California: Food and a Sustainable Future

ITINERARY | MARCH 27–APRIL 4, 2022

Discover the real meaning of “farm to table” on our inaugural journey through California – from the precious waters of the Delta, through the fields where Cesar Chavez fought for farm workers, to Steinbeck’s storied valleys and the urban farming innovations of Los Angeles, learn about the politics, culture and environmental impact of the food we eat.

**MARCH 27: SACRAMENTO**

- Arrive independently at the historic Citizen Hotel in downtown Sacramento, located across from Cesar Chavez Park and Plaza.

- Depart the hotel at 2.30 pm to learn about the cradle of modern-day California, which began in Sacramento with the dream of a massive agricultural enterprise. We will visit Sutter’s Fort, named after John A. Sutter, whose desire to create a farming utopia resulted in a flourishing empire, which he named New Helvetia (New Switzerland) Valley. To protect his property, which eventually spanned nearly 300 square miles, he built what became known as Sutter’s Fort.

- Before dinner enjoy an introductory talk with acclaimed journalist Mark Arax (The Dreamt Land) where we will look at the themes we will be exploring throughout our journey.

- Welcome reception and dinner with your fellow travelers.

**MARCH 28: SALINAS**

- Drive south to explore California’s Delta, a vast maze of over 1,100 miles of waterways that traverse prime farmland and support one of the most productive agricultural regions in the world. Once a huge marsh, the Delta changed rapidly when unsuccessful gold miners turned to farming the Delta’s rich, fertile soil, building a complex system of canals, levees, and irrigation works that transformed the land.

- Our first stop will be at the Greene & Hemly Farm, which dates back to California’s Gold Rush era. Greene & Hemly has emerged as a leader in stewardship and sustainable farming practices, ensuring that their land will remain healthy and productive for generations to come. Today the farm includes 160 acres of organic pears and apples.
• After lunch at Hemly’s drive towards Salinas stopping to meet Javier Zamora, owner of JSM Organic Farms, a certified organic farm located in the rolling hills of Royal Oaks. As a second-generation farmer, he grew up helping his dad farm in Mexico and cultivated his own piece of land in middle school to learn about the importance of agriculture.

• Close by is the much larger Coke Farm, an organic grower, shipper and handler since 1981. Coke Farm serves as an essential distribution hub for over 70 growers in the region, empowering smaller farmers while engaging customers to become part of the organic farming movement.

• By visiting these three places we will gain an insight into the structure of different farms as well as how the organic crops of small family enterprises are handled and distributed as they make their way to our tables.

• Transfer to the Monterey Tides Hotel for overnight and dinner.

MARCH 29: SALINAS AREA

• Joining us this morning will be Evan Oakes, an agricultural scientist working for the University of California Cooperative Extension office in Salinas, conducting research in vegetable and wine grape production.

• Set out to explore the Salinas Valley, often called the Salad Bowl of the World. Framed by mountain ranges on the east and west, and opening up to the Pacific Ocean, a combination of rich soil and a temperate climate is key to what is grown here. Much of the land is devoted to cool-season vegetables, such as artichoke, broccoli, and spinach. In the southern half of the valley farmers grow warmer-season vegetables, including carrot, pepper, and tomato. Driving through the valley we will see farming up close and learn what it actually means to work in these fields. We will make several stops including Pezzini Farms, producers of Heirloom Green Globe artichokes for over eighty years. Stop at Veda Farming solutions to come close to the enormous range of machines that have revolutionized farming methods.

• Meet with staff from the start-up company FarmWise who are providing a range of data-driven services to support precise field actions that streamline farm operations and increase food production efficiency. At the end of 2020 Time magazine placed the FarmWise Titan FT-35 (an automated mechanical weeder) on its list of Best Inventions of 2020.

• Enjoy lunch at the Steinbeck House, where John and his younger sisters grew up. Steinbeck was raised with modest means and his father, John Ernst Steinbeck, worked a variety of jobs: he owned a feed-and-grain store, managed a flour plant and served as treasurer of Monterey County. Steinbeck grew up forming an early appreciation for the land, and in particular California’s Salinas Valley, which would greatly influence his later writing.
• Close by is the **National Steinbeck Center**, dedicated to preserving the author’s creative legacy, as well as documenting the evolution of this area from cattle country to the most productive farmland in the world. A short walking tour will focus on some Steinbeck highlights.

