



STAFF REPORT
9/11/2024

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council Members

FROM: Gabriel Perez, Development Services Director

SUBJECT: Authorize Formation of a 2025 Coachella Agricultural Summit Ad-Hoc Committee and Appoint a Councilmember to the Committee

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the City Council authorize the formation of an ad-hoc committee tasked with organizing a Coachella Agricultural Summit and appoint a Councilmember as an ad-hoc committee member. The summit will bring together key stakeholders—including large and small farmers, agricultural-related businesses, nonprofits, educational institutions, markets, city officials, and restaurants—to support the agricultural industry in the City of Coachella and strengthen the local food system.

BACKGROUND:

Agriculture has long been a cornerstone of Coachella’s economy and cultural heritage. The city’s agricultural sector plays a vital role in sustaining the local food system, providing employment, and contributing to the city’s overall economic health. However, the sector faces various challenges, including water management issues, evolving market demands, and the need for innovative agricultural practices.

To ensure the sustainability and growth of the agricultural industry, it is crucial to bring together all relevant stakeholders to discuss current challenges, share knowledge, and develop strategies to strengthen the local food system. The City of Coachella once convened the AgSummit in the late 1990s through the early 2000s at Anthony Vineyards and convened farmers, educational institutions, elected officials, and other stakeholders. The proposed Agricultural Summit will serve as a platform for these discussions and will help identify actionable solutions to support the agricultural industry’s future success. In collaboration with Coachella Blue Zone efforts, the summit would explore the intersection between agriculture and health, highlighting how local food production can contribute to better health outcomes for residents.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS:

The Agricultural Summit objectives would be as outlined below:

1. **Stakeholder Engagement and Collaboration** – The summit would provide an opportunity to engage stakeholders across the local food system.
 - Foster collaboration among large and small farmers, agricultural-related businesses, schools, nonprofits, food banks, markets, city officials, and restaurants.
 - Facilitate networking and partnership opportunities to support the agricultural industry’s growth and innovation.
 - Develop strategies to address identified challenges and leverage opportunities to enhance the local food system.
2. **Thematic Summit Track Opportunities:**
 - **Agricultural Issues:** Discussion of key agricultural challenges and opportunities, including crop diversification, sustainable farming practices, water management, and access to resources.
 - **Agricultural Research:** Presentation of the latest research and technological advancements in agriculture, with a focus on innovation and sustainability.
 - **Food Security:** Discussion on strategies to ensure a resilient and secure local food system, including food access, distribution, and affordability.
 - **Farm-to-Table Initiatives:** Explore ways to strengthen connections between local farmers and restaurants, schools, and markets to promote the use of locally sourced food.
 - **Regenerative Agriculture:** Discuss regenerative farming practices that improve soil health, enhance biodiversity, and increase farm resilience to climate change.
 - **Urban Agriculture:** Investigate opportunities for urban farming initiatives, including community gardens and rooftop farms, to increase local food production.
 - **Labor and Workforce Development:** Address labor challenges in the agricultural sector, including workforce training, retention, and the promotion of fair labor practices.
 - **Marketing and Branding of Local Produce:** Strategies for marketing and branding local agricultural products to increase consumer awareness and support for local farmers.
 - **Agritourism:** Examination of opportunities to promote agritourism as a means of supporting local farmers and boosting the city’s economy.

Ad-Hoc Committee

In order to plan this effort it is recommend that an ad-hoc committee be established to meet monthly with the following recommended members:

- Councilmember Appointed
- Janell Percy, Growing Coachella Valley
- Juan de Lara, former Coachella Mayor and original AgSummit organizer
- Office of County Supervisor V. Manuel Perez representative
- Hidden Harvest representative, nonprofit
- Temalpakh Farms, Augustine Band of Cahuilla Indians
- Riverside County Office of Nutrition and Health Promotion representative

- Coachella Valley Unified School District representative
- Coachella Valley Water District
- City staff

GENERAL PLAN CONSISTENCY:

The Agricultural Summit would assist in implementation of the Coachella General Plan as outlined below:

<p>Sustainability and Natural Environment Element</p>
<p><u>Goal 5 Agricultural Preservation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural Economy - Maintain and support a viable agricultural economy within the City that recognizes the community’s agricultural heritage. • Agricultural Preservation and Preservation Tools • Water-efficient agriculture • Right to Farm - Support the right of existing farms to continue operations. • Farmworker Housing <p><u>Implementation Actions:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture education park (#7) • Right to Farm Ordinance (# 8)
<p>Community Health and Wellness Element</p>
<p><u>Goal 5 Local Food System</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local food production • Farmer’s markets • Community gardens • Edible school yards • Zoning for small scale food production • Community kitchens <p><u>Goal 6 Healthy Food Access</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy food retail • Food Access • Elimination of hunger • Nutrition Education • School food <p><u>Implementation Actions:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Edible landscapes (#21) • Community garden and composting education (#22) • Gardening tools and resources (#23) • Emergency Food (#24)

FISCAL IMPACT:

The estimated cost of organizing the Agricultural Summit is unknown and will be determined as the ad-hoc committee convenes, including venue rental, marketing, and workshop materials. Potential funding sources include sponsorships, registration fees, and contributions from local businesses and organizations.

ALTERNATIVES:

- 1) Authorize formation of a Coachella Agricultural Summit ad-hoc committee to implement Coachella General Plan Goals and appoint a Councilmember to serve on the committee.
- 2) Deny formation of a Coachella Agricultural Summit ad-hoc committee and suggest implementation of Coachella General Plan Goals through other methods.
- 4) Continue this item and provide staff and the applicant with direction.

RECOMMENDED ALTERNATIVE(S):

Staff recommends that the City Council approve Alternative #1.

Attachments:

1. 1999 AgSummit Program and newspaper articles