

2021

ANNUAL REPORT



Our Mission ✨ Nuestra Misión

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

Estamos trabajando para fortalecer nuestras comunidades rurales apoyando a los empresarios y construyendo nuestros recursos creativos y económicos regionales.

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

Construyendo modelos para economías rurales resistentes, prósperas e inclusivas.



Our Team

A Note from Our Board of Directors

The sky is not the limit. This has become a mantra at Blue Sky over the last year. Last year continued to be challenging but also rewarding, as we work together as a community to support the growing needs that have arisen from the pandemic, spurred from a lack of investment in rural communities.

We believe in the community we serve, and we have seen so many exciting programs and success stories this year. We hope that you'll read on to learn more and will be inspired to reach out. Our board and staff count on you as a supporter and co-conspirator to help us build a more inclusive economy in the Cuyama Valley!

We encourage you to visit; it just all makes more sense in person. If you haven't had an excuse to visit, you don't need one! With graceful accommodations and the natural beauty that surrounds us, we hope that you'll consider visiting our abundant community and contributing to our cause this coming year.

Gratefully in community,
Agradecido en comunidad,

David Kietzman, President of the Board; Managing Partner at Momentum Solutions

Cecilia Lopez, Treasurer of the Board; Cofounder at handprint.io

Bill Kelley Jr., Member of the Board; Curator, Writer, and Educator at California State University, Bakersfield

Coty Hastie, Member of the Board; Analyst and Asset Manager with AutoCamp

Jesse Sugarmann, Member of the Board; Artist and Educator at California State University, Bakersfield

Kelly Schmandt Ferguson, Member of the Board; Chief of Staff at Automotus

Blue Sky's Top Circle met in October for the annual all-team retreat: a part two-day board meeting and part team building hosted on-site at Blue Sky Center.



Una Nota de Nuestra Junta Directiva

El cielo no es el límite. Esto se ha convertido en un mantra en Blue Sky durante el último año. El año pasado siguió siendo desafiante pero también gratificante, ya que trabajamos juntos como comunidad para apoyar las crecientes necesidades que han surgido a raíz de la pandemia, impulsadas por la falta de inversión en las comunidades rurales.

Creemos en la comunidad a la que servimos y hemos visto tantos programas emocionantes e historias de éxito este año. Esperamos que sigas leyendo para aprender más y que te inspire a comunicarte. ¡Nuestra junta y el personal cuentan con usted como partidario y co-conspirador para ayudarnos a construir una economía más inclusiva en el Valle de Cuyama!

Le animamos a visitar; simplemente todo tiene más sentido en persona. Si no has tenido una excusa para visitar, ¡no la necesitas! Con elegantes alojamientos y la belleza natural que nos rodea, esperamos que considere visitar nuestra abundante comunidad y contribuir a nuestra causa el próximo año.

STAFF

Em Johnson, Executive Director

Evolution is not linear. - Grace Lee Boggs

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

We can only see a short distance ahead, but we can see plenty there that needs to be done. - Alan Turing

Jack sees rural development as a lot having to do with spreadsheets. Access to resources relies on quality data sets, and the reality is that each abstracted input is connected to individual people, and people are dependably fallible. The work Jack leads at Blue Sky Center uses information provided by Cuyamans to build armatures for creative work: scaffolding built to drape upon it the human experience. Stories are how we connect, and rural folks are quite adept at storytelling.

STAFF

Alicia Muniz, Community Coordinator

Optimist, supporter, mother

Corbin LaMont, Creative Director

Pepper jam, amarillo, wildflower

Sandra Uribe, Land Steward

Emprendedora, compromiso, reunión

Katrina Staaf, Rural Community Designer

Daydreamer, absorber, synthesizer

Rob Barnett, Food Action Coordinator

Collaborator, researcher, hummingbird

CONTRACTORS & CONSULTANTS

Aaron Reimler, Rural Community Assistance Corporation, Made in Cuyama Consultant

Carolina Solorio, Housekeeper

Chris Cohen, Sustainable Law Group, LLP, Lawyer

Diana Pereira, Balance Financial, Accountant

Eric Weiss, Service Arts Inc., Hospitality Consultant

Erika Holzhauer, Rural Community Assistance Corporation,
Action Plan and Farmworker Housing Consultant

Gloria Morales, Victory Gardens Recipe Book Translator

Instituto de Lengua S.C., Language Skills Teachers

Jesus Ruiz, Groundskeeper

Joel Ruiz, Groundskeeper

John Schinnerer, Sociocracy Consultant

Jensen Lorenzen, Blue Sky Ventures Consultant

Luke Viscusi, Cuyama Events Report Contractor

Maria Carpenter, Farmworker Housing Surveyor

Noa Kornbluh, Rural Community Assistance Corporation, Made in Cuyama Consultant

Quail Springs, Cuyama Events Report Partner

(Next page)

Em and Ali hit bullseyes during a team building activity of horseback archery.

Go to hcrgaitedhorses.com to plan your Cuyama adventure!



