

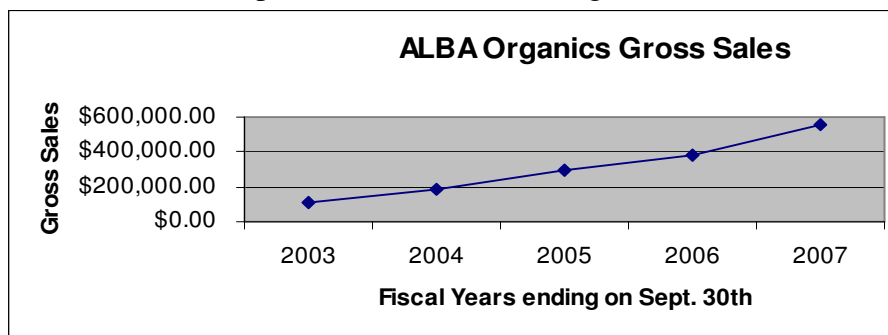
Proposal Narrative

The goal of the Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA) is to create greater economic opportunities for aspiring and existing small farms and related businesses while promoting healthy local foods and ecological land management. With educational programs and a farm business incubator, we empower participants by providing access to knowledge, opportunities to develop leadership skills, and technical assistance to implement what they have learned and apply it to their business, in topics such as business planning, organic certification, production, marketing, record-keeping, labor law, pest management and other topics related to operating a small farm business.

ALBA's mission is to advance economic viability, social equity, and ecological land management among limited-resource and aspiring farmers. We work to expand sustainable food systems that are healthy, green, fair and affordable. We increase the skills and business acumen of small-scale minority and immigrant farmers, primarily Latino/as who work in the local agriculture industry. Historically such farmers have had difficulty prospering because of language and cultural barriers, lack of resources, institutional exclusion, and limited government engagement. Our training programs combine classroom education, small farm incubators, and business technical assistance to create an engine for economic development among some of the lowest-income residents in our region. ALBA has helped to double the number of farmers' markets in the region and supported the development of community supported agriculture and home delivery services created by farmers – proliferating local food options.

The organization is growing as a resource for economic, community, and personal development in the Salinas Valley, particularly among entrepreneurial farm worker families and small business people with limited resources. In the past year, ALBA has helped coordinate the expansion of business technical assistance by establishing collaborations and outreach capabilities in partnership with other small business programs. Through its work with aspiring, small-scale and often immigrant farmers, ALBA is filling a niche for farm business incubation and technical assistance found nowhere else in California. From 1997 to 2002, the number of Latino farmers in Monterey County increased 70% alongside a statewide growth rate of 44%. This dynamic demonstrates the timeliness of our work, and the growth among minority farmers will likely expand with results of the 2007 Census of Agriculture. ALBA contributes to a more just and sustainable food system through the development of: 1) Human resources that will be tomorrow's farmers, business owners, and community leaders; 2) Growing marketing alternatives for small-scale farmers and other limited-resource business people; and 3) Greater access to fresh, healthy foods for vulnerable children and families, and 4) Biological diversity and protection of natural resources.

In order to support the marketing needs of farm-incubator participants, in 2002, ALBA created *ALBA Organics* as an earned-income fresh produce sales venture. It has been very successful in expanding sales and serving a diversity of retail, food service and wholesale customers in the region from Monterey to the San Francisco Bay Area. Customers include UC Santa Cruz Housing and Dining Services, Delaware North Corporation (Asilomar Conference Center), San Jose Civic Center Catering Services, Dominican Hospital, Sutter Maternity and Surgery Center, Whole Foods Market, and many others in the restaurant and wholesale sectors. Dozens of small farmers in the region have sold to *ALBA Organics*. In order to address the sales growth, we formed the Monterey Bay Organic Farming Consortium among local, small- and mid-sized farmers to help serve UCSC. Currently more than three dozen farmers work with ALBA Organics. The business has run a slight deficit in most years of its operation, and annual sales since inception include the following:



Priorities for the Region

One key priority is the development of *ALBA Organics* as a successful social and earned-income venture. We have conducted legal reviews of various business and corporate structures for its long-term success. Currently *ALBA Organics* operates as a project of ALBA. We have also identified infrastructure needs in order to meet numerous vendor requirements of prospective customers with whom we are currently negotiating, particularly Sodexo Corporation. There are also numerous prospective retail and food service customers that we are approaching in 2008 in order to diversify sales outlets and support consistent sales throughout every season, working to overcome barriers we have faced.

