



2017

# QUAIL SPRINGS STRATEGIC PLAN



**QUAIL SPRINGS**  
PERMACULTURE

Quail Springs Permaculture (QS) is a leading environmental and educational non-profit located in the Cuyama Valley, Santa Barbara County, CA. At its inception in 2004, QS created a 200-year plan for the organization that considered its impact for the next seven generations. QS staff are passionate about restoring our planet; they believe that these times offer a call to action to live regeneratively, not just sustainably. QS has long been a learning and demonstration center for local and international students. It is a hub for people to share and discover ways of deepening their understanding of regenerative living.



## Our Mission

To empower students of all ages and backgrounds with knowledge, skills, and inspiration essential to cultivating ecological and social health.



## Our Vision

QS envisions an equitable global community that shares the bounty of this living planet and the responsibility to tend to its health. We believe the most effective way to foster positive change is through our relationships, both with one another and our ecologies.



## Who We Serve

QS' constituency includes Cuyama Valley youth, grade-school students from multiple California counties, as well as college students and adults from around the world seeking our unique educational offerings.



## Who We Are

QS staff is a collective of on-site educators, farmers, ecologists, natural builders, chefs, artists, and other talented team members, connected to expansive local and international networks of leading-edge practitioners and passionate change-makers.

**3** ways QS accomplishes its mission:

**YOUTH & ADULT PROGRAMMING**

**MAINTAINING AN EXAMPLE OF HIGH-DESERT REGENERATIVE HUMAN SETTLEMENT**

**PARTNERSHIPS WITH FOR-PROFIT & NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS**

## SUMMARY



Quail Springs provides transformational, hands-on experiences for its constituents in the areas of community development, regenerative land management, ancestral skills, nature connection, rites of passage, social justice, and natural building. These specialties provide students with the opportunity to become leaders in the world we are regenerating together. This strategic plan will hold the organization accountable toward goals that broaden the impacts of QS' work and reduce financial stress. While the plan holds a 200-year vision in mind, it focuses on attainable strategies for the next five years and will be revisited and updated annually.

Strategic planning began in 2014, with the hiring of a new Executive Director and the completion of 10 years of service. The QS staff and board members have engaged consistently for the last three years in ongoing visioning and planning sessions, creating documents that comprehensively outline aspects of the site, the organization, and our goals. The overarching theme of these sessions has been the need for increased clarity. Outcomes include clear mission and vision statements, a new website that clearly communicates our work, and clarity around target areas of improvement.

### QS Strengths:

**Dedicated staff and volunteers:** QS has a team dedicated to the organizational mission; based on average national salaries, staff donate approximately \$300,000 in labor annually. The QS staff includes several members who have been with the organization for more than a decade. The nonprofit attracts hundreds of volunteers to the demonstration site annually.

**Strong programming:** A strong staff provides teaching, catering, farm-fresh meat and produce, and facilities management for the fully contained on-site courses. Many schools return every year for field trips, many adults return to attend additional workshops, and QS has created relationships with several international development organizations who send staff to our courses.

**World-renowned permaculture site:** Building on eight years of on-site food production, QS is recognized as a leader in arid-land food production education. The site produces all its meat and dairy and a growing percentage of vegetables in a rain-shadow region that gets only 8" of rain annually with soils that were once substantially degraded, relying on a limited amount of gravity-fed water from our spring.

### QS Limitations:

**Fundraising:** The staff and BOD have limited experience in raising funds. Experience is increasing due to the Capital Campaign, but there are currently no separate development staff whose main focus is fundraising (other than the externally hired capital campaign manager). The organization has also struggled with gaps in administration staffing, placing excessive workloads on existing staff.

**Difficult location:** Due to the remoteness of the site, some groups and individuals are unable to receive services. Weather extremes in the summer and winter limit annual course programming. Our site is not ADA, and to make it handicap-accessible would require substantial resources.

**Capital improvements needed:** The farm has been without a working farm truck for two years. Because the bulk of the incoming resources have been earmarked for paying the lien on the land in Phase I of the Capital Campaign, finances have been unusually stretched in the already small budget for the organization. Additionally, the spring-fed garden relies on nearly 50-year-old infrastructure that is dilapidated and rapidly becoming defunct. Minor repairs have been made, but an overhaul on the whole system is needed and would have substantial impact on increasing food production, thus reducing overall expenditures on food.



