

Sonoma Mendocino Economic Development District (SMEDD)

April 2024 Update

Team Members

- Brad Johnson, Special Projects Analyst
- Katherine DiPasqua, Director

Event: Biomass Utilization Symposium

- The Sonoma Mendocino Economic Development District (SMEDD) is hosting a Biomass Utilization Symposium event on Friday, May 3rd, from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. at the UCANR Hopland Research and Extension Center, Shippey Hall.

The symposium will be an educational opportunity to discuss emerging biomass utilization technology and entrepreneurship. Specifically, the diverse group of experts will be discussing topics such as fire safety, forest health, renewable energy, wood products, and sustainable rural economic development.

There will also be a field trip to Old World Winery in Fulton, CA, on Thursday, May 2nd, from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Derek Trowbridge, owner of Old World Winery, has developed a unique process to convert left-over wood chippings from fire safety tree work into high-quality soil compost that is being utilized by local agricultural producers. Due to the success of the pilot project, he is in the process of developing a larger facility in Cloverdale to meet the growing demand.

Tickets are \$75 for the symposium on May 3rd, \$25 for the field trip on May 2nd (lunch will be served), or \$90, which includes attendance to both events. More information on the event, including the agenda, ticket purchasing, and sponsors, can be viewed on [SMEDD's website](#).

Ag-Tech Innovation

- Since hosting the Ag-Tech Innovation event in May 2023, the SMEDD has engaged various organizations on the topic of Ag-Tech. Two of the most prominent are the Sonoma County Winegrowers Association and the VINE by the University of California Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources (UCANR).
 - The Sonoma County Winegrowers have integrated themselves as the premier technology incubator for one of the region's largest cash crops, wine grapes. The Sonoma County Winegrowers have successfully engaged in and implemented private public partnerships with Ford, John Deere, and others to incubate sustainable, efficient, resilient, and climate smart agricultural technologies in their members' vineyards. Such technologies include fully electrified trucks from Ford and tractors from John Deere. Additional technology includes AI-generated smart spraying systems.
 - The VINE is a knowledge-based network organization funded by UCANR. They are currently developing a physical ag-tech incubator and pilot center in California's Sacramento Valley. Their expertise and assets span beyond their physical location. Their primary asset is the vast network of knowledge that implements ag-tech along each node of the supply chain, from producing food to putting it on the table.

SMEDD has also been working with regional economic development planning and funding organizations under the CA Jobs First opportunity (previously known as the California Economic Resiliency Fund). Unfortunately, the state has separated the district into two separate regions, with Sonoma County joining the Bay Area region and Mendocino County joining the North Coast. This has provided a challenge to planning and advocating for SMEDD CEDS-related goals, but it has also presented an opportunity to identify sectors that fit the needs of a greater region.

Sonoma County has been paired with Marin County to identify approximately four projects to propose to the Bay Area Committee for a portion of the \$9,000,000 of regional funding. The SMEDD has developed a proposal for \$300,000 that would fund a feasibility study and subsequent strategic plan to inventory assets and assess opportunities for ag-tech innovation in the North-Bay. The feasibility study would outline the existing regional assets, opportunities, threats, and weaknesses to the ag-tech sector. Additionally, it would provide a comprehensive implementation plan (strategic plan) to develop value-added and climate-smart industries that are directly and indirectly related to agricultural production through innovative technology. Leveraging the relationships with the VINE and Sonoma County Winegrowers Association, the feasibility study will outline the existing network and gaps for ag-tech development in our region.

Letters of Support:

- One of the simplest and most effective ways SMEDD can be used is to provide letters of support to organizations applying for grant funds for a project that directly relates to the goals in the CEDS. Letters of support issued by SMEDD in the past year include:

Request From	Topic/Project	SMEDD Letter Issued to Requestor	Status of Grant Award
Sonoma-Marin Area Rail Transit District (SMART)	Connecting Cloverdale to the Bay – Equitable Transportation Access & Resilience Project	02/26/2024	Under Review
Regenerative Forest Solutions	Woody FeedStock Pilot Project (CalFire)	9/27/2023	Under Review
Regenerative Forest Solutions	Woody FeedStock Pilot Project (Bay Area Council)	9/27/2023	Awarded
Mendocino Forest Products	Biomass-to-Hydrogen Grant Application	9/15/2023	Awarded
West Business Development Center	CalOSBA Blue Economy iHub	8/31/2023	Under Review
Regenerative Forest Solutions	Woody FeedStock Pilot Project USDA Forest Service	8/9/2023	Under Review
Regenerative Forest Solutions	NCRP Woody FeedStock Pilot Project	8/9/2023	Awarded
Sonoma County Meat Company	USDA Local Meat Capacity Grant	6/21/2023	Under Review
Noyo Harbor	Noyo Harbor District Port Infrastructure Development	4/24/2023	Under Review

Board Vacancy

- Currently, there are two vacant seats on the SMEDD Board. If you, or someone you know is interested in learning more about the SMEDD and the duties of a board member, please connect them directly with Brad Johnson, Bradley.johnson@sonoma-county.org.