Another fundamental priority is wealth creation in farm worker communities to create opportunities for families to escape poverty and overcome disenfranchisement. Of course, this priority is at the core of ALBA's work in small farm business incubation. This priority also dovetails with high rates of overweight children, obesity and diet-related disease among local Latino communities. To address these dynamics, ALBA has created a community food systems program that is working to expand healthful, local and organic food options in low-income communities. While we have established direct markets such as farmers' markets and Sunday morning farm stands in collaboration with churches, we continue to work on reaching retail and food service markets. We are committed to sustained, long-term efforts to truly diversify sales venues for healthy, green, fair and affordable food options.

There are also substantial priorities for training and technical assistance for expanded distribution of foods that are healthy, green, fair and affordable. Through ALBA's experience building a social venture that distributes fresh produce, many lessons have been learned. We are also developing a *Small Farm Business Incubator Manual* to serve as a resource for other groups nationwide. We are eager to share experience with organizations, retailers, and distribution companies that are part of our region's good food movement and are able to collaborate in this process. Primary needs include: 1) crop/market planning and balancing direct and wholesale markets, 2) analyzing, defining and establishing best labor practices, and 3) marketing and communications in order to foster involvement of immigrant and minority communities, and food-related businesses serving our communities. Examples include the mid-sized and small grocery chains such as *Mi Pueblo Food Centers*, *Esperanza* and *La Princesa* markets.

Significant needs exist for networking, especially with mid-sized retailers and immigrant/ethnic markets and in regard to culturally appropriate crops, including strategies for expanding demand for healthy food options in such markets. We intend to bring together stakeholders representing diverse Hispanic/Latino, African-American and Asian-American perspectives and values regarding healthy, green, fair and affordable foods. In addition, the multicultural and bi-national context in which we work presents challenges and opportunities. For example, one local, extended Latino family with whom we are acquainted owns and operates nearly 30 taquerías and other restaurants in the region. While we hope to build a business relationship, they are planning for vertical integration by producing vegetables on family lands in Mexico. Clearly we face complicated dynamics in building healthy, green, fair and affordable options in our region, but they are coupled with profound opportunities in the numerous large populations of people who are becoming increasingly aware of such a food system.

Finally, we must also focus on food safety protocols to meet the needs of scaled-up markets. A food safety crisis in the "fresh-cut" produce industry in our region, such as the e.coli problems in spinach, has generated a strong response from national retailers and industry groups. The result has essentially been a bifurcation of the California leafy greens industry. Large-scale grower-shipper companies with nationwide distribution are members of the California Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement; hundreds of smaller-scale farmers who engage in direct and local marketing are not. The marketing agreement has created production and harvest protocols with which it is nearly impossible for small- or mid-sized farmers to comply. *ALBA Organics'* decision to not be part of the marketing agreement has not significantly impacted our sales. However, we continue to invest time in establishing food safety protocols and related technical assistance for a diversity of farmers in order to be part of new markets.

Throughout our region there is great interest in developing innovative models for distribution of food that is healthy, green, fair and affordable. *ALBA Organics* is one successful example, and many organizations have benefited from our collaboration, including partners in our proposed regional steering

committee. ALBA operates the most established alternative distribution model in our region, and we have developed business plans, financing prospects and marketing materials to further advance it.

Work Plan

During the proposed one-year process, we intend to address nearly all of the priorities listed above by leveraging existing programs and business development. Specific priorities to be addressed by establishing a Regional Steering Committee of the National Good Food Network include:

1. Sharing successful business models that create both wealth in low-income communities and expand healthy food options throughout the region,¹
2. Training, technical assistance and collaboration to expand understanding and implementation of best practices for a food system that is green, healthy, fair and affordable, including criteria for each element thereof.
3. Networking and shared learning to proliferate opportunities and expand the ability to significantly “scale-up” distribution of foods that are healthy, green, fair and affordable.