• End the day meeting with journalist **Kate Cimini** who has covered labor issues in California for years. Recently she wrote extensively about a U.S. Supreme Court decision which invalidated a decades-old California rule inspired by César Chávez that allowed union organizers to meet with farmworkers at their place of work, making it much harder for union representatives to access workers and to advocate for their rights.

• This evening enjoy dinner at a winery.

**MARCH 30: SALINAS AREA**

• This morning meet with staff from the **Western Growers Center for Innovation and Technology**, whose mission is to help startups bring their technologies to market in an effort to solve agriculture’s most pressing issues including labor shortages, food safety and water scarcity. Launched in 2015, the center has become a hub of collaboration and innovation and houses more than 50 startups.

• We hope to visit **Taylor Farms**, a huge American producer that currently ranks as the world’s largest processor of fresh-cut vegetables. The visit will provide an illuminating look at big ag and an important contrast to the smaller farms we visit throughout the program.

• Meet with **Janis McIntosh**, the **Director of Marketing Innovation & Sustainability at Naturipe Farms**. The programs she oversees represents Naturipe’s commitment to reducing their environmental footprint while also helping their growers remain financially viable.

• After lunch meet with the Salinas office of the **USDA Farm Service Agency** which provides a financial safety net to America’s farmers and ranchers, while at the same time protecting natural resources and enhancing food security. The federal government currently subsidizes only five crops nationally and none of California’s crops are subsidized, but farmers do benefit from crop insurance and disaster relief support from the federal government.

• Afternoon visit to **Grassroots** nursery, a state of the art minority-owned cannabis nursery operating at a wholesale level. Grassroots works primarily with plant clones which allows indoor, outdoor, and greenhouse growers to get a quick start in providing potent, healthy plants for their premium cannabis brand.

• End the day at the **Schoch Family Farmstead**, a third-generation small dairy farm. The Salinas Valley was once home to hundreds of small dairies, owned and operated by immigrants of Swiss or Portuguese descent. Schoch Dairy is the last remaining and one of only one of three dairies in all of California certified to sell raw milk. We will sample their delicious Monterey Jack cheese – the only Monterey Jack still produced in Monterey County, and their “East of Edam” cheese — a Dutch-styled cheese similar to a Gouda.

• Dinner at leisure this evening.
MARCH 31: VISALIA  B, L, D

- This morning head south to Gonzales, a primarily Hispanic and Latino town in the central Salinas Valley where the majority of residents work in agriculture. Right before Gonzales, stop at the Bracero Memorial Highway honoring Mexican workers who died in two devastating accidents over fifty years ago. Our plan in Gonzalez is to meet with union organizer Juan Martinez and with farm workers to discuss first-hand what it is like to work in agriculture from a multiple set of perspectives. Salinas Valley is home to about 90,000 farmworkers with Latino workers making up 93 percent of the state’s agricultural laborers. Pay is poor, benefits negligible, and housing expensive, often forcing farmworkers to crowd together in small apartments.

- After lunch we have requested a meeting with staff from the Mann Packing, one of the largest suppliers of packaged vegetables in the world. The facility opened in the summer of 2021 and was designed with the goal of achieving electric sustainability.

- Continue on to Visalia, located in the heart of California’s Central Valley.

- This afternoon meet with Susana De Anda, Co-Founder and Executive Director of the Community Water Center, a nonprofit environmental justice organization with a mission of supporting community-driven water solutions through organizing, education, and advocacy. Susana is a seasoned community organizer who was named one of “150 Fearless Women in the World” by Newsweek magazine.

- Continue on to Visalia. Dinner this evening at the rooftop Elderwood restaurant with its panoramic view of the Sierra Nevadas.

APRIL 1: VISALIA  B, L, D

- Today we explore the California Central Valley, an elongated, flat valley that stretches over 450 miles, dominating the interior of California. It is California’s most productive agricultural region, and the world’s largest patch of Class 1 soil. With 300 sunny days a year, the area grows more than 230 crops, including 40% of the nation’s nuts and fruits.

- Stop in at Lindcove Ranch, a citrus farm founded by Frank Kirkpatrick in the early 1900’s. Four acres of the farm is devoted to producing kosher etrogs, a citron that resembles a large, bumpy lemon. The fruit plays a vital role in observance of the Jewish holiday of Sukkot, and the Kirkpatricks are the leading grower of the prized fruit in the United States.
• End the morning at one of the small farms worked by Hmong families, refugees from Laos who settled in the area after the Vietnam War. Hmong farmers grow a variety of vegetables including different types of eggplants, green beans, daikons, basil, squash and more. Most Hmong farmers rent their land and their focus is less about sustainability and more about maximizing production.

