

The Faces of Sustainability series highlights how Bay Area residents are making their communities better places to live, protecting their natural environment, and conducting business in ways that promote quality of life for subsequent generations.



Full Circle Farm groundbreaking, September 2007.
Courtesy of Lilia Schwartz



Bay Area Counties

Santa Clara County, home to world-famous Silicon Valley, is the largest of the nine San Francisco Bay Area Counties in both area and population. Over the past half century the county has changed radically as high-tech business and the development following in its trail have largely replaced what was once a primarily agricultural area. Today, agriculture is limited to the southern extreme of the county. Along with innovation, Silicon Valley, the county’s economic core, has brought new challenges to sustainability—traffic congestion, high energy consumption and related greenhouse gas emissions, and lack of affordable housing among them.

Municipalities, non-governmental organizations, and private businesses throughout the county are well aware of these challenges and increasingly are developing creative solutions, individually and collectively, to address them. Here we present a brief overview of a few recent initiatives, beginning with the region’s thorniest problem, transportation.

Transportation

According to the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, in 2000 (the most recent data available), 935,000 people commuted to work in Santa Clara County every day, more than 147,000 (16%) of them coming from outside the county. At the same time, 97,000 were commuting out of the county. In 2005, 74% of commuters in Santa Clara County were driving alone. This puts a huge number of vehicles on the road and a significant amount of CO₂ in the air. The approaches to changing these driving patterns are many and varied.

A leader in the region’s sustainability efforts is the Silicon Valley Leadership Group (SVLG), whose 210 member companies cooperate with local, regional, state, and federal governments to address major public policy issues affecting the economic health and quality of life in Silicon Valley. Currently, some 55 of SVLG’s companies are participating in “Cool Commutes,” a yearlong competition to reduce solo driving to work, cut carbon emissions, and lower

