fabiola Granados Espinosa, Board Member (Cuyama Resident and Latinx Advocate)

Ami Pascual Spear, Board Member (Regional Director of Philanthropy for Mercy Housing California)

Pilar Diaz, Board Member (Commissioner for the City of Los Angeles Board of Recreation and Parks)

Tom Gottelier, Board Member (Creative Director / Co-founder of Designers On Holiday)

Bo Mitchell, Groundskeeper (July 2019–April 2020)

Abigail Gallup, Rural Community Designer, AmeriCorps VISTA (July 2019–July 2020)

Aeysha Kinnunen, Rural Community Designer, AmeriCorps VISTA (July 2019–July 2020)

Luke Viscusi, Rural Community Designer, AmeriCorps VISTA (July 2019–July 2020)

Maria Carpenter, Development Coordinator, AmeriCorps VISTA (July 2019–July 2020) and Outreach Specialist (October–December 2020)

From The Directors

Each year, Pantone – a company of color expertise – selects a “color of the year”; 2020’s was “Classic Blue,” as the company described it, “a color that anticipates what is going to happen next.” Blue anticipates optimism and clarity, while equally somberness and reflection. “Blue skies” are a good fortune, and also a boundless amount of opportunity that can sometimes stymie. In this sense, 2020 was accurately predicted to be classically blue. This year challenged and humbled us, but in a way that has made us better.

The 2020 [Cuyama Valley Community Action Plan](#) released in February culminated a couple years of steady work, employing Cuyamans to self-define our community’s opportunities. Seven priorities established both where resources were needed and where enthusiasm existed to work together: town beautification and wayfinding, food access, economic opportunity and jobs, school system support, water infrastructure improvement, rural broadband access, and housing quality. These areas of interest align with our mission for Blue Sky Center, validating our work – while also invigorating and challenging us. The community-wide survey completed at the end of 2019 created a data set that fills in the gaps and raises Cuyama’s voice. The data was missing but only because no one asked; all along, our neighbors were experts of their own experience, and by simply asking, they were willing to provide their own truths.

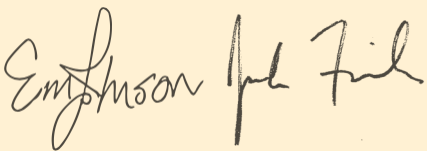
We do more with less and with less waste. There’s not a guaranteed audience for any event, special interest club, or restaurant. Feedback loops are quick, and unabashed. We must care and celebrate first, then be afforded an opportunity to critique. Getting things done – tangible things with a felt, personal impact – sets our stake in the game and willingness to be in service. When the pandemic came to us in mid-March, our offices closed, but from home we quickly transitioned and got to work. A flurry of phone calls to try to understand these abrupt and scary changes turned that first week into a community-wide coordination call, involving all of Cuyama’s organizations, the schools, and many businesses. A printed bulletin and a hotline website that same week. Cuyama did not wait; we led. Instinctually, we set out to identify neighbors’ needs, collect funds to feed schoolchildren, increase food bank deliveries, provide creative activities to do from home, and release funds for household expenses, each Wednesday circling back to check in and assign new tasks.

Even back in 2019, the survey results determined that “healthcare access” was the number one health issue in the Cuyama Valley; simply access. Internet access was already identified by Cuyamans as woefully inadequate, with 35% of Cuyaman households depending on cell phone data for internet and another 23% with no access at all. Economic opportunities were in need before; inequities due to race and gender existed before, and persist. Our schools had declining enrollment before this. We grow a lot of produce, raise a lot of cattle, and generate a significant amount of solar energy, yet we’re a food desert and we’re susceptible to “safety” power shut-offs. Water was over-drafted; the housing stock is aging. There is some comfort in knowing that Cuyama’s community issues are not a “new normal”; they were and are: past and ever-present. There is a lot of comfort in knowing that Cuyamans acknowledge these issues, and – as we always have and know no other way – want to work together, deliberately and intentionally, to make progress. A lack of bureaucracy, a small population of 1,100 neighbors, and the distance (physically and culturally) from local government have freed us. We are well-suited and appropriately callused to be just stubborn enough to persist, to see the optimism in the blue breaking through the clouds.

Common to rural communities, we are resourceful and innovative. Our networks of trust built through inclusion, transparency, and duration are primed to celebrate Cuyama’s abundance and opportunity. We have adapted our artist residencies, invested in food security at individual homes, safely hosted visitors, and we are launching the [Cuyama Beverage Company](#) as a manifestation of our ethos. We have looked out for each other, and much credit is due to our neighbors, partners, and funders that continued to stand up and be nimble in their support.

We invite you to read more about our work in this annual report that follows, to reach out to us with opportunities for collaboration and sharing of resources, and to visit Cuyama.

