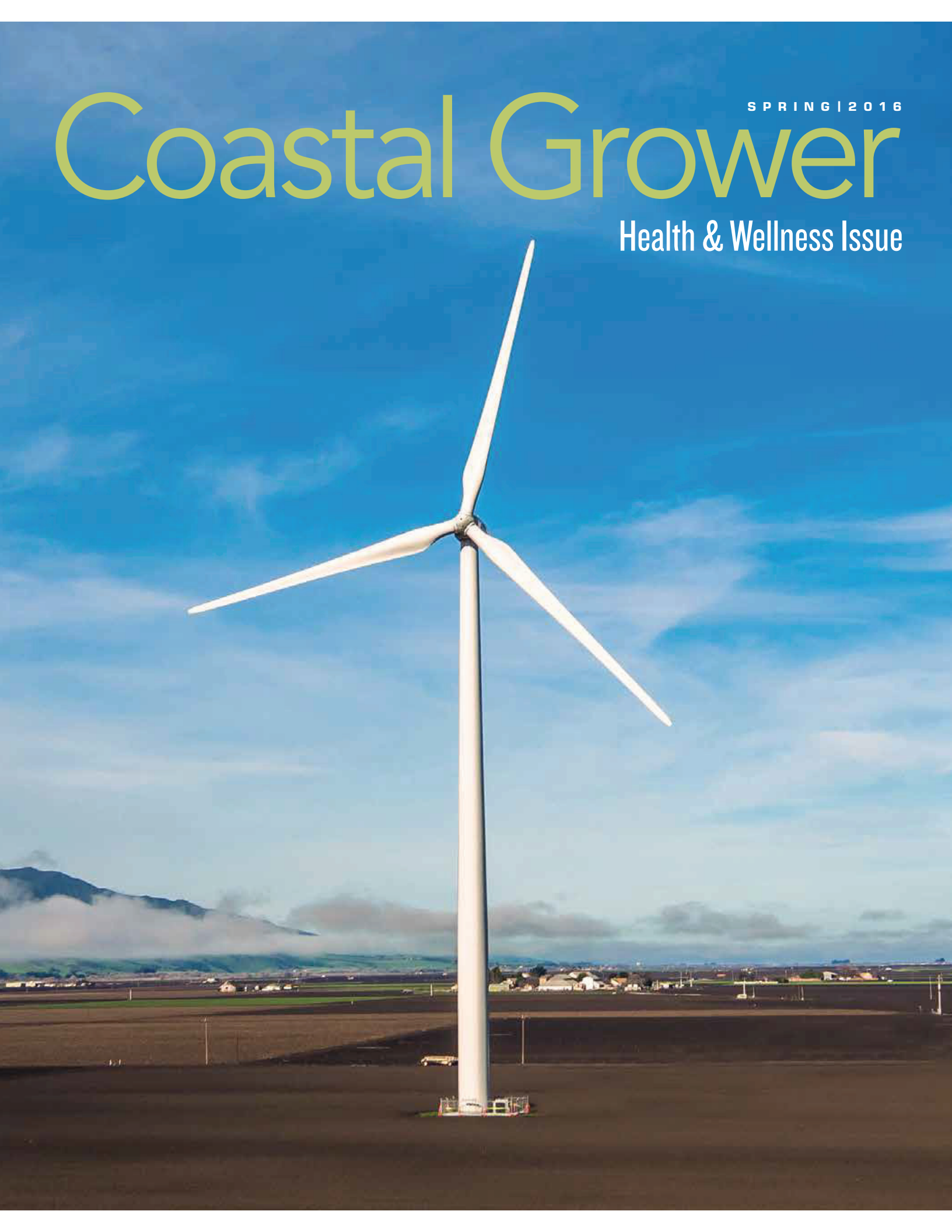


# Coastal Grower

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## Sustainable Growth with an Agricultural Focus Helps Boost Economic Development for Gonzales, CA

BY IRWIN SPEIZER

**O**n Google Earth, the sprawling Constellation Brands facility in Gonzales, CA looks more like a giant solar farm than a winery. The solar panels covering the roof of Constellation's main building provide renewable energy to the winery. But in an unusual twist, a few of those panels belong to the City of Gonzales, which leases roof space from Constellation and uses the solar power to run a municipal domestic water pumping station.

The solar installation at Constellation illustrates the economic development dynamic in Gonzales that local businesses praise as a model of how a city can partner with its resident companies to promote growth while also advancing the cause of sustainability.

Steve Smit, who serves as Constellation's vice president and general manager for the central coast of California from its base in Gonzales, says the city not only shares a

commitment to sustainability with his company but also understands how to promote that cause while simultaneously being adaptable and easy to work with on company projects. When Forbes magazine brought its Reinventing America AgTech Summit to the Salinas Valley last summer, Constellation provided meeting space at its Gonzales winery for the kickoff gathering.

"We are on the same page in terms of the need to push for sustainability," Smit says. "While the city has a strong desire of wanting to be sustainable, they are also realistic about what can be done. It is refreshing to work with them."

The ability to work with companies in a timely and efficient manner to get projects done while also promoting sustainability has helped Gonzales, a town of less than 10,000 people, post some significant economic development gains. The property tax base in Gonzales grew by 16.65 percent from 2014 to 2015, double that

of the next closest municipality in Monterey County. The city is emerging as a center for agriculture-related businesses and technology that also maintains a strong commitment to environmental principles outlined in its Gonzales Grows Green (G3) initiative.

"The city aggressively seeks to create jobs through economic development while also advancing the cause of sustainability and environmental stewardship," says Gonzales City Manager René Mendez. Among some of the success stories:

**Taylor Farms:** A leader in the growing and processing of fresh vegetables, Taylor Farms recently constructed a major new vegetable processing and cooling facility in Gonzales (the largest recent industrial development project in the city). It also partnered with the city on the towering wind turbine that was erected on city land near the plant, which has become a symbol of the city's sustainable focus. The wind-generated electricity goes directly to the Taylor Farms facility and has helped Taylor Farm's significantly reduce its electricity costs, while also reducing its carbon footprint. Taylor Farms CEO Bruce Taylor says the city maintains a pro-business attitude that included fast tracking the new processing plant from permitting to construction.

**Ramsay Highlander:** The manufacturer of custom harvest equipment that is shipped around the globe moved to Gonzales in 2000 to accommodate its growth and has expanded its footprint in Gonzales since then. President and CEO Frank Maconachy says that when he was shopping for a new location, he walked into Gonzales City Hall one day in hopes of getting some information. Instead of a typical cool, bureaucratic reception, Maconachy found himself welcomed with open arms. "I said I was thinking about relocating and I had some questions," Maconachy recalls, "They said, come on in. The next thing, the City Manager was there, the building person was there, and we sat around a table and talked. They said, what can we do to help your business move to Gonzales."

That was the key. They said, 'How can we help you?' The city points to Ramsey Highlander as an example of the agricultural-technology type of business that it hopes to attract in the future. The company's custom-made machines are designed to improve efficiency and reduce waste in the harvesting process, both pluses in the sustainability drive.

### **As Gonzales has continued to grow its industrial base, it has also instituted a range of programs within the city aimed at advancing the sustainable goals of its G3 initiative.**

**Healthy Soil:** The company that produces additives that enhance soil health rather than simply promote plant growth as most fertilizers do, moved to Gonzales in 2002 and has expanded since then. President and CEO Thomas Piatkowski was looking to relocate from a smaller site a few miles away when he found an available building in Gonzales. Like others with agricultural-related businesses, he appreