

UC SANTA CRUZ

Center for Agroecology

Impact Report 2024-2025



agroecology.ucsc.edu

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTORS



Dear Center for Agroecology supporters,

What a year it's been. The Center for Agroecology has seen so much growth and success this year, supporting community gardeners and small-scale farmers, conducting novel research, fostering equitable access to agricultural education, and shifting institutional supply chains.

Yet, like many Americans, we found ourselves under threat. Federal funding for our incredible projects has been clawed back entirely or frozen and unfrozen so often that we do not know if we will be paid for work we have done. This instability has taken a tremendous toll on us and those we serve, making our work even harder to accomplish.

Despite this challenge, 2025 was undeniably one of our most impactful years. We managed six USDA research trials, including testing over 35 different tomato varieties and investigating the impacts of cover crops on drinking water quality. We served over 400 farmers with technical assistance around marketing and crop production. And we engaged more students — for more hours — than ever before.

That success has grounded us and given us resolve. Because despite the serious efforts to undermine our work this is clear evidence of the continued reach and impact that would have been unimaginable at the Center's founding 58 years ago.

To that point, this year we are launching a campaign to acquire 214 acres of prime agricultural land along the Santa Cruz coast with campus support. This project, over a decade in the making, will allow the Center, and the campus, to fully realize its potential as a public university at the service of organic agriculture, farmers of all sizes, and the communities that make agriculture possible. We are under no illusion about the scale of what this effort will take or the resources needed to bring this transformative vision to life.

But we are dreamers. Ever since students first chipped away at a clay hillside with pickaxes hoping to turn it into the "chocolate cake" soil it is today, and our faculty and researchers set out to prove how to grow strawberries organically, we've known what it takes to bring the seemingly impossible into reality. To turn the improbable into the everyday.

So, in the midst of a year marked by global, national, and regional challenges, we are not deterred. We will not back down. Because we've seen the difference our work makes: in the global adoption of cover cropping practices, in the lives of our students, in the strength of the communities we serve. This has never been short-term work. Organic and agroecological farming is not something you dabble in for a month, a season, or even a year. These are systems that return value over decades — and we're in it for the long haul.

In the pages ahead, you'll see the impact of that commitment in the work, the people, and the communities we serve. We hope you're as inspired as we are.

Sincerely,

Darryl Wong, Ph.D.

Executive Director, Center for Agroecology

Stacy Philpott

Faculty Director, Center for Agroecology
Dean, UCSC Agricultural Experiment Station
Professor, Environmental Studies Department
Ruth & Alfred Heller Chair in Agroecology

STUDENT & ALUMNI SPOTLIGHTS

"I've seen the impact that being involved with the center has. It really helps everybody to stay connected and work towards the goal of sustainable agriculture, while providing food and education for students. I feel like I've really grown a lot as a person and in my career at the time here, and I feel like other people could also gain that experience by becoming involved in learning what it is that we do here." -EMILY ESQUIVEL



EMILY ESQUIVEL

Sustainable education assistant, agroecology & earth sciences combined major, class of 2024

"This is a really great program and a really great opportunity. I've seen how impactful it can be, both for myself and for others, just to get the chance to learn by doing. I think it's very often an undervalued part of learning. I think it's really important for people to be connected to their food." - REUBEN EZEKIEL

REUBEN EZEKIEL

Chadwick Garden student worker, environmental studies major, class of 2025



"I think this is a very special place to get such amazing hands-on experience that I don't think I could find elsewhere, and in such a beautiful place. With my experience working on the farm I was able to get another job in a soils lab under Dr. Hannah Waterhouse, and it really solidified my commitment towards sustainable food systems and soil health. And right now, I'm applying to graduate programs. So I think I think I'm going to be on this path for a long time." -MARCO NUÑEZ



Photo: Jim Clark

MARCO NUÑEZ

Field student manager, agroecology & economics combined major, class of 2025

The mission of the Center for Agroecology is to advance agroecology and equitable food systems through experiential education, participatory research, agricultural extension, and public service.





Photo: Jim Clark

Our undergraduate education programming offers students hands-on experiences that prepare them for graduate study or careers in agriculture and related fields. We also create opportunities for all students to explore where their food comes from and to think critically about the social, environmental, and economic factors involved in how food is produced and consumed.