Together with you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Em Johnson and Jack Forinash". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

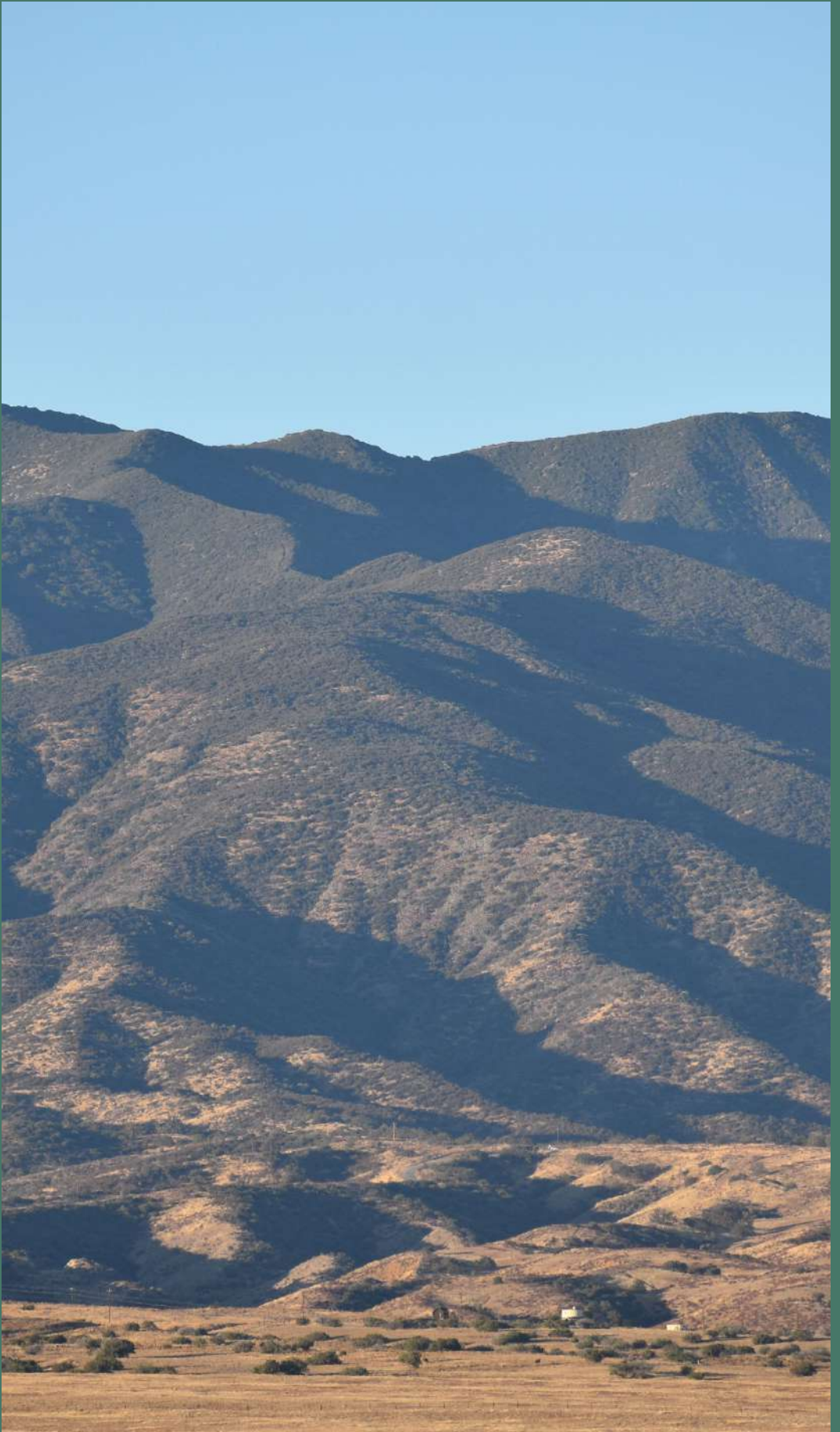
Em Johnson and Jack Forinash
Executive Directors



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Cuyama Valley Community Action Plan