In order to foster a regional community of practice, we will both engage a Regional Steering Committee and conduct extensive outreach to build a network that will learn from and expand the practices – both established and evolving – with the support of that committee. ALBA is uniquely positioned as a collaborator with dozens of multicultural partners, offers extensive produce distribution experience, and has commitments for participation from key leaders who can provide perspective and resources in several contexts.

Specific strategies and activities we will use to engage this work include:

1. **Build and Leverage Relationships:** Generate, proliferate and sustain relationships among regional experts with a strongly facilitated Regional Steering Committee of the National Good Food Network. We propose to conduct six 2-hour meetings over the twelve-month period, at least two of which will be in person, with the intention to expand activities in the future. In addition, each committee member will provide at least 4-8 additional hours of targeted assistance for business development and/or analysis.
2. **Expand Awareness of Community Benefits and Viability of Good Foods:** Develop and promote good food tenets to inform a broad network and community of practice among food-related businesses, food service companies, non-profit organizations, community health advocates, financial institutions, and social venture investors. Demonstrate the use of a bilingual/bicultural local foods promotion campaign, *Compre Lo Fresco de Nuestra Region* in collaboration with the Community Alliance with Family Farmers’ *Buy Fresh, Buy Local* campaign.
3. **Establish and Expand New Markets:** Create marketing partnerships and other strategies to expand demand for food that is healthy, green, fair and affordable, especially culturally appropriate crops among immigrant and multiethnic communities in California, by building and leveraging our relationships, business experience and growing network.
4. **Develop New Educational Opportunities:** Leverage existing ALBA and partners’ programs to provide additional business development and crop planning/distribution assistance to more than 50 farms and 30 additional businesses in year one, through workshops hosted by ALBA and by sharing the Regional Steering Committee’s ideas through presentations at other organizations’ workshops and meetings with prospective new markets.
5. **Collaborative Networking and Media Outreach:** Leverage and expand the relationships of Regional Steering Committee members and businesses and organizations in the community of practice to identify and act upon knowledge gaps. In addition, share those elements with other regional partners in the National Good Food Network as well as leadership in public outreach/communications. Finally, gain crucial knowledge from other regions’ networks, especially in regard to policy ideas and precedents that can be applied in our region and/or communities.

¹ The region is largely defined by our partners, stretching from the Salinas Valley in the south to the San Francisco Bay Area, altogether a population area with 6 million residents. Moreover, collaboration with additional groups and business models can spread the impact throughout much of California.

	Sep08	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan09	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	July	Aug
Regional Steering Committee	Face-to-Face: Intro and Work Plan	Follow-up: Assign Roles and Tasks	Conf Call: Values and Tenets	Follow-up: Codify Values and Criteria	Conf Call: Plan Education and Outreach	Follow-up: Recruit participation in workshops	Conf Call: Create Market Access Plan	Follow-up: Plan market distribution	Face-to-Face: Delegate Market and Public Outreach		Conf. Call: Assess Progress and Next Steps	
Expand Awareness of Good Food		Invite diverse participation		Document partners	Promote good food tenets							
Establish Markets	Identify 5+ retail prospects		Discuss market needs / crops			Establish partnerships		Start distribution				
Educational Workshops/ Exchange	Identify knowledge gaps			Prepare sharing plan	Identify workshops	Conduct workshops			Share knowledge*			
Networking and Media Outreach		Document key relationships		Develop framing strategies and talking points		Conduct outreach and nat'l cooperation*						

* - estimated periods for National Good Food Network knowledge exchange / dates not known

Results and Outcomes

The involvement of ALBA, *ALBA Organics*, the regional steering committee and partners will result in the following outcomes:

1. Document networking and relationship-building among regional steering committee members and stakeholders such as non-profit organizations, public health advocates, funders and/or investors, community development financing and business incubators.
2. Demonstrate awareness and understanding of best practices for each element of a food system that is healthy, green, fair and affordable among at least 15 new partners and prospects, including retail markets, food service companies, and prospective investors.
3. Expand *ALBA Organics* sales by 30% in 2009, including at least one additional national food service company and two retail outlets serving immigrant and/or low-income communities.
4. Gain access to community development financing for infrastructure upgrades and management assistance, totaling at least \$100,000 during the project period.
5. Establish educational programs and evaluation strategies to verify knowledge gained by 50 farmers, 30 non-farm businesses, 10 non-profit organizations and other members of the National Good Food Network through workshops and training programs.
6. Gain regional and national media exposure to promote the tenets and business models of the National Good Food Network, demonstrate a bilingual local foods campaign, and learn about policy initiatives that can support a food system that is healthy, green, fair and affordable.