90

Agroecology Majors
with 17 graduating this year



114

Undergraduate Interns



494

Students Enrolled
in agroecology classes
on the farm



85

Paid Student Employees
engaged in over
26,000 hours of paid work

CULTIVATING STUDENT LEADERS

The USDA-funded **NextGen Program** is expanding access to agricultural careers for students from diverse backgrounds. The program unites UC Santa Cruz, CSU Monterey Bay, Hartnell College, and ALBA to create a cross-institutional pipeline that has already supported 2,550 students toward graduate study and careers.

Launched last year, the 17-unit UC-wide **Agroecology Field Quarter** offers seven weeks of immersive, hands-on learning in sustainable agriculture. Based at the UCSC Farm and partner sites across Northern California, the program blends classroom study with real-world experience alongside seasoned practitioners.



The **Leadership Development Program** helps students explore and grow in food and agriculture through inclusive, low-barrier opportunities—like events, campus produce, and community spaces. It then offers pathways to deeper engagement through internships, paid roles, and research, empowering diverse students to become leaders in building more equitable, sustainable food systems.

FEEDING OUR COMMUNITY

Through our produce offerings, food access programs, and advocacy for sustainable procurement across UC campuses, we're advancing just, resilient food systems.

SUPPORTING STUDENT FOOD SECURITY

We believe that access to fresh, nutritious food is a basic right—and essential to student well-being and academic success. To help meet that need, we provide free and low-cost organic produce and prepared meals to students. This support has reduced food insecurity on campus and helped students stay healthy, focused, and engaged in their studies.

32,310 lbs

of UCSC Farm-grown produce
donated to Basic Needs outlets

200+
free meals per day

25,000+ total, were served
at the Cowell Coffee Shop

7,100+
unique students

served by Center-supported
Basic Needs programs

40,000
touch points

reaching 36% of the total
UCSC student population



"Knowing that the food I was harvesting would go to the Cowell Coffee Shop in order to feed students for free made me realize how large of an impact this internship makes."

LINDESY SANDS, STUDENT INTERN

UC GLOBAL CLIMATE LEADERSHIP COUNCIL SUSTAINABLE FOOD SOURCING

We're supporting UC in achieving its goal of sourcing 25% of its food from sustainable sources by 2030. This year marked phase two of the project, with a focus on supporting convenings, trainings, and technical assistance.

- Connected over 180 farmers, food hubs, and institutional and community-based organizations
- 2X increase in sales for small-scale fisherfolk and 200,000+ lbs of regenerative, grassfed meat sourced into the UC system
- Introduced 10 small underserved producers to existing produce distributor wholesale pathways across UC sites



RESEARCH FOR CLIMATE & COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

We collaborate across multiple disciplines on campus, with other universities, and with community partners to conduct research that integrates natural and social sciences. Our work focuses on practical solutions for sustainable and equitable food systems, including climate-resilient crops and sustainable farming practices. We also provide meaningful opportunities for students to engage directly with this research.



FY2025 RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

CDFA MULTI-STATE DRY FARM TOMATO RESEARCH

This year we planted more than 15 varieties of dry farm tomatoes in collaboration with Oregon State University, including grafted varieties, to see how new cultivars might perform on yield and disease resistance. These varieties will be part of grower trials in 2026.