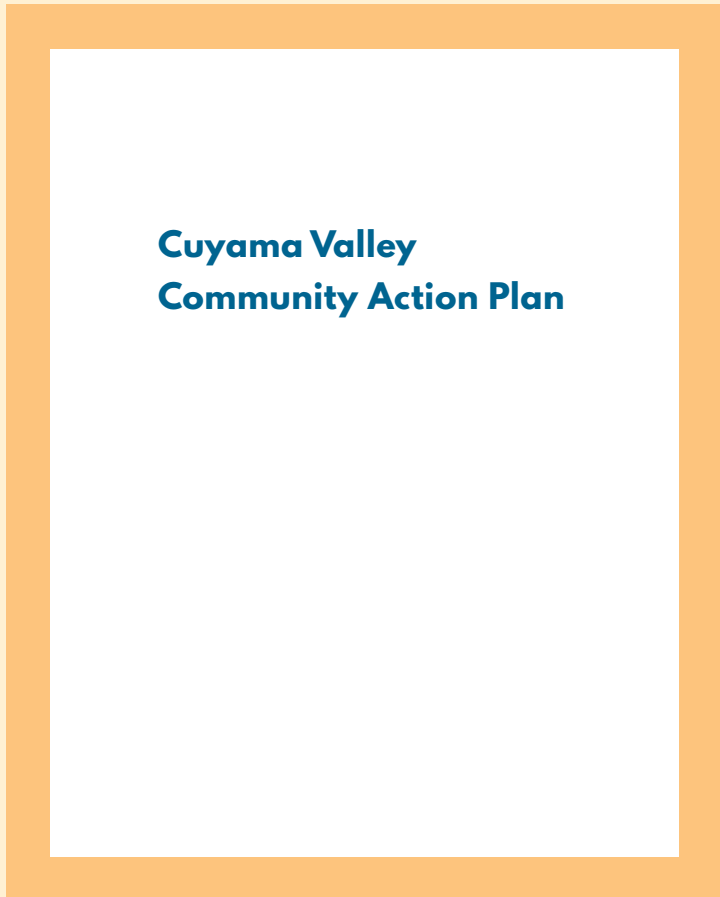


Cuyama Valley Community Action Plan

Years of community-based research and engagement have resulted in a prioritized action plan for the Cuyama Valley.

Rural development work is inherently holistic. Our work - although targeted and strategic - is, in a sense, generalist in nature. We concurrently factor in opportunities to support housing affordability and availability, local job and educational opportunities, connecting Cuyama's food producers to Cuyama consumers, and community beautification efforts; simultaneously our local infrastructure systems - water and internet availability - are preeminent aspects affecting what's possible.

This year we completed a yearslong research project that became the [2020 Cuyama Valley Community Action Plan](#). Funded by a federal HUD Section 4 grant from [Enterprise Community Partners'](#) Culture and Creativity Initiative, the development of this Action Plan was achieved through an extensive 18-month public process including:



Released in February 2020, this comprehensive plan acknowledges our shared community issues and provides intentional steps toward resilient progress. View the full plan at blueskycenter.org/action-plan.



engagement with 73 Cuyamans through a series of in-person community meetings

implementation of a community-wide 63-question survey that received 143 responses (42% of Cuyaman households)

hosting multiple social gatherings over meals

soliciting expert input from 29 stakeholder and resource-holder organizations

presentation of drafts at five community meetings and events

utilizing photographer Noé Montes to document personal histories through conversations and workshops

and leading a standing room-only panel discussion at the annual Housing California conference on preconception and data biases affecting rural California.

Community Development Opportunities

This Community Action Plan's process - in both its development and its action steps going forward - has the goals of identifying shared community values and desires along with opportunities for investment and communicating those to elected officials and resource-holders. The Action Plan outlines clear next steps for implementing actions that improve the vitality and economic opportunity of the Cuyama Valley. These seven community development opportunities are:

- A. Townsites beautification and wayfinding
- B. Food action network
- C. Economic opportunity development and job creation
- D. School system support
- E. Water/sewer infrastructure improvement
- F. Rural broadband
- G. Housing stock improvement through repairs and renovations



Over the past year and moving with intention forward, Blue Sky has helped facilitate local working groups of community champions addressing each of these development priorities. The Cuyama Buckhorn inn and restaurant along with local champions Pam Baczuk and Meg Brown have been a crucial partner for townsites beautification and wayfinding, with a significant accomplishment of researching and releasing a [town directory of businesses and resources](#) and are now working on an artistic Valley map to showcase local businesses and ranches. With support from our partners at the Santa Barbara County Food Action Network, we have continued to work with local farmers and ranchers - including Robbie and Steve at Condor's Hope winery and olive oil, Jean Guillard and Meg Brown at Cuyama Homegrown farm-fresh produce, Alisha Taff at Rock Front Ranch honey and jujubes, and again with the Cuyama Buckhorn - to connect local producers directly to consumers and celebrate the abundance of the Cuyama Valley. With the support of Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC) and a three-year Rural Capacity Building Grant from HUD, our "[Made in Cuyama](#)" team has been working with local entrepreneurs and businesses through the "Start, Grow, Revive Your Business" curriculum. We continue to support the school system through advocacy and direct fundraising, setting up and collecting \$20,394 to support the school breakfast and lunch program

- and other school new safety and distanced learning needs - during the pandemic. With long term timelines in mind, we continue to be learning about and contributing to the body of research and resource solicitation for the improvement of quality and access to drinking and irrigation water along with research and coalition building to support projects that seek to bring broadband internet to the Cuyama Valley. With RCAC and a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor, we have been specifically looking to understand the housing needs of Cuyaman farmworkers, collecting new data and developing partnerships with regional housing organizations to bring housing repair and rehabilitation resources to Cuyama in the coming year.

Any community development plan runs the risk of sitting on the shelf; all plans can quickly become obsolete if not acted upon. For this Cuyama Valley Community Action Plan, we are taking the long view of determined and incremental steps, based on verified community-based data as reported up - from Cuyamans themselves. It will take time and diligence - and sometimes patience to wait for the right pieces to come together - but we are steadfast in supporting the community-identified priorities for improving the quality of life and economic opportunity in the Cuyama Valley for all.