• After lunch we plan to meet for a discussion and a hard look at water management in California. Learn about the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, an attempt by the legislature to fix a problem partly caused by the legislature as well as by reduced surface supplies and decreased flood irrigation.

• Later this afternoon meet with Neil Black, former president of The Nation and currently president of California Bioenergy (CalBio), one of the leading dairy digester companies in the U.S. Methane produced by cows is a significant contributor to greenhouse gas. CalBio collects and conditions the bio-gas, resulting in nearly pure methane which it injects into the utility pipeline for transportation to near zero emission trucks, buses and electric vehicles, improving local air quality while helping California achieve its greenhouse gas reduction goals.

• Dinner at a local restaurant.

APRIL 2: LOS ANGELES  B, L

• Our first stop today is at Lost Hills to learn more about Stewart and Lynda Resnik’s vast agricultural empire which includes Wonderful Halos, Wonderful Pistachios and Almonds, POM Wonderful, FIJI Water, and more. They are one of the wealthiest farmers in the United States, owning 180,000 acres in California. Their farms use almost as much water as the entire city of Los Angeles.

• About half of the households in Lost Hills include someone who works for the Resnicks. The Resnick’s have been credited with funding the transformation of the town, helping to pave roads, improve schools, and support community nutrition and health programs.

• Continue on to Buttonwillow to hear the story of the South Central Urban Farm, once the largest urban garden in the USA. Founded in 1994 in Los Angeles, it served the local community successfully until 2006, when, despite protests, its site was bulldozed for development. The farmers then acquired an 85 acre plot of land in Buttonwillow, California where the South Central Farmers Cooperative was established. The farm grows vegetable crops for low-income residents of the Los Angeles area.

• Lunch at Chalet Basque Restaurant. The Central Valley was first farmed by large numbers of European immigrants including Armenians and Basques who in, so many ways, have shaped the Californian agricultural narrative.

• En route to Los Angeles stop at Apricot Lane Farms, whose story is well documented in the 2018 award-winning documentary “The Biggest Little Farm”. In 2011 John and Molly Chester purchased 214 acres that had been farmed intensively and was now completely devoid of life. They began a journey to regeneration, bringing life, nutrients, and biodiversity back to the land. Today they grow more than 200 varieties of fruits and vegetables, and raise sheep, cows, pigs, chickens and ducks. The farm is certified organic, bio-dynamic and regenerative.

• Arrive in Los Angeles. Dinner at leisure.
APRIL 3: LOS ANGELES

- This morning we will look at food justice issues with staff from Community Services Unlimited. Food justice requires connecting good food to good jobs, prioritizing people’s economic standing as the solution to food insecurity and poverty. Community Services Unlimited runs an urban farm and is committed to helping communities address the inequalities and systemic barriers that make healthy, sustainable food less available.

- After lunch with the Community Services Unlimited team we plan to meet with Ron Finley and learn about the Ron Finley project. Previously a fashion designer, Ron is now a full-time gardener who uses horticulture to build communities. Finley takes overlooked spaces, including alleys and the plots of lands between the curb and people’s property lines, to create productive gardens.

- Farewell dinner this evening.

APRIL 4: LOS ANGELES

- Our goal this morning it to learn about the future role of a “vertical farming”. Vertical farming is being developed to address global food challenges by using hi-tech methods to produce large quantities of nutritious crops all year round. The vertical system grows vegetables, salads and fruit, stacked vertically and without soil in a nutrient-rich solution. The system operates without the need for favorable weather, fertile soil, lots of water and the usual high-running costs associated with the crop sector. It’s a transformational technology that is growing exponentially and will change how the world is fed.

- After our visit drive to Los Angeles airport for return flights home.

PRICING

Per person double occupancy: $5,495
Single room supplement: $1,100

INCLUDES

- Accommodation, based on double occupancy, in hotels as listed
- Meals as listed in the itinerary
- All sightseeing and excursions as listed with all entrance fees
- Transportation in a deluxe motor coach with air-conditioning
- Services of a tour manager and subject expert
- All gratuities
- Welcome and farewell receptions

NOT INCLUDED

- Airfare to Sacramento and from Los Angeles
- Arrival and departure airport transfers to/from group hotels
- Luggage charges
- Drinks at included lunches and dinners, except for soft drinks
- Porterage
- Travel insurance
- Items of a purely personal nature
- Any item not listed