## OUR FIVE-YEAR GOALS

2017-2022

### #1 INCREASE DIVERSITY

Quail Springs aims to be a leader in diversifying the face of permaculture. Realizing that more must be done in the permaculture community to include marginalized peoples in our work, especially economically underprivileged & non-white demographics, the organization has partnered with a consulting group, Bridge & Edge, to explore issues of justice and equity as a community. Ongoing staff development in this sphere began in February 2017. QS already explicitly implements an affirmative action policy in hiring, and continues to offer more than \$20,000/year in scholarships or discounts to course participants in need.

Since 2015, QS has been offering youth programming in the wider Cuyama Valley area. This work partners QS with existing groups such as the Cuyama Valley Family Resource Center (CVFRC), Cuyama Valley Future Leaders youth group, Blue Sky Center, and the community at large. Outreach in the surrounding Ventura, Santa Barbara, and San Luis Obispo counties as well as the Los Angeles area has enabled the QS team to connect with new communities of low-income youth, LGBTQ-identified people, and People of Color, offering empowering education to the under-served. This work is at the crux of the non-profit's mission.

### #2 STREAMLINE PROGRAMMING

Courses are the central pillar of this organization. Students come to study at QS from both the neighboring community and from all over the world. The Executive Director and Program Coordinator have made substantial progress in tracking inputs and outputs from courses over the last several years. In that time, programs have made the non-profit financially viable, with course-related revenue nearly doubling in the last two years. More schools are bringing their students to the farm, and in FY2016 programming brought in nearly 44% of non-Capital Campaign income. Expanding on this success, QS is exploring how courses can generate enough surplus to meet QS' operational budget needs while being more widely inclusive of marginalized demographics. One strategy is to build a more robust program team on site and to "stack" programs that are similar in nature.

#### GOAL:

**Diversify staff and student enrollment.**

#### STRATEGIES:

1. Ally with social justice organizations in the region, including Bridge and Edge, One Step a la Vez, Santa Barbara Transgender Advocacy Network, and Homeboy Industries, among others.
2. Continue staff inclusivity trainings focused on race, sexual orientation, and disability.
3. Diversify marketing efforts to better reach under-served communities.
4. Improve affirmative action practices for student enrollment and staff hiring.
5. Seek grants and funding to provide scholarships to low-income students.

#### GOAL:

**Bolster program team and streamline programming.**

#### STRATEGIES:

1. Develop a dedicated programming team of four to five people.
2. Improve already existing scholarship system to ensure we turn no student away because of financial hardship.
3. Create more opportunities for "stacking programs" by determining which programs can be held simultaneously

## #3 IMPROVE FINANCIAL RESILIENCE

Quail Springs is a small non-profit with an operating budget of less than \$345,000 in FY2016. Expenses are kept low by an innovative system in which the organization provides room and board to staff, and in which the demonstration farm produces thousands of dollars' worth of meat, dairy, and vegetables for staff and course participants. That said, goals include increasing the number of staff, raising staff incomes, and creating more resilient income streams that can relieve financial stress on the organization.

QS aims to diversify its income for greater financial security in the coming five years. The organization has long relied on donations and an increasing percent of income from programs. Hundreds of supporters are listed in the donor database, but the organization relies on a few key large donors. An expanded network of supporters could bring in needed financial support, increase course attendance, strengthen the volunteer and donor bases, and establish a greater number of regular monthly donations. Furthermore, the organization is exploring opportunities for passive income (i.e., 1% for the planet and Amazonsmile purchases), receiving stock and bequests, and a percent of profits from individual livelihood strategies undertaken on the land (i.e., combining ecological restoration via holistic management through a large-scale sheep operation). Grants from foundations and the private sector have also been a major source of income in the past and will continue to be sought in addition to ongoing relationship-building and joint funded projects with for-profit corporations and other organizations whose missions are in alignment with QS.