Made In Cuyama

In 2020 our “Made in Cuyama” initiative provided one-on-one technical assistance to local small businesses and continued supporting the development of a comprehensive food action network for the Cuyama Valley.



Start, Grow, Revive Your Business

In partnership with [Rural Community Assistance Corporation](#) (RCAC), Blue Sky Center hosted the final “Start, Grow, Revive Your Business” workshop and graduation ceremony in February. With the goal of strengthening and creating new revenue streams for Cuyamans, the workshop series offered direct technical assistance for existing and aspiring business owners. We had nine local entrepreneurs graduate from the program taking with them invaluable knowledge and tools to help them develop their business from inception to maturity. Some of the participating businesses included woodworkers, farmers, photographers, and bookkeeping professionals, all from here in our very own Cuyama community! As we know, entrepreneurship is not for the faint of heart. Nevertheless, creating wealth for our families and progress in our community, is a shared value and responsibility of our Cuyama business leaders. Below are some experiences shared by entrepreneurs we served in 2020:

“The SGR Workshop Series first helped me solidify my business idea, then gave me the confidence and support to follow through and make it a reality.” - RACHEL, CUYAMA COUNTS

“2020 was a very challenging year, nevertheless thanks to Blue Sky Center and their organized workshops Cuyama Homegrown was able to continue growing and achieved goals set during the past [Start, Grow, Revive] workshops, which was a very positive surprise. We definitely have a lot of improvements to achieve during 2021 and are very confident that despite the COVID-19 pandemic the Blue Sky programs will remain successful and continue strengthening the Cuyama Valley community.”

- JEAN, CUYAMA HOMEGROWN

Although our goal of hosting the fall series of “Start, Grow, Revive Your Business” in Spanish had to be postponed due to the pandemic, our team is working hard to creatively adapt our curriculum to uplift family-centric learning and spur local wealth generation in 2021.

Building local wealth relies on building capacity of local networks. In September we safely gathered our Cuyama Valley agricultural leaders who have not slowed down but instead persevered. Coming together to break bread and rediscovering the beautiful products being grown carefully and intentionally in our Valley brought light to the incredible opportunity we have to promote and invest in one another. Through our partnership with [Santa Barbara County Food Action Network](#), our Made in Cuyama team facilitated the creation of beautiful videos telling the story of our Cuyama food system leaders and promoting the products and services unique to the Cuyama Valley.



Land Stewardship



With the onset of COVID-19 came the urgency to address the issues and opportunities arising from the pandemic's effects on our community. With counsel from the lead School Garden Coordinator at Cuyama Joint Unified School District, Nicole Furstenfeld, the development of the Victory Gardens project came to life in conversation with Blue Sky Center staff and prospective project participants.

With financial support from the Fund for Santa Barbara, the Victory Gardens project utilizes a garden-to-table model to empower families to find food security within their own backyards. With educational and material support, nine families have been growing food in raised bed gardens that both complement and expand their family's palate.

Blue Sky Center's approach to promoting holistic human flourishing in our community is to continue fortifying what exists within the Valley by identifying local champions and developing resources that establish resiliency. The establishment of a gardening "network" model has functioned as an invitation to participants to step into volunteer

and leadership roles in the Valley. At the outset of this project, Sandra Uribe was acting as an essential part of the Blue Sky Center staff in a housekeeping and groundskeeping role. It became increasingly evident that Sandra is the most in her element when tending to the outdoor portions of our facilities and she quickly took on the role of primary community coordinator for the Victory Gardens project. From the beginning of this project Sandra has proven her extraordinary skill and management competency time and time again, and she has since been promoted to a new position at Blue Sky Center with the title of Land Steward.

As Sandra often reminds us, "Las personas son como las plantas." ("People are like plants.") With this in mind we have worked to develop a garden program that does not overemphasize the transmission of facts but that instead invests in a social network where knowledge is shared in a manner that flows out of the culture of the Valley itself. Through the reflection and personalized support that takes place during home visits, Victory Gardens are providing participants with ample opportunities

to learn from their own observations and to nurture excitement about their garden as they grow both a vital skill set and a connection to place.

To continue momentum gained from the Victory Gardens project, Sandra thoughtfully crafted plans for Project Cempasúchil (pronounced sem-pa-soo-cheel). This effort reinvigorated a small plot of land located on Blue Sky Center's campus: the former site of a community garden. Throughout the summer and fall seasons, Sandra cultivated marigolds and pumpkins, produce which holds deep cultural significance for many Latinx Cuyama Valley residents and that has decorative, culinary, and medicinal uses. The pumpkins and marigolds were used as culturally relevant decorations for Blue Sky Center's fifth-annual Día de los Muertos event. Project Cempasúchil is inherently celebratory, affirming through continuity the importance of tradition while also infusing a sense of newness into a gathering that brings together the diverse groups that call the Cuyama Valley home.