ARTISTS & DESIGNERS

Alex Guerrero, Warrior Wagons, Woodworker

Amy Mae Garrett, Cuyama Beverage Company Prop Stylist

Andrea Rivera, Sabores del Valle Cover Artist

Charlene Cooper, Cuyama Sun/Moon Photographer

Christine Dong, Cuyama Beverage Company Photographer

Corbin LaMont, Office of Virtue, Designer for Organizational Capacity Arts Grant

Cuyama Middle School Students, Speculative Fiction Authors for Cuyama Sun/Moon Newsprint, Cuyama Strong Mural Designers and Painters

Eloy Flores, Cuyama Strong Mural Layout Designer

Garrett Gerstenberger, Cuyama Beverage Company Brand Designer

Ismael Garcia, Cuyama Sun/Moon Photographer, Welder/Fabricator

JM Nimocks, Speculative Fiction Artist

Kiana Toossi, Cuyama Hotline Web Developer

Mary Welcome, Grant Advisor

Nicole Furstenfeld, Cuyama Sun/Moon Photographer

Noé Montes, Artist-in-residence

Sandra René Jantz, Cuyama Sun/Moon Photographer



ALUMNI

Melanie Shaw, Hospitality Manager (September 2018–July 2021)

Paul Schreiber, Food Systems Designer, Communications Manager (July 2020–August 2021)

Sam Ihrig, Production Manager (July 2018–October 2021)

Sam and Rob receive a tour from Jean Gaillard of his farm that grows food for Cuyamans. Contact Cuyama Homegrown at 661-565-5936 to order your weekly farm-fresh produce and eggs!



AMBASSADORS

An Ambassador is a professional volunteer role at the Blue Sky Center. BSC has ongoing special projects that can benefit from the experience and insight of our Ambassadors. In addition to their technical and strategic support, Ambassadors commit to be advocates for the organization, sharing BSC resources, updates, and impact with their circles of friends and contacts. If you're interested in this opportunity, visit blueskycenter.org/ambassadors and contact us!

Chris Cohen, Blue Sky Ventures Ambassador

Eric Junker, Blue Sky Los Angeles Ambassador

F. Paul Chounet, Blue Sky Partnerships Ambassador

Steve Sappington, Blue Sky Airstrip Ambassador

**LOOK TO
THE SKY
VASTNESS
CLARITY
SUN**

From the Directors

The passage of time is tumultuous. The mountains out our windows—on every horizon—trick us into seeing them as static, heavy walls that cradle the Cuyama Valley. We perceive them as setting us apart, protecting us from the busyness on the other side. Perhaps we've felt that Cuyama is independent, distant enough to be left alone. But in truth, the mountains are groaning ever upward and the canyons provide porous paths and we're susceptible and vulnerable.

In a second year of a pandemic, our collective anxiety expresses itself in attempts to move forward. We crave more opportunities to be together, to work on community projects with an ethic of quality of life over quantity of things. Those perilous feelings need tangible tasks: growing food at home, brewing honey and jujube fruits into mead, filling in potholes on the airstrip, and throwing a town-wide loud parade. Hours spent listening manifest into creative work that seeks to express resilience and—in Spanish—resistencia. Our mountains are folding and bending and not breaking. We Cuyamans are trusting in one another and exploring our shared vision for the future. We are not waiting around for our future to show up.

We are honored to be able to share with you the work of our team in this report that follows. We are a small team of creative practitioners, supported by a network of rural advocates and experienced consultants. More and more we see our roles as uplifting the endurance of our fellow Cuyamans, connecting resources and connecting people. More and more the work itself is that of our neighbors, packaged and represented to a broader audience, in the hope that Cuyama can be seen as a community of talented and brave individuals that want to offer you an experience of this special place.

Together, neighbor to neighbor,

Em Johnson and Jack Forinash, Executive Directors

De los Directores

El paso del tiempo es tumultuoso. Las montañas a través de nuestras ventanas, en todos los horizontes, nos engañan para que las veamos como paredes estáticas y pesadas que acunan el valle de Cuyama. Los percibimos como algo que nos diferencia, protegiéndonos del ajeteo del otro lado. Quizás hemos sentido que Cuyama es independiente, lo suficientemente distante como para dejarlo solo. Pero, en verdad, las montañas están gimiendo siempre hacia arriba y los cañones proporcionan caminos porosos y somos susceptibles y vulnerables.

En un segundo año de pandemia, nuestra ansiedad colectiva se expresa en intentos de avanzar. Anhelamos más oportunidades para estar juntos, para trabajar en proyectos comunitarios con una ética de calidad de vida sobre la cantidad de cosas. Esos sentimientos peligrosos necesitan tareas tangibles: cultivar alimentos en el hogar, elaborar miel y frutas de azufaifo en hidromiel, rellenar baches en la pista de aterrizaje y organizar un desfile ruidoso en toda la ciudad. Las horas dedicadas a escuchar se manifiestan en un trabajo creativo que busca expresar resistencia y, en inglés, resilience. Nuestras montañas se están plegando y doblando y no se están rompiendo. Los Cuyamanes confiamos unos en otros y exploramos nuestra visión compartida para el futuro. No estamos esperando a que aparezca nuestro futuro.

Nos sentimos honrados de poder compartir con ustedes el trabajo de nuestro equipo en este informe a continuación. Somos un pequeño equipo de profesionales creativos, respaldados por una red de defensores rurales y consultores experimentados. Cada vez más, vemos que nuestros roles elevan la resistencia de nuestros compañeros Cuyamans, conectando recursos y conectando personas. Cada vez más, el trabajo en sí es el de nuestros vecinos, empaquetado y presentado a una audiencia más amplia, con la esperanza de que Cuyama pueda verse como una comunidad de personas talentosas y valientes que desean ofrecerle una experiencia de este lugar especial.