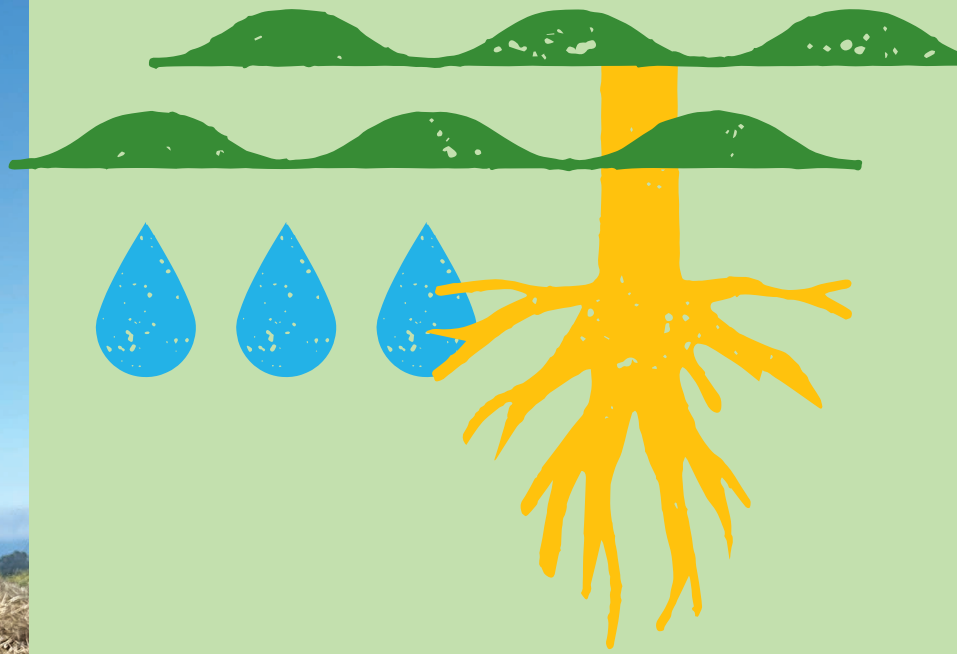
GORDON NO-TILL TRIAL-PHASE 2

This year we saw surprising results: no-till summer cover crop plots with compost performed just as well as tilled plots—with or without compost. No-till plots without compost only saw about 50% of that growth. These are some of the most promising results we've seen in organic no-till farming so far.

SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS WINE GRAPE GROWERS AND WINERIES RESEARCH NEEDS

We surveyed local wine grape growers and wineries to understand current challenges, research needs, and interest in partnering with UC Santa Cruz researchers.





FY2025 NEW RESEARCH GRANTS

OPTIMIZATION OF STEAM SOIL DISINFESTATION FOR HEALTHY SOILS AND COMMUNITIES AROUND THE AG-URBAN INTERFACE OF COASTAL CALIFORNIA

Funded by a multiple year CDFA grant, this project will develop and deploy a biologically based farming system that is a scalable replacement for pre-plant soil fumigation in strawberries.

CALIFORNIA ORGANIC, AGROECOLOGY, REGENERATIVE (COAR) TRANSITIONS

Funded by the UC Office of the President, this multi-campus research will map hot spots of agroecological transition in California and investigate policy innovations to support transitions across the state.

CRITICAL INCLUSIVE AGTECH

Funded by the 11th Hour Project of the Schmidt Family Foundation, this project will investigate the process of community-driven problem identification in AgTech and will entail working with a cohort of small-scale growers to understand their needs.



This is such a great class and will be very useful in getting my own organic farm started. [Course instructor] Christof [Bernau] has so much knowledge and is really an expert on citrus growing.

CITRUS SHORT COURSE
PARTICIPANT

EMPOWERING SMALL-SCALE FARMERS & FOOD ENTREPRENEURS

SHORT COURSES AND WORKSHOPS FOR SMALL-SCALE FARMERS

We wrapped up a 4-year CDFA-funded project: Organic Specialty Crop Training Courses for Growing More Diverse, Sustainable Small Farm Operations. Course topics included fruit tree planting and care, organic flower production, whole farm scouting and more.

SOUTHWEST REGIONAL FOOD BUSINESS CENTER (SWRFBC)

As a key partner in the USDA SWRFBC, we support small-scale farmers and food businesses with technical assistance and market access across 14 California counties. This work strengthens local food economies, helps historically underserved producers thrive, and builds a more resilient, equitable regional food system.



17 courses

341 participants

94% participants gained
knowledge and would
use what they learned



480 enterprises
and farms served

10 small farms and enterprises
supported with market
enhancement projects

FOSTERING COMMUNITY & CAMPUS ENGAGEMENT

RETURN OF OUR ANNUAL FARM TO FORK DINNER

Last September marked the return of our Farm to Fork benefit dinner on the UCSC Farm. The festive event will resume as an annual offering and we look forward to connecting the community with the farm year after year.