With the pumpkins and marigolds harvested, Sandra continued to use the available land as a demonstration site for the planting, care, and maintenance of garlic, a crop that grows in the winter and will be ready to harvest around June of next year. To ensure that Cuyamans can benefit from year-round regional assets, Sandra organized a workshop for six of the Victory Gardens families to demonstrate how to identify garlic bulbs that are the best seeds, prepare the soil for them, and plant them. After a hands-on demonstration of best practices, she provided each participant with a set of tools and seed to be used at home. With the seeds sown, we now can wait and tend to our gardens that will provide us with a culinary staple come June. Although the COVID-19 pandemic is still presenting hurdles for community gathering and impacting the ways in which we can see each other, our small and brief moments together can still be sources of shared joy and learning.

Photo by J. Andrew Hill



Cuyama Beverage Company

Our Sage Honey Session Mead is both a celebration of the abundance of the Cuyama Valley and a new earned income venture for our nonprofit organization: a strategy for rural economic development that we hope can become an example of rural resilience and innovation.



Cuyama Beverage Company

After two years of trial and error, our newest earned revenue venture and social enterprise, [Cuyama Beverage Company](#), is on the precipice of its first release: Sage Honey Session Mead. In the midst of an economic recession, we solidified our ambitions to showcase solutions that enable our community members not just to survive but thrive throughout insurmountable challenges. This venture will create jobs within our community as well as create new revenue streams for our local farmers, enabling a future for our Blue Sky facility that is prosperous from the ground up.

With the help of Jensen Lorenzen, our Food Ventures Consultant, we are eager to start brewing and serving our very first Sage Honey Session Mead in early 2021. We have invested time in research and development, establishing and growing partnerships with producers, and soliciting and receiving approvals from relevant agencies. We are eager to get this delicious effervescent product into the hands of customers. For now the Cuyama Beverage Company is wholly owned and invested in by Blue Sky Center. With your help, we hope this venture takes root, injecting new revenue into our Cuyama farms and equitably employing local residents.

With a mission to craft beverages that support rural resilience in the Cuyama Valley and embody the spirit of our region, Cuyama Beverage Company is excited to partner with local farmers and makers in the creation of unique, small-batch beverages.

With each varietal we develop, we strive to support multiple facets of our food system using “triple bottom line” metrics. With each bottle sold, we are supporting the livelihoods of those in our community through fair and equitable wages, developing a foundation for a worker-owned cooperative enterprise. Through an ecological lens, we choose to work with farmers who practice sustainable and regenerative farming and who are treating the Earth in a just way. In the end we are working to carve out a space for everyone within this food system to be genuinely valued and supported.

Visit cuyamabeverage.com and sign up on our mailing list to receive information on our upcoming beverage club, new partnerships, retail locations, and releases. With your support, our success bolsters the success of our local community and food system.

Cuyama
BEVERAGE CO



Creative Community Engagement

At our core, we are a team of creative professionals that hire artists to fill roles as rural economic developers, a strategy that supports our efforts of inclusivity and resiliency.



Artist Residencies

Our June 2020 Desert Fellow [Michelle Glass](#) brought vibrant color to our bus stop shelter and an opportunity for healing to our valley. During her residency, Michelle refurbished an old newsstand into a “nicho,” or “niche” in English, which is best described as a folk art diorama made from found objects. She hosted a community workshop to design “milagros” (or “miracles”) to hang within it. These charms represent the particular needs of the petitioner, chosen for their face value as well as their traditional symbolism. For example, a leg charm could be placed as a wish for the healing of a broken leg; charms representing eyes might be used to petition for vision, insight, intuition, or vigilance. Michelle converged on this concept by speaking - by phone and at length - with community members who expressed desire to process the events of the year. In the midst of a pandemic is exactly the time that we can and need to

rely on creative professionals to help process loneliness, fear, and - equally important - dreams for the future.

We also launched our [Outpost Studio Program](#) this year. Rather than a residency, this program serves as a retreat for artists in search of space and time to develop creative practices. Outposters can make use of our abundant indoor and outdoor facilities, drawing inspiration from Cuyama and enhancing its creative culture in turn. We hosted our pilot outposters, [Zoe Hertz](#) and [Sally Lavengood](#), in December. During their time in Cuyama, they collaborated to create a wood and leather chair. Not only did they exercise their own personal creative skills, but they also worked on projects helping to build the capacity of the organization using their unique skills.



Photo of Artist-in-Residence Michelle Glass

California Arts Council Grants

Our arts programming this year was largely made possible by grants from the [California Arts Council](#). Through the Artists in Communities grant, our creative collaborator [Noé Montes](#) hosted two (out of five total to come) free photography workshops for Cuyama residents. The event series kicked off in August with portraits of the Valley's residents on the lawn of Community United Methodist Church. Data was gathered from participants about what they would like to see in an upcoming issue of a community newspaper. Topics from water, healthcare, housing, and water, to reporting the price of bitcoin came up! A second socially distanced workshop was distributed during November's Día de los Muertos celebration; attendees took home instructions for conducting their own family photography workshops. We look forward to supporting three events in 2021 that

will similarly emphasize place-based identity and participatory photography.