Juntos, de vecino a vecino,

Em Johnson and Jack Forinash, Directores Ejecutivos

**Todo es posible
con la fuerza y la unión
de la comunidad.**

- Sandra Uribe, Cuidadora de la Tierra de Blue Sky Center

Table of Contents

| | |
|-----------|--------------------------------------|
| 2 | Our Mission |
| 4 | Our Team |
| 15 | From the Directors |
| 21 | Made in Cuyama |
| 28 | Blue Sky Ventures |
| 34 | Advocacy Through Art |
| 38 | Neighbor-to-neighbor Action |
| 40 | Researching Farmworker Housing Needs |
| 42 | Visit Cuyama! |
| 44 | 2021 Financials |
| 50 | In The Press |
| 52 | Donors |
| 56 | Contact Us |
| 57 | Credits |



**No matter how hard something
might be, as long as you try
and never give up, we can
accomplish many great things!**

**- Nicole Furstenfeld, Long-time resident and
4th-Grade Teacher at Cuyama Elementary**

An aerial photograph of the Cuyama Valley, showing a winding river through a valley with agricultural fields and mountains in the background. The entire image has a yellow-orange color overlay.

**Cultivating community proprietorship,
connections and solidarity in the Cuyama Valley**

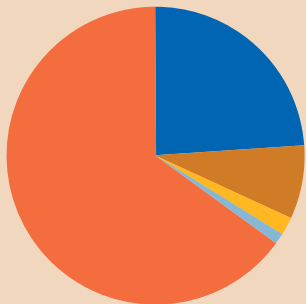
**MADE IN CUYAMA
HECHO EN CUYAMA**

**Cultivamos propiedad comunitaria,
conexiones y solidaridad en el Valle del Cuyama**

FOOD ACCESS IN THE CUYAMA VALLEY

Cuyamans make almost all of their meals at home and would benefit from having more access to fresh food and grocery options in the Valley.

MEALS MADE AT HOME



- 65% MAKE VIRTUALLY ALL OF THEIR MEALS AT HOME
- 24% make most of their meals at home
- 8% make half of their meals at home
- 2% make few of their meals at home
- 1% make virtually none of their meals at home

GETTING GROCERIES

85%

PERCENTAGE OF CUYAMANS
WHO DO VIRTUALLY ALL
GROCERY SHOPPING OUTSIDE
THE CUYAMA VALLEY



PERCENTAGE OF INCOME SPENT ON GROCERIES

Cuyamans who spend **MORE THAN A THIRD** of their monthly household budget on groceries:

63%

POPULATION WIDE

NEED FOR FOOD BANK

Percentage of Cuyamans who utilize food bank donations to supplement their groceries:

POPULATION WIDE:

32%

LOW-INCOME FAMILIES:

39%

HISPANIC HOUSEHOLDS:

47%

NON-HISPANIC HOUSEHOLDS:

25%

EMPLOYED CUYAMANS
WORKING IN
AGRICULTURE:

1-IN-5

CUYAMA IS A FOOD DESERT

The average American travels 4 miles for groceries. Cuyamans, however, must travel to:

SANTA MARIA

55 MILES

TAFT

31 MILES

BAKERSFIELD

69 MILES

DISTANCE FROM NEW CUYAMA

SOURCE: USDA's National Household Food Acquisition and Purchase Survey



MADE IN CUYAMA

Through our Made in Cuyama initiative, we actively support the development of social ventures that hire locally, provide job training, and advance social and environmental community initiatives as partners and collaborators. Our team assists with business planning, marketing, connection to financing, commercial space, and manages a shared-use commercial kitchen: Cuyama Kitchen/La Cocina Cuyama.

One of our aims through 2021—set by our entire team through a year of diversity and inclusion assessment—was to prioritize workplace policies and systems that reflect the diversity of Cuyama’s communities and ensure staff members have a pathway and network that leads to personal and professional fulfillment. In 2021 we secured financial support to provide weekly one-on-one tutoring for all staff to enable proficient use of Spanish and English in all of our operations. Our team has spent over 120 hours progressing toward this effort! With the support of Rural Community Assistance Corporation (RCAC) and a three-year Rural Capacity Building Grant from Housing and Urban Development, we have also provided direct assistance to 22 Cuyama entrepreneurs, supporting the expansion of two local businesses and one new business in our Blue Sky Shops while launching our own social enterprise, Cuyama Beverage Company! Despite the economic fallout of the ongoing pandemic, these efforts have supported 13 local jobs in 2021 and have built wealth throughout our community.

Our Community Coordinator, Ali, spent this year adapting our entrepreneurial training program, “Start, Grow, Revive Your Business,” into Spanish (Tareas de Negocios) with a focus on culinary entrepreneurship. This work could not have happened without the support of our Lideres Jardines, our Garden Leaders, who contributed to the redesign of the curriculum. One of our core values is to build wealth in every aspect of our work, so we ensure that workshop leaders/ lideres de tareas, as well as peer mentors, are always paid fairly for their time. Additionally, Ali was able to complete notary training and pass the required state exam, enabling an essential service to fill the gap for our Spanish-speaking community members in the Cuyama Valley!

HECHO EN CUYAMA

MADE IN CUYAMA

Blue Sky Center implemented the Cuyama Valley Victory Gardens Project to confront immediate issues of food access in the Cuyama Valley during COVID-19. Santa Barbara-area foundation funds enabled our organization to install raised bed gardens and supply planter materials, seeds, and starter plants, as well as implement bilingual curricula now serving 150 individuals in the Valley. This project created a supportive network for participating families that helped ensure the success of each family's garden and provide a sense of community during the onset of the pandemic.

