



## Santa Cruz County Cuisine Tourism Initiative

A summary of the project (in process for community input) and a resident survey are available for review at <https://santacruzcountyaz.gov/833/Plans-and-Reports>

### What is the purpose of the Santa Cruz County Cuisine Tourism Initiative?

Santa Cruz County received a \$300,000 grant from the US Economic Development Administration to develop a countywide cuisine tourism action plan that connects the fast-growing wine sector<sup>1</sup> with businesses countywide to capture increased tourism spending<sup>2</sup>. The initiative is also intended to build upon the local nature-based restorative economy<sup>3</sup>, made up of employers in nature-based tourism, and conservation, restoration and preservation.

### How is the initiative being developed and what is the timeline?

The initiative has two phases for which the county is soliciting stakeholder input:

The first phase (fall 2023 through winter 2024) establishes a community-led vision to develop appropriate land use planning tools to 1) mitigate impacts of growth, such as already occurring in residential areas near the wineries; 2) offer wineries regulatory relief within a proposed district boundary offering more flexibility in exchange for following development standards. This phase includes:

- A **market study** to assess the economic potential of cuisine tourism to rebuild lost tourism employment.
- A **winery district master plan** recommending a community vision and conceptual land use plan. Community input will shape the proposed boundary for the district. Plan development will follow a process similar to that completed for the [Rio Rico Vitality District Master Plan](#).
- A proposed **land use overlay district and zoning regulations** with the purpose of encouraging future economic growth in strategic locations while mitigating land use compatibility issues. Overlay districts are commonly used growth management tools among local governments for

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<sup>1</sup> The county has 13 tasting rooms, and employment was up in this sector 76% since the pandemic, according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census, 2019 through Q2 2022).

<sup>2</sup> Tourism and travel spending grew by 36.1% throughout the state from 2011 to 2019, but in Santa Cruz County, tourism and travel spending declined by 1.9% over that same period. The pandemic cut tourism and travel spending by 49.5% in Santa Cruz compared to 41.2% in Arizona. (Source: The Economic Impact of Travel: Arizona Office Tourism. 2021.)

<sup>3</sup> This sector of the local economy contributes to 1,200 jobs, \$53.8 million in county GDP, \$121.7 million in sales, \$41.2 million in labor income and \$4.7 million in state and local tax revenues, as defined in a University of Arizona 2021 study, [The Nature-Based Restorative Economy in Santa Cruz County, Arizona](#). Local groups raised \$48,000 from 21 individuals, organizations, and businesses funding to pay for the study (source: Patagonia Regional Times, March 4, 2022).

promoting flexible and incentive-based development in exchange for compatibility within the community context.

The second phase of the project (late winter-summer of 2024) will build on the first to develop a business, branding and marketing plan. The business plan will outline potential pathways for sustainable jobs in cuisine tourism that leverage the county’s existing culinary arts sector and commercial kitchens in Nogales, Sonoita, and Patagonia.

### How can the community shape the plan?

A consultant team, Urban Scenarios, retained by the county through a competitive request for proposals process, has been and will continue collecting community input to shape the plan. They have done so through several meetings held in October 2023. Below are upcoming opportunities for community input; email [thatch@urban-scenarios.com](mailto:thatch@urban-scenarios.com) for questions.

1) **Community Meeting:** 6pm, January 16, 2024 at Pioneer Hall at the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds in Sonoita

2) **Community Meeting on Zoom:** 7pm, January 23, 2024  
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/2184217485?pwd=M25obFF4ZVcxU1g5MVR3MjJZVGpxZz09>  
Meeting ID: 218 421 7485  
Passcode: 082026

3) A **community input survey** (QR code on the right) is open through December 31, 2023

4) A **StoryMap** (QR code on the right) with key information about the project, updated as community input is received



### What is the county’s role in this work?

The county’s role is to support and coordinate development of the initiative. The county will not be building out the master plan itself but could support public improvements necessary for its development. The county also can streamline land use regulations as well as support collaborative partnerships needed for implementation of the business, branding, and marketing plan.

### What are the next steps?

The Planning and Zoning Commission and Board of Supervisors will be hosting public hearings in the summer of 2024 for consideration of the master plan, land use overlay district and zoning regulations. If approved, a comprehensive plan amendment would be coordinated to reflect continuity with other plans. The county could also create design guidelines to create a place that attracts the type of activities and businesses to support this work.