We have also begun work on our other grant from the California Arts Council, an Organizational Development grant. This project allows us to hire Corbin LaMont of the [Office of Virtue](#) to transform the data collected from the 2019 Cuyama Valley Community Survey into beautiful, accessible, and comprehensive infographics. Assets created through this arts focused consulting service will be distributed to community members and stakeholders through BSC's website, social media platforms, and printed reports. This project builds Blue Sky Center's capacity both in communicating more effectively the survey results and by providing templates for infographics for us to create ourselves for future projects.

Día de los Muertos

This year we hosted New Cuyama's Fifth-Annual Día de los Muertos celebration. Though different than years past, a bit of creativity allowed for a day of community celebration in support of the Catholic Church confirmation class. Throughout the event, volunteers used the Cuyama Kitchen to prepare to-go containers filled with beef birria, Mexican rice and beans, and handmade tortillas. As families arrived to pick up food, they viewed ofrendas from the confirmation

class, which featured favorite foods and beverages, photos, and other commemorative objects of departed loved ones. Attendees also went home with an instructional package for a socially distanced photography workshop, courtesy of [Noé Montes](#). Across the lawn, pumpkins and marigolds grown by our Land Steward Sandra Uribe were used as celebratory decorations. Overall, it was a beautiful event for an attendance of 119 community members.

Photos by Noé Montes

Page Right: Garrett Gerstenberger of [High Desert Print Co.](#) provides silkscreening tutorials and take-home bandanas designed for the Día de los Muertos celebration.





COVID Community Coordination

Without waiting for direction or resources from beyond the Cuyama Valley, our community has been a model of working together to identify needs and support our neighbors during this pandemic.



Community Resilience in Facing the Pandemic

In mid-March California shut down. But in Cuyama the shut down put our community into action. We immediately began utilizing old-fashioned phone trees to share information and determine what needs to be done now. Working from home - coupled with school from home and significant cut in hours for wage earners - quickly burdened Cuyamans. In the first week of the “safer at home” order, we hosted a conference call with the Cuyama Buckhorn, the school district administration, the family resource center, and many concerned Cuyamans. A printed bilingual bulletin with weekly updates started then too, with a new issue every week (in mid-July we adjusted to meet by phone and release a bulletin every other week). A [“hotline” website](#) provided those updates, along with direct links to trusted health news sources and other links for housing resources, resources for undocumented communities, social services and relief funds, links for business owners, and more.

A relief fund was set up to raise money to provide breakfasts for school-age children (which had been cut when the schools closed for in-person teaching), along with two meals per day for spring and summer breaks. A total of \$20,394 came in - most from outside the Cuyama Valley - providing direct support to the local school district. We worked with the Red Cross to provide transportation for food bank contributions, permitting an increase from two deliveries per month to four. With the support of [Rural Community Assistance Corporation](#), Blue Sky applied for and received a Paycheck Protection Program loan, while also helping two Cuyama small businesses do the same. Lastly, through the adept decision making of our board of directions, we were able to lend \$7,490 in no-interest, delayed-repayment loans directly to individuals in our community to help cover essential household costs like groceries, rent, and utility bill payments.



Explore Cuyama

With new safety protocols and adjustments to scheduling, we have continued to provide our outdoor campground for those looking for a break in the wide-open space of Cuyama.



Explore Cuyama

With the silver lining of time afforded by shutdowns in 2020, we have worked to develop better communication documents for those looking to Explore Cuyama and stay at our campground. Our new [Visit Cuyama](#) page on our website provides facility rental guides based on your interest. We have also been improving our facilities on our campus, working hard to make a space that is perfect for your next getaway including planting more trees, adding new dispersed camping amenities, and soon adding additional lodging options. When safe to do so and on weekends only, we hosted 443 out-of-towners in our facilities and an additional 53 retreat visitors in 2020.

Through unique architecture and artist residencies, our facilities have been designed to provide a memorable space, making them ideal for your next special event, from weddings to retreats and everything in between! Over the years, we have had the pleasure to host a number of corporate and private retreats here at Blue Sky Center. Before the March “stay at home” order, we hosted Get Out Stay Out for a staff retreat and Enterprise Community Partners for a grantee convening, bringing people from across the county to Cuyama

for their first ever visit. We were honored to be able to partner with our neighbors here in the Cuyama Valley to highlight some of the hidden gems this valley has to offer, including catered meals by Cuyama residents, wine tasting, hiking excursions, stargazing, yoga, and horseback riding. We have been able to not only ensure that our guests have a memorable experience but provide companies, families, and friends a unique way to bond out in nature while helping Cuyama small businesses at the same time.

As an earned revenue venture, our Visit Cuyama initiative provides critical support for our organization. This income provides unrestricted revenue to cover organizational costs not typically covered by grants while also directly employing three local residents who provide property and landscape maintenance, housekeeping services, and hospitality coordination. We look forward to later in 2021 when it’s safe to have gatherings and we can once again be your host for retreats, weddings, and celebrations. We will continue to maintain flexible terms in response to the pandemic. Visit [our website](#) to see our new facility rental guides and contact us to book your stay!