In our second year of programming, we brought together some of the 10 participants from 2020 to help mentor 20 more families in 2021. We hosted small gatherings to learn together about preparing nopal for food storage in jars and about how to plant garlic. With the help of last year's network, we collected recipes for a special cookbook "Sabores del Valle CUYAMA Tastes of the Valley." The culinary genius of many cultures are present here in the valley and represented in the cookbook!

For five years, Blue Sky Center has facilitated a working group of farmers and ranchers actively contributing to the creation of a healthy food system in the Cuyama Valley. Building local wealth relies on building the capacity of local networks. With support from the Santa Barbara County Food Action Network, our Cuyama Valley Food Action Network develops an equitable, engaging, and resilient food system via collaboration, resource sharing, and educational opportunities available both within the Valley and throughout Santa Barbara County. CVFAN catalyzes increased and sustainable small farmer/rancher food production for local consumption through: (1) generating market incentives/increased demand, (2) promoting sound stewardship of the Valley's fragile landscapes with water-efficient, climate-smart, and environmentally friendly technologies and practices, (3) creating sustainable economic prosperity for small farmers, ranchers, and businesses, (4) improving overall food access, and (5) creating a greater sense of community within our rural community.

HECHO EN CUYAMA

1000

BLUE SKY



MADE IN CUYAMA

The Cuyama Valley Food Action Network drafted this mission statement and these goals during the spring and summer of 2021. We have also been flexing our collaborative muscles by applying for a USDA Regional Food Systems Partnership Grant with the Santa Barbara County Food Action Network, while continuing to meet about co-marketing, strategic planning, and collaboratively advocating to the county for zoning ordinances that support our small and midsize farms. We also welcomed four new members to the group, representing 11 total local food and farming businesses, to now include beginning farmers!

HECHO EN CUYAMA

Thank you to our funding partners, who supported and adapted with us during this challenging year:

Rural Capacity Building Grant (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development)

AHEAD Program (Federal Home Loan Bank of San Francisco)

Rural Community Assistance Corporation

Santa Barbara County Food Action Network

The Fund for Santa Barbara

Santa Barbara Foundation

Miller McCune Foundation

Hutton Parker Foundation

Better to do it than not.

- Ferial Sadeghian, Owner of the Cuyama Buckhorn

Blue Sky Ventures

Crafted to support rural resilience

Diseñado para apoyar la resistencia rural

Blue Sky Ventures emerged from the essential ethos of rural resilience. After nearly a year of adapting to the challenges of COVID-19, it became more apparent than ever that our Cuyama Valley communities would need to self-determine a future in response to multiple crises compounding: a mass exit of industrial agriculture due to unsustainable water extraction, a global pandemic exasperating the already limited resources allocated to our rural region, and the intrinsic inequities caused by America's rural blind spot in resource allocation.

We've been working with a group of farmers and ranchers for five years to share resources and cultivate new revenue streams to withstand adaptations in the future. It has been a rough and winding road to identify a product that bottles up the best parts of the Cuyama Valley, and we were proud to launch Cuyama Beverage Company sales in March of 2021!

Sage Honey session mead was our debut brew, made with 100% pure and raw local honey cultivated by our founding partner Alisha Taff of Rock Front Ranch. We followed this in June with the release of Juju-bee, incorporating an additional Rock Front Ranch product: jujubes! With all proceeds from every bottle benefiting regenerative economic development in the Cuyama Valley, the continued growth of Cuyama Beverage Company prioritizes partnerships that advance the resiliency of our local food system.



What does regenerative economic development look like?

We believe that all rural communities deserve:

Dignified jobs that pay livable wages

Education and skills for the whole family

A place to gather

Incentives to grow at a scale supported by the climate

Celebration of the products they cultivate as part of a community's culture—not extracted from it



This year Cuyama Beverage Company produced craft session mead (naturally fermented honey wine) to directly invest in small farmers and climate-appropriate products cultivated in the Cuyama Valley. Our ultimate big, hairy, audacious goal is to create a sustainable local economy fueled by a thriving local food system. Our minimal viable product is a wealth-generating incentive for farmers who care for the Cuyama Valley to stay here.

We now have our Cuyama beverages in thirteen retailer locations across Southern and Central Coast of California and have incubated a business model that we believe is viable and scalable, enabling Blue Sky Center to launch its first subsidiary in 2022!

Through this venture our team will showcase strategies toward rebalancing the economic playing field so that all Americans, whether rural or metropolitan, are protected from economic exploitation and are able to receive a fair share of the wealth generated through their labor. This is not just about creating a high-quality product that can be distributed from the Cuyama Valley: this is the first step in creating many high-quality, value-added products and services that generate wealth for our farmers, increase dignified jobs within our community, and incentivize regenerative strategies for replenishing our regional ecosystem.





Una cosa que todos aprendimos de esta experiencia fue que todos somos iguales cuando se trata de algo como una pandemia. Puedes tener dinero, propiedades, autos, cuentas bancarias lo que quieras, pero nada de eso puede comprarte buena salud en una situación como esta. En este sentido todos somos iguales.

- Fabiola Granados, residente y defensora de Cuyama

Advocacy Through Art

Our work exercises the ambitions of Cuyamans to work together.

Nuestro trabajo ejercita las ambiciones de los Cuyamans de trabajar juntos.

We're better together. To meet the place-specific challenges the Cuyama Valley provides, Cuyamans lean on one another and keep moving forward with purpose. Our creative practice emphasizes the role of the artist as listener and translator, discerning and representing stories from Cuyama that are “deeply personal and infinitely universal”—a phrase Ra Joy of the National Endowment for the Arts presented in a recent call. With the help of the many artists recognized earlier in this report, we spent this second pandemic year continuing to address Cuyama’s most pressing concerns, resulting in some beautiful publications.