It is important to note that as part of this project, ALBA will advance its use of Salesforce, an on-line customer relationship management database currently used most intensively to track client services in its small farm incubator program. The system will be adapted to: 1) record the involvement of steering committee members, 2) track and cultivate new partnerships both regionally and nationwide, 3) record sales relationships among new customers, 4) generate monitoring and evaluation reports regarding the efficacy of educational initiatives.

Collaborators in the Region

The following organizations and individuals have been identified as key collaborators in our work to contribute to a body of knowledge and practice in the National Good Food Network:

- Ron Stochlic*, Executive Director, California Institute for Rural Studies (530) 756-6555 *researching and defining fair labor practices / project monitoring and evaluation*
- Tim Galarneau*, Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems / UCSC Food Systems Working Group / UC Sustainable Foods Campaign (831) 459-3248 *networking and demonstrating examples in university and public school food service operations*
- Martha (Guzman) Aceves, Cultivo Consulting (626) 698-4798 *policy development*
- Marge Sanford, Purchasing Manager, Delaware North Companies (831) 642-4258 *customer feedback on partnerships and competitive price points*
- Carmen Herrera, Exec. Dir., El Pájaro Community Development Corporation (831) 722-1224 *business incubation, networking among food-related businesses, and bicultural training*
- Michael O’Gorman*, Just Farms Consulting & Jacobs Farm/Del Cabo Produce (619) 200-5954 *guidance on fair trade, fair labor practices, and scaling-up our crop planning and distribution*
- Jim Richardson, Exec. Director, National Rural Funders Collaborative (214) 824-4450 *networking, community development, policy development, and social venture financing*
- Chris Moss*, Coordinator, Network for a Healthy California / Monterey County Health Department (831) 755-4675 *public health outreach/ partnerships, policy development*
- Peggy da Silva*, Education and Training Manager, Veritable Vegetable (415) 641-3500 *training and distribution expertise, collaborative planning and new market access*
- Melanie Wong, MBA, MPH, Council for a Healthier Salinas (415) 309-7336 *policy development*

In addition, numerous organizations will be invited to join and/or learn from the process, including Roots of Change, Growers Collaborative, People’s Grocery, SAGE, and others. Notably, some current customers such as UCSC Housing and Dining Services believe they cannot serve in a collaborative role due to perceived preferences among competing vendors.

* - denotes persons interested in serving on the Regional Steering Committee, other candidates include: 1) both immigrant and U.S.-born farmers in the region, 2) retailers, particularly those serving immigrant communities, 3) public school food service officials, and 4) financial institutions / potential investors.

Establishing/Leveraging a Regional Steering Committee and Org’l Capacity

With resources from the National Good Food Network, ALBA will hire Jan S. Cohen to facilitate the steering committee and provide business planning assistance and social venture capital contacts and proposal assistance. She is an experienced facilitator, task-master and earned-income development specialist. She worked with *ALBA Organics* in 2005-2006 as leader of the Community Foundation for Monterey County’s *Business Ventures Institute*, helping six non-profit organizations to plan and implement earned-income strategies. In addition, the steering committee will be leveraged and supported with the involvement of Monica Rodriguez, sales and operations manager of *ALBA Organics*; Coy Williams, business development consultant for *ALBA Organics*; and Brett Melone, executive director.

Actions to Sustain the Regional Lead Team

ALBA intends to sustain the regional team by learning how to best meet members’ needs when we seek to formalize the group as an ongoing *ALBA Organics Business Advisory Committee*. We have a strong interest in leveraging the Good Food Network opportunity for participating farmers’ continued business development. Thus, we are eager to learn, share, and generate lasting organizational benefits with you.