THEN AND NOW, NOW AND THEN: CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF PUBLIC WORKSHOPS AT THE UCSC FARM & GARDEN

Last August, we commemorated 50 years of public workshops at the Farm & Garden and 50 years of Orin Martin's teaching. Four hundred alumni, farmers, and community members attended the event which consisted of a talk and demonstration by Orin and his students followed by a reception and remarks on the impact of Orin and our long history of public workshops.



Our public- and campus-facing programming creates opportunities for people to engage with food, farming, and one another in meaningful ways. From volunteer days and guided farm tours to u-pick events, produce and flower sales, and campus celebrations, these offerings invite participants to connect with the land, learn where their food comes from, and cultivate community.

11

public workshops with
250+ attendees

500

visitors attended our
berry u-picks on the farm

25

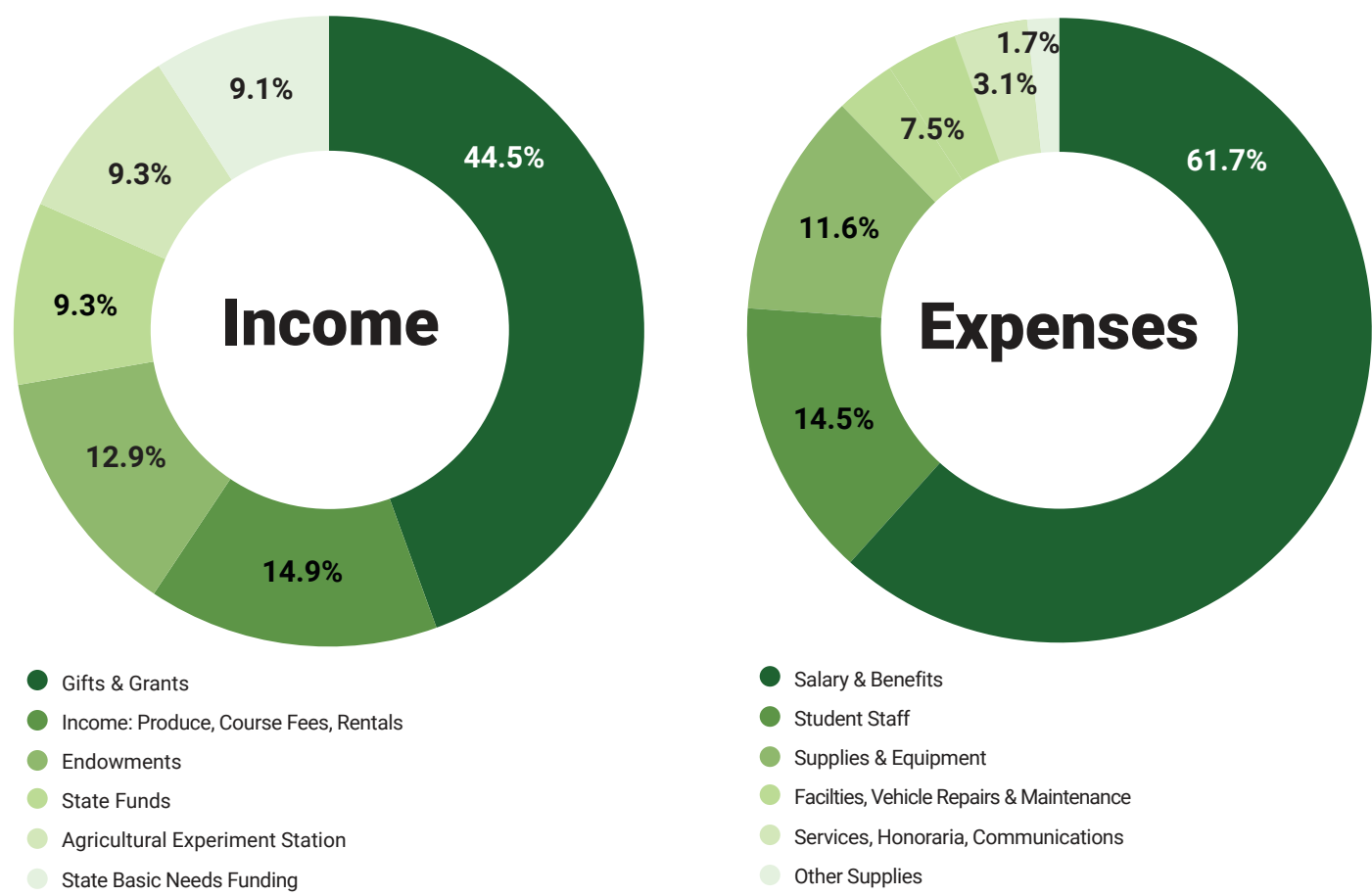
student-led workshops and events
serving more than 1000 students