Despite pandemic-imposed limitations on gatherings and celebrations, 2021 presented surprising, powerful opportunities for sustenance in our creative community engagement efforts. Through support from California Arts Council’s Artists in Communities grant program, we were able to continue hosting photographer and conversationalist Noé Montes as a long-term artist-in-residence. Since 2016 we have partnered with our friend to document life in Cuyama; this year Noé captured the state of our community through interviews, portraits, and a process of mural making with middle school students. Mr. Russ Barnes was a key member of this team, providing class time and direction, while Eloy Flores assisted with the mural layout; our Production Manager Sam Ihrig worked with the students to paint the final mural that they had designed.



In October we celebrated the work of Noé and his community collaborators with a publication and parade. “Cuyama Sun, Cuyama Moon” is a special-edition newspaper that shares reflections of our valley and captures Cuyaman creativity. It encompasses photographs, speculative fiction, illustrated data, local resident profiles, and community voices on the impact of COVID-19.

Designed by Corbin LaMont of the Office of Virtue, the newsprint included work supported by California Arts Council’s Organizational Development Grant. Corbin worked with our data team to represent the results of the Cuyama Valley Community Survey, which continues to support and direct our broader work. By taking data from spreadsheets to infographics, we have been able to create reports focused on specific locally relevant topics: housing, schools, and food, to start. Through “one-sheets,” stickers, and postcards, we are reporting out the results of the survey, presenting back the information so graciously shared with us by our neighbors. We believe that this data—once back in the hands of Cuyamans—can empower direct action. And we can see it working!



Cuyamans line up at the La Cocina Cuyama for birria served at Día de los Muertos as a fundraiser for the local youth group.

**‘Little by little together’
is apt to be more
successful and enduring.
I think of slow
growing trees.**

- Pam Baczuk, Cuyama Resident & Advocate

Neighbor-to-neighbor Action

Through collaboration and resources provided by Cuyama stakeholders, we are pursuing the calls to action laid out by the Community Action Plan.

A través de la colaboración y los recursos proporcionados por las partes interesadas de Cuyama, estamos siguiendo los llamados a la acción establecidos por el Plan de Acción Comunitario.

In 2020 we released the Cuyama Valley Community Action Plan, a comprehensive identification of opportunities that have resident support. A community-wide survey that reached 42% of Cuyama households has created a wealth of data about the desires of Cuyamans for our home, validating and directing our work alongside community champions who volunteer to meet regularly and pursue resources that will improve quality of life for all Cuyamans.

Throughout 2021 we facilitated with the “working groups” that this process and plan helped coalesce: the Cuyama Valley Food Action Network (presented in a prior section of this report), a rural broadband task force seeking to bring fiber Internet to Cuyama, a housing-focused group researching farmworker-specific housing opportunities (presented later in this report), and a Townsites Beautification and Wayfinding Working Group.

The latter group has been developing designs to utilize new funding from Caltrans (the state highway department), which is awarding \$1 million to Cuyama to improve the roadside along Highway 166. The working group has proposed planting a series of palo verde trees, installing benches and landscape viewfinders, and producing wayfinding signs to direct visitors to local businesses and recreation sites. Plans are underway for this project to be completed by Caltrans in 2022.



Led by artist-in-residence Noé Montes, Cuyama middle-schoolers from Mr. Barnes' class paint a mural they designed representing their experiences of the pandemic.

Researching Farmworker Housing Needs

We have been expanding our housing research specific to the needs of Cuyama farmworkers.

Hemos estado ampliando nuestra investigación de vivienda específica para las necesidades de los trabajadores agrícolas de Cuyama.

Compared to the surrounding communities, housing looks different in the Cuyama Valley. While in Santa Barbara County as a whole 64% of residents live in stick-built homes, 87% of Cuyamans live in stick-built single-family homes and only 1% of Cuyamans live in apartments. When asked what types of housing are needed in the Cuyama Valley, 89% of residents responded that multi-family/apartments are desired.

Our housing research this year (with our partners at Rural Community Assistance Corporation) focused on the specific needs for housing for farmworkers. Agriculture, after all, employs nearly 1-in-4 Cuyama workers. In seeking to begin to understand what housing options are desired, we developed a survey, made a list of farmworkers using our communal knowledge of our neighbors, and then went door to door to interview our fellow Cuyamans.

What we found may surprise some:

- **more than half of Cuyama's farmworkers have lived here for 26 years or more;**
- **half of farm employers provide housing for their workers;**
- **73% of farmworkers rent their home with 50% of renters paying unaffordable rates; and**
- **90% of farmworkers are employed year-round; and nearly a third work on farms that primarily farm carrots (a worrisome issue in that carrot production will be leaving the valley in the near future due to water resource management practices that began in 2020).**

For the past couple years, there has been a private housing developer expressing interest in developing new multi-family housing options in New Cuyama. Funding for pre-development and some construction funds have been secured by them through state grants, grants that are earmarked to be used for farmworker housing. Although our research is independent of this project, the resulting data and report is timely to help inform this project. Already we have seen the results of the community-wide survey from 2019 and the farmworker survey from 2021 being used by the developers in the design and community outreach process, with the developers now proposing family units (with 1-, 2-, and 3-bedroom layouts) rather than their original proposal which was primarily small studio units.