2020 Financials

As with many businesses - nonprofits and for-profits alike - 2020 saw a decrease in money coming in, with us dedicating reserve funds from prior years to continue investing in our staff, our community, and our research and development of more sustainable earned revenue ventures to better support our organization beyond recessions and grant restructuring.



2020 Income

The 267 acres, 23,949 square feet across seven buildings, six huts, mobile commercial kitchen, and 4,000' airstrip we have been entrusted with require significant annual costs of maintenance, permits, insurance, and other "soft costs" that are difficult to fund through grants. And with a nationwide recession and subsequent decrease in governmental and philanthropic spending, we are emboldened in our pursuit in the development of mission-aligned earned income ventures: rental of our spaces to creative businesses

and artists; our hospitality initiative hosting overnight guests, retreats, and weddings; and our newest venture the Cuyama Beverage Company that creates a value-added Cuyama-centric product and future local jobs. Our next year is critical to ensuring sustainable funding for this important work.

We are honored by the support we receive from our partners who are investing in our community-based initiatives. We love sharing our story - including the nitty gritty - and welcome you to invest in Cuyama.

Private Grants \$41,844

Public Grants \$62,565

Donations \$4,738

COVID Relief Fund Donations \$20,394

In-kind Contributions \$15,917

Interest Income \$631

Land Lease Income \$5,000

Other Income \$3,454

Program Income \$78,272

Sale of Excess Assets \$2,150

Total Income \$234,965

Costs of Services Provided \$10,142

2020 Expenses

Personnel

Salaries & Wages	\$178,490
Fringe Benefits	\$18,742
Payroll Expenses & Fees	\$17,501
Consulting & Professional Services	\$21,187
Artists Honoraria & Stipends	\$3,058
Housekeeping	\$18,759

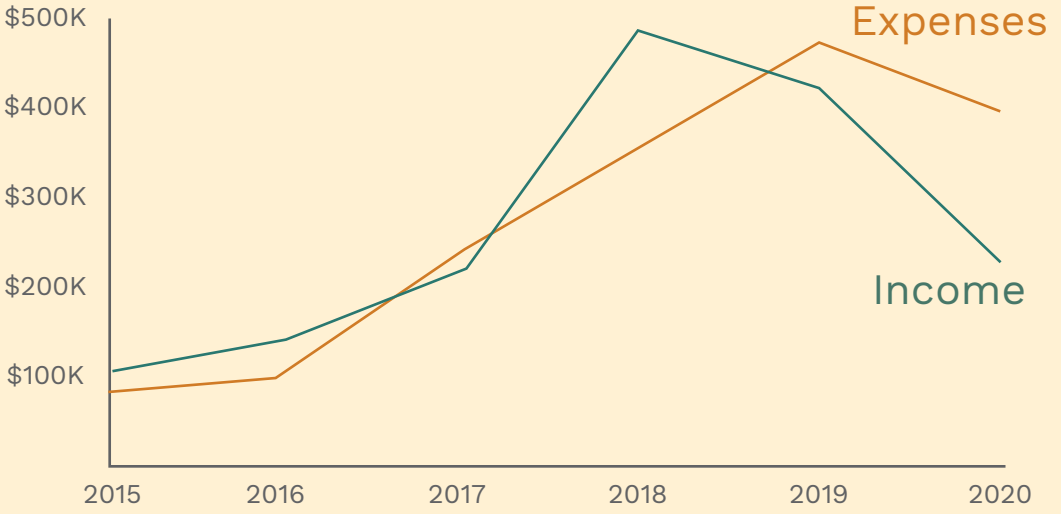
Non-personnel

Accounting, Bank Fees, and Legal	\$5,190
Booking Fees	\$2,210
COVID Relief Fund Payouts & Fees	\$20,394
Facilities, Equipment, & Construction	\$52,662
Fundraising Expenses	\$1,760
Insurance	\$20,587
Licenses & Permits	\$2,558
Operations Expenses	\$5,665
Property Tax	\$9,809
Supplies	\$12,247
Travel & Meetings	\$10,026
Utilities	\$18,278