"Our family and our toddlers had the best time picking strawberries and blueberries today. The strawberries and blueberries are the BEST I have ever eaten. The event felt like our community came together, not to mention the spectacular view!"

U-PICK CUSTOMER

FUNDING & SUPPORT FY24-25



GRANT & MAJOR GIFT FUNDERS IN FY24-25

CDFA Biological Integrated Farming Systems
CDFA Specialty Crop Block Grant
CDFA Water Efficiency Technical Assistance subaward
Clarence E. Heller Charitable Foundation
Friends of the UCSC Farm & Garden
Gaia Fund
Helen and Will Webster Foundation
Henryorg Foundation
Ida & Robert Gordon Family Foundation
Joanna Miller

M&T Fantastic Family Foundation
Newman's Own Foundation
NOAA Climate Resilience Regional Challenge
Schmidt Family Foundation/11th Hour
Sharon Naraghi Farms
UC MultiCampus Research Programs and Initiatives (MRPI)
UC Santa Cruz Innovation & Business Engagement Hub
UCOP Global Climate Leadership Council
UCSC AES Faculty Research Grant

UCSC Carbon Fund
UCSC Center for Coastal Climate Resiliency
USDA From Learning to Leading: Cultivating the Next Generation of Diverse Food and Agriculture Professionals Program (NextGen)
USDA Hispanic Serving Institutions Grant Program
USDA Organic Research & Extension Initiative
USDA Regional Food Business Centers
USDA Specialty Crop Multi-State Program
We are grateful for the many contributions to the Center for Agroecology and the Friends of the UCSC Farm & Garden!

LOOKING AHEAD

EXPANDING OUR IMPACT THROUGH A TRANSFORMATIVE LAND OPPORTUNITY

UC Santa Cruz is working to pursue 214 acres of private, ocean-front farmland that borders the Coastal Science Campus. By uniting the Center for Agroecology and the Natural Reserves System, the site will serve as a dynamic hub for hands-on research, organic regenerative agriculture, conservation, and public engagement. Building on UCSC's legacy as a pioneer of the organic movement, the certified organic ranch will offer a living laboratory for climate-resilient farming and restoration practices. With expanded access for students, researchers, and the public, Ocean Cliffs Ranch will inspire the next generation of changemakers and demonstrate a scalable model for the future of coastal land use.

SUPPORT OUR WORK!

We owe so much to our many supporters—individuals and family foundations that care deeply about creating food and agriculture systems that sustain people and the planet. Grants, gifts, and other donations are essential to continue the Center's work and to steward the UCSC Farm and Alan Chadwick Garden sites. Becoming a Friends of the UCSC Farm & Garden member is a great way to support the Center for Agroecology's work! For more information about supporting our center's work, visit **agroecology.ucsc.edu/support** or scan the QR code.



#502

University of California Santa Cruz
Center for Agroecology
1156 High Street
Santa Cruz, CA 95064



VISIT US

We invite you to visit the UCSC Farm and Alan Chadwick Garden, open to the public daily from **8am to 6pm**. Find a self-guided tour booklet on our website.

GET INVOLVED

Attend a workshop, join an event or guided tour, shop at our farmstand, or volunteer! Visit **agroecology.ucsc.edu/news-events** to see our upcoming opportunities.

CONTACT US

UC Santa Cruz Center for Agroecology
1156 High Street, Santa Cruz, CA
(831) 459-3240
agroecology@ucsc.edu
agroecology.ucsc.edu

JOIN THE FRIENDS OF THE UCSC FARM & GARDEN

Join the many community members throughout the Monterey Bay region and beyond who enjoy and support our programs. For more information on becoming a member, see **agroecology.ucsc.edu/get-involved/friends/** or email **agroecology@ucsc.edu**.