The development of new housing in a rural community can cause concern for some residents who may see the hurdles for growth, but for many, new housing can be hopeful: more options means more access and—oftentime—more affordability for all residents. The schools could be helped by more enrollment, and businesses and farms may see additions to the workforce. We will continue to watch this project closely as it develops, and contribute information that has been provided by our Cuyama neighbors so that—if this or any other housing project is built—it can be informed directly by Cuyamans.

You can read the full report on our website: blueskycenter.org/housing

Visit Cuyama!

The abundance of Cuyama awaits you.

La abundancia de Cuyama te espera.

Our hospitality options attracted 596 visitors to Cuyama in 2021, most for their first visit to this Valley of Enchantment. Along with our five Shelton Huts, we added a new accommodation option in 2021: the Shepherder Wagon! This cozy wagon adds another unique glamping opportunity that has allowed us to host seven events in 2021, including a wedding, an academic retreat, a church retreat, and a 40th birthday celebration! We've been able to host groups of up to 30 adults overnight and—with our partners at the Cuyama Buckhorn—retreats and weddings of up to 75 people.

It was 2017 when we first began offering these unique camping experiences. Our research showed that light touch hospitality offerings were a good way to bring outside investment and interest to rural communities, specifically in former company towns. Now in our fifth year of hosting campers, the enthusiasm for Cuyama from visitors continues to grow, supporting local businesses and bringing respectful attention to the Cuyama Valley. The income from these overnight stays and multi-day special events directly supports three jobs at Blue Sky and provides critical funding to cover organizational costs that are less likely to be funded by programmatic grants. Contact us today to start planning your Cuyama retreat!

visit

**BLUE
SKY**



2021 Financials

This year has been our best in terms of earned revenue: we launched the Cuyama Beverage Company (earning \$20,857 in gross sales), added a new tenant to the Blue Sky Shops while two other tenants expanded their footprints (a record \$26,204 earned from shop rents, up 22% from the prior year), and our Explore Cuyama hospitality initiative brought in \$56,426, the highest year since we started this initiative in 2017 (even as we stayed closed in the early part of the year out of COVID precaution). All combined, our earned revenue programs account for 32% of our total annual income.

We further diversified our sources of income, with public grants also having a record year (\$101,269 in 2021, up 62% from 2020 and up 96% from 2019). We are grateful to you, our supporters, for sending in personal donations and providing discounts on goods and services totalling \$25,249, another record for Blue Sky Center. If we exclude the significant one-time gift from 2018 and the income from the sale of some agricultural land in 2019, overall, 2021 was our highest income year to date!

On the expenses side, we have spent less this year than last on wages as we have focused more on hiring consultants and artists to perform project-specific roles. Travel expenses have shrunk significantly from pre-pandemic figures, while insurance costs have skyrocketed. With 24,000 square feet of buildings and 267 acres (including an airstrip), our maintenance, property tax, and insurance costs are significant; these costs are the hardest to fund through grants, which more often only pay for direct project expenses. We have used reserves from prior years to invest in the Cuyama Beverage Company, our newest enterprise.

In total since our 501(c)(3) IRS designation in July 2014, Blue Sky Center has invested \$2,217,000 into our rural development initiatives that envision resilient, thriving, and inclusive rural economies for the Cuyama Valley.

2021 FINANCIALS

Income

| | |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| Private Grants | \$92,147 |
| Public Grants | \$101,269 |
| Donations | \$16,259 |
| In-kind Contributions | \$8,990 |
| Interest Income | \$141 |
| Other Income | \$2,702 |
| Program Income | \$103,364 |
| Sale of Excess Assets | \$1,000 |
| Total Income | \$325,871 |

.....

Costs of Services Provided **\$10,131**

2021 FINANCIALS

Expenses

Personnel

| | |
|------------------------------------|-----------|
| Salaries & Wages | \$172,383 |
| Fringe Benefits | \$12,920 |
| Payroll Expenses & Fees | \$16,074 |
| Consulting & Professional Services | \$36,778 |
| Artists Honoraria & Stipends | \$9,430 |
| Housekeeping | \$16,191 |
| Groundskeeping | \$11,029 |

Non-personnel

| | |
|--|------------------|
| Accounting, Bank Fees, and Legal Expenses | \$9,894 |
| Booking Fees | \$2,346 |
| Depreciation Expense | \$34,000* |
| Facilities, Equipment, & Construction Expenses | \$23,446 |
| Fundraising Expenses | \$1,015 |
| Insurance | \$14,693 |
| Licenses & Permits | \$518 |
| Media & Marketing | \$461 |
| Operations Expenses | \$11,795 |
| Property Tax | \$10,006 |
| Supplies | \$20,137 |
| Travel & Meetings | \$7,641 |
| Utilities | \$9,377 |
| Total Expenses | \$420,136 |