Total Expenses **\$419,121**

Net -\$194,299

Historical Income & Expenses



Balance Sheet

Assets

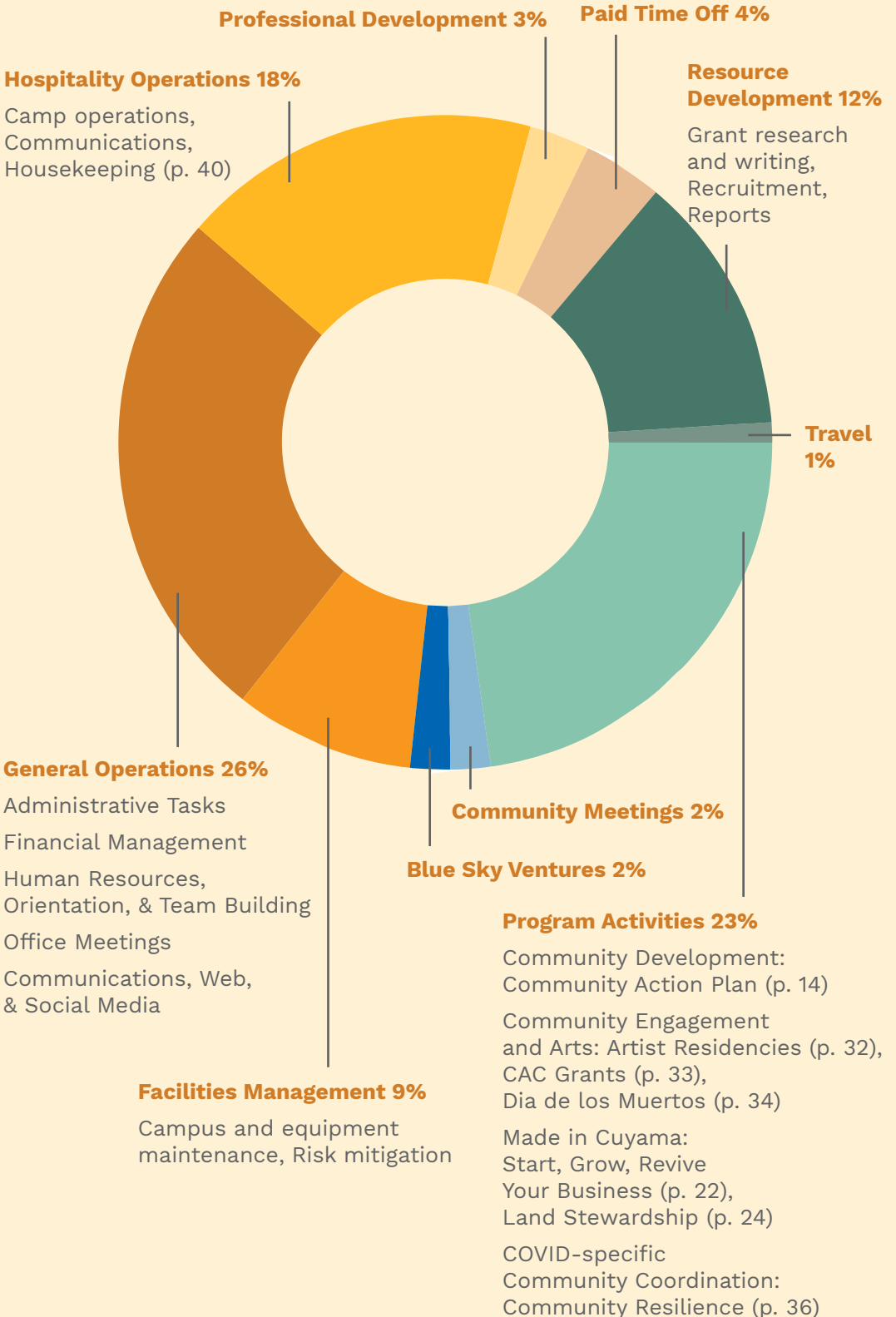
Cash	\$ 164,210
Accounts Receivable	\$ 6,236
Short-term Loans Issued	\$ 6,541
Property	\$ 486,930
Buildings	\$ 564,124
Dwellings	\$ 13,000
Equipment & Furniture	\$ 25,723
Vehicles	\$ 55,000
Accumulated Depreciation	\$ (85,583)
Total Assets	\$ 1,236,181

Liabilities & Net Assets

Net Assets & Income	\$ 1,236,181
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$ 1,236,181

Time Spent

Total Hours Performed: 12,578



In The Press

[*Em Johnson Named to Pacific Coast Business Times' '40 Under 40'*](#)

Pacific Coast Business Times, Vol. 21 No. 24, September 3, 2020

[*Blue Sky Center Receives \\$17,500 in Funding from California Arts Council*](#)

Santa Maria Sun, Vo.. 21 Issue 11, May 13, 2020

[*Blue Sky Center Interviewed for Springboard for the Art's New Series: 'From the Field'*](#)

Springboard for the Arts' YouTube Channel, November 25, 2020

[*The Victory Gardens Project Profiled by the Santa Barbara County Food Action Network*](#)

Santa Barbara County Food Action Network's Website and YouTube Channel, Posted October 17, 2020

[*Santa Barbara County Food Action Network Gives \\$150,000 in Grants to Nonprofits*](#)

Santa Barbara News-Press, December 21, 2020

[*Kim Sutherland's 'Rural, Issue 2: New Cuyama': Artist and Author Produces Intimate Look at Northeastern Santa Barbara County*](#)

M. Kettmann of the Santa Barbara Independent, December 16, 2020

[*A Time Capsule of this Year's Food and Drink Ventures Throughout Northern Santa Barbara County*](#)

Santa Maria Sun, 2020

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