Ensure Kern Residents' Access to Clean Technology

- Establish cost-effective funding mechanisms to provide rooftop solar to low-income households and renters.
- Establish adequate infrastructure and cost-effective funding mechanisms to provide Kern County residents access to electric vehicles.

JOBS & THE ECONOMY

Kern County is experiencing an economic crisis due to plummeting oil prices and an epic drought. The unemployment rate remains above 10 percent, well above the state average.[9] Yet, Kern County has made little movement toward a more diversified economy. Kern County relies heavily on a few extractive commodities, making the economy vulnerable to unpredictable factors such as variations in harvests and price slumps. A recent analysis of metropolitan areas' ability to cope with change ranks the entire San Joaquin Valley very low on the resilience capacity index.[10] Resilience capacity is assessed in relation to economic capacity (income inequality, diversification, regional affordability, business environment), socio-demographic capacity (educational attainment, without disability, out of poverty, health insured), and civic connectivity capacity (voter engagement, civic infrastructure, homeownership, metropolitan stability). The Valley needs to diversify its economy, prepare its workforce for emerging trends, retain skilled workers, and increase wages and standard of living. In doing so, Kern must include poor people and people of color in any emerging economic opportunities. Residents identified the need to improve retention of college-bound Valley residents, increase local education and training programs, and adopt programs to spur green businesses and a more diversified job market.

Policy Solutions

Increase Local Opportunities for Kern County Students and Young Adults

- Provide stipends or scholarships to college-bound students who commit to returning to the region for at least two years after graduation.
- Restore funding for vocational training in local high schools.
- Invest in job training programs and higher education opportunities in the Central Valley.

Provide Support for Small Businesses and Cooperatives

- Adopt policies to assist community cooperatives and community gardens to sell produce to schools and at farmer's markets.
- Provide assistance to new small businesses, especially minority or women owned, in the form of grants, guidance, and trainings.
- Promote job opportunities and training in new sustainable sectors, such as rooftop solar and energy efficiency. Specifically target resources for retraining workers from industries with sizable job losses such as the oil industry.

Ensure Safe Working Conditions and a Living Wage

- Require that employers pay a living wage that allows employees to meet basic needs, including food, clothing, housing, medical care, child care and basic transportation.
- Enforce worker safety laws and regulations which require clean and sufficient drinking water, clean bathrooms, shade from the heat, access to medical care when requested and limited exposure to health damaging toxics.
- Adopt enforcement mechanisms to increase compliance with local hire provisions.
- Pass immigration reform to increase protections for undocumented agricultural workers.

CONCLUSION

In developing this policy platform, residents hope that local and state representatives value the insights, the expertise, and the experiences of Kern County residents who are committed to making their home a better place for all. By focusing on the priorities identified by Kern residents, decision-makers have a unique opportunity to build fruitful partnerships with their constituents that can deepen and broaden over time. Together, we can build a better future for Kern County.

CRPE staff and Kern residents demand climate leadership in Oakland, CA 2014.