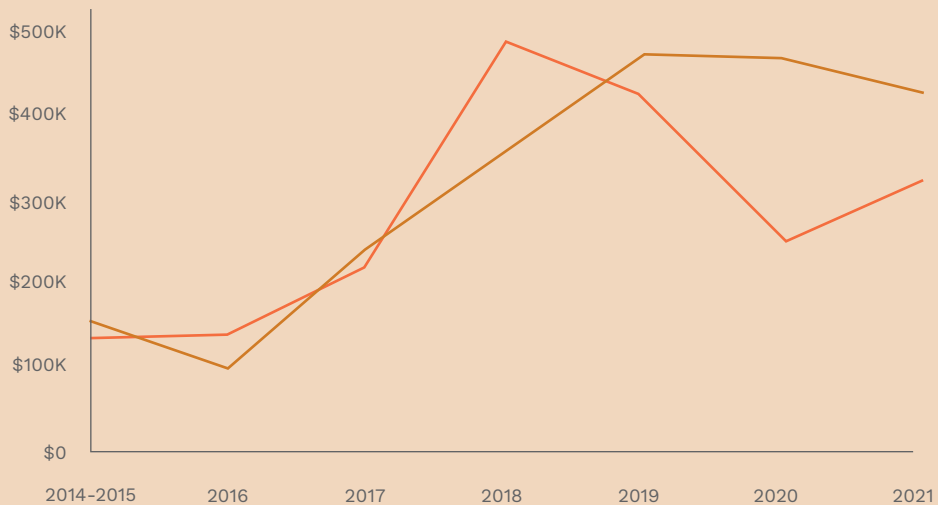
*Estimated

Net \$(104,396)

2021 FINANCIALS

Income and Expenses

■ — Expenses
■ — Income



2021 FINANCIALS

Balance Sheet

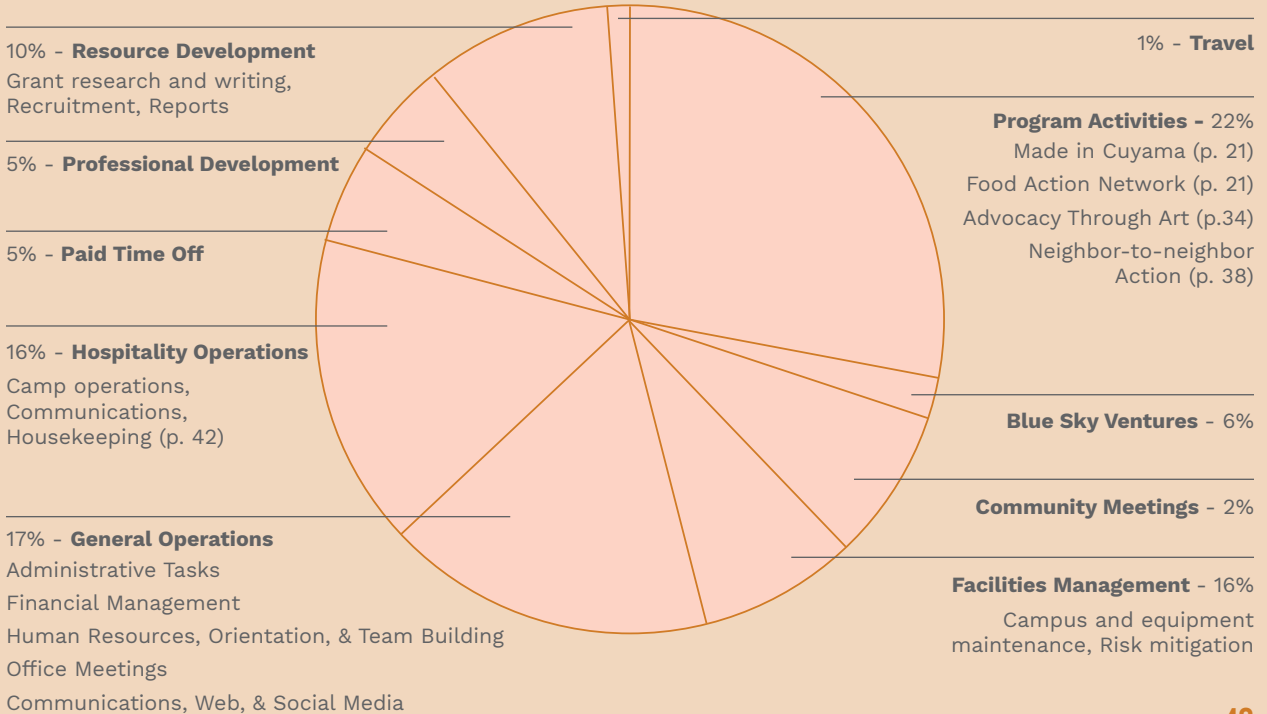
Assets

| | |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| Cash | \$ 119,562 |
| Accounts Receivable | \$ 20,035 |
| Inventory Assets | \$ 9,011 |
| Prepaid Expenses | \$ 2,922 |
| Undeposited Funds | \$ 808 |
| Property | \$ 482,146 |
| Buildings | \$ 564,124 |
| Dwellings | \$ 13,000 |
| Equipment & Furniture | \$ 32,268 |
| Vehicles | \$ 55,000 |
| Security Deposits Asset | \$ 190 |
| Accumulated Depreciation | \$ (153,712) |
| Total Assets | \$ 1,145,355 |

Liabilities & Net Assets

| | |
|---|---------------------|
| Deferred Revenue | \$ 8,420 |
| RCAC Relief Loan | \$ 24,750 |
| Sales Tax Payable | \$ 354 |
| Net Assets & Income | \$ 1,111,831 |
| Total Liabilities and Net Assets | \$ 1,145,355 |

TIME SPENT



In the Press

Crossroads: The High Desert Heats Up with the Reimagining of New Cuyama

Santa Barbara Magazine, Katherine Stewart and photos by Dewey Nicks, September 2021

A Look at Cuyama Buckhorn, Central California's Hidden Retreat and Desert Oasis (feat. Blue Sky Center and the Cuyama Valley Food Action Network)

Forbes, Chelsea Davis, July 21, 2021

Visionary Valley: Blue Sky Center's Innovative Approach to Community Issues in the Cuyama Valley Gives Art a Voice in the Big Conversation

California Arts Council's DREAM Magazine, Issue 1, Summer 2021

'Reimagining Resilience' Initiative Aims to Strengthen Cuyama Economy

Santa Maria Sun, Vol. 22 No. 7, April 15, 2021



Donors

Our economic and community development work is supported by a range of donors and contributors providing the funding and resources we need to get things done.