## GOAL:

**Increase financial resilience via diversified income streams.**

## STRATEGIES:

1. Invest in mission-based businesses led by long-term staff, such as a holistic grazing operation.
2. Continue to pursue other forms of passive income.
3. Hire a Development Director to spearhead fundraising efforts, grant writing, and networking.
4. Improve farm productivity to reduce off-site inputs, grow high-expense purchased items and cultivate more land (dependent on improved water infrastructure).



## #4 ECOLOGICAL RESEARCH & RESTORATION

In the past, Quail Springs has not documented its significant ecological restoration efforts. For instance, although staff and volunteers have spent thousands of hours restoring our highly degraded on-site waterway, Burgess Creek, no thorough documentation or data collection occurred to identify resulting hydrologic outcomes. What is known, however, is that a spring that once provided a gallon a minute when the farm was acquired now produces an average of sixty gallons a minute.

QS now aims to partner with private, public, and university research institutions to thoroughly monitor, analyze and publicize the effectiveness of permaculture practices. To this end, QS has brought on an on-site Research Coordinator. This coordinator, in partnership with QS' Rangelands Manager, is responsible for generating a cohesive land management plan which includes generating maps, cataloging biodiversity and hydrologic interventions, and advancing external research partnerships. Such research will help guide land stewardship practices in high-desert agriculture and increase both the legitimacy of QS and of permaculture as a whole. An outside biological consultant was contracted to collect baseline ecological data on the site's riparian zone, in which multiple endangered species reside, and that data is now being used to inform future stewardship.

In combination with a planned holistic sheep grazing business, the team is actively exploring innovative practices in landscape-scale climate change mitigation through the implementation of "carbon farming" practices. QS has additionally partnered with a former student to map the land with drone technology. Use of such technologies will enable QS to stay at the forefront of ecological restoration and ensure quantitatively that we are having lasting beneficial impacts on the landscape.

## #5 CAPITAL CAMPAIGN COMPLETED

Quail Springs' Capital Campaign has two phases: the first is to repay a ten-year, no-interest loan on the non-profit's land; the second is to construct a green-building model education center and improve supporting infrastructure. Both phases are crucial to the non-profit's mission. The campaign began in earnest in 2016, and in the summer of 2017 the organization is still finishing Phase I (\$400,000). Challenges have included failure to acquire grant funding to cover the costs of the campaign, a delay in acquiring a capital campaign manager, and difficulty attracting new donors. The organization has received an extension on the loan, and must repay the remaining \$180,000 by July 2018.

Moving forward with Phase II (\$968,000) will therefore take significant strategizing with the board of directors, key staff, and the Capital Campaign manager. The education center will enable QS to host programs throughout the year and diversify the constituents that we serve. In this effort, the organization has a great opportunity to build on its ten-year relationship with the County Building Department to develop alternative, progressive building codes. Policy change outcomes could include non-toxic, locally-appropriate, low-income and farmworker housing in the Cuyama Valley.

## GOAL:

**Produce research with partners that leads to greater ecological restoration.**

## STRATEGIES:

1. Acquire a Research Coordinator.
  - a. Generation of maps and a cohesive land management plan.
  - b. Cataloging biodiversity and hydrologic interventions.
  - c. Advancing external research partnerships.
2. Focus on biological monitoring, performance of natural buildings, and agricultural systems.
3. Move forward with a plan to holistically graze sheep on the landscape to regenerate grasslands habitat.
4. Continue to restore the watershed including the riparian zone, increasing habitat for rare and endangered species.

## GOAL:

**To finish Phase 1 of the Capital Campaign by the Fall 2017, and to strategize Phase II.**

## STRATEGIES:

1. Hold events that will enable the organization to pay off the money owed on the land.
  - a. Two fireside events in Fall 2017
  - b. Mailer appeal
  - c. Individual meetings with new potential supporters
2. Key staff, Capital Campaign Manager, and BOD will meet to review Phase II plans, discuss feasibility study, and strategize a clearer plan before moving forward.
  - a. Feasibility study
  - b. Accountability measures to ensure follow through with the plan



Thank you for supporting Quail Springs!



**QUAIL SPRINGS**  
PERMACULTURE

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