Corporate Donors

Duncan Family Farms

Foundation Contributions

The Fund for Santa Barbara
Hutton Parker Foundation
McCune Foundation
Santa Barbara County Food Action Network
William R. Hearst Foundation
Zannon Foundation

Government Grants

CDC Foundation
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Small Business Administration (PPP)
State of California

DONORS

Private Donors

Ali Osborn
Allen Maris
Aman Segal
Andrew Jeknavorian
Ann Myhre
Ashwin Manthripragada
Bill Kelley Jr.
Caitlin Pacheco
Cecilia Lopez
Christiane Schlumberger
Christina Chase
Claudia Walsh
Coty Hastie
Crystal Robles
David Kietzman
F. Paul Chounet
Florian Dejako
Frank Chance
Frank Spandler
Freya Robayo-Perez
Garrett Gerstenberger
Geroge & Karen Johnson
Heidi Stilwell
Irene Faye
Jack Forinash
Jennifer Thompson
Jesse Sugarmann
Joseph Bassett
Joseph Dezso
Joseph Fennewald
Julie Currie
Julie Munsayac
Justin Bethune

Katherine Kennedy
Katie Katigbak
Kelly Schmandt Ferguson
Kevin Shaw
Kyle Taylor
Lisa Haslett
Leland & Linda Charlton
Leritha Harris
Luisa Murad
Luke Boles
Lynne Hornyak
Mardi and Phil Niles
Mark Oberman
Maureen Webb
Meli Batimana
Michael Oberman
Nicholas Centino & Ms. Ana Rosa Rizo
Nico Gomez
Pamela K. Baczuk
Philip Jankoski
Rick Rothlisberger and José Paz
Rob Barnett
Rotary Club of Newbury Park
Savannah Fox
Steffanie Merloni
Stephen G. Winnewisser
Susan Cramm
Tauria Linala
Trent Parsons
William Hearst
Zale Morris
And other anonymous donors

PROGRAM CONTRIBUTORS

Tenants

Warrior Wagons
GM Fabrications
High Desert Print Co.
Garage6

Contributors

Aaron Reimler
Alexandra Eisinger
Alexis Wilkman
Alfredo J Ortiz
Ashley Ross
The Apiary
C&H Market
Casa Dumetz Wines
County of Santa Barbara - District 1 Supervisor's Office
County of Santa Barbara - Long-Range Planning
County of Santa Barbara - Office of Arts and Culture
Community Environmental Council
Cuyama Buckhorn
Cuyama Homegrown
Condor's Hope
Cuyama Joint Unified School District
Cuyama Valley Family Resource Center
Cuyama Valley Recreation District
Cuyama Library
Erika Holzhauer
Full of Life Foods

Contributors

Continued

GM Fabrications
Harry Curtis
High Desert Print Co.
Ismael Garcia
JJ's Market
John Schinnerer
Judy & Russ Barnes
Kathleen Ricci
Lama Dog Tap Room and Bottle Shop
Maria Carpenter
Maria Medina
Meg Brown
Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey
Nick Shaw
Noa Kornbluh
Noé Montes
Office of Virtue
Ojai Beverage Company
Pam Baczuk
Quail Springs
Rainbow Bridge Market
Rock Front Ranch
Robbie Jaffe
Rural Community Assistance Corporation
Sage Ojai Cafe
Sarah Angon Wickman
Santa Barbara County Food Action Network
Santa Barbara Pistachios
Satellite Santa Barbara
Tate Larrick
United States Postal Service
Vinovore
WineSneak

Contact Us

Visit or write to us!

Blue Sky Center

1000 Perkins Road

PO Box 271

New Cuyama, CA 93254

(661) 413-3005

blueskycenter.org

Connect with us!

hello@blueskycenter.org

[instagram.com/blueskycenter](https://www.instagram.com/blueskycenter)

[fb.com/madeincuyama](https://www.facebook.com/madeincuyama)

twitter.com/blueskycenter

Financial disclosures can be found at blueskycenter.org/disclosures and at [guidestar.org/profile/46-1239650](https://www.guidestar.org/profile/46-1239650).

Our federal employer identification number (EIN) is 46-1239650.

Credits

We appreciate those that provided free use of their images for this report, and thank you to our graphic designer and printer.

Image credits:

Cover Photo: Tate Larrick, reunionoriginals.com

Page 3: Noé Montes, noemontes.com

Page 9: Heather Lomax, Hidden Creek Ranch

Page 11: Jeff Uzzel, jeffuzzel.com

Page 19: Ryan Flanagan, @ryanflanaganphoto

Page 29: Andrew Hill, jdrewhill.com

Page 31: Christine Dong, christinedong.com

Page 32: Noé Montes, noemontes.com

Page 35: Noé Montes, noemontes.com

Page 36: Noé Montes, noemontes.com

Page 51: Ryan Flanagan, @ryanflanaganphoto

All other photos taken by Blue Sky Center

Designed by the Office of Virtue.

Printed by Eastwood Print & Copy, Birmingham, Ala.

**STOP AND
FEEL THE
BLUE SKY
SMILING AT
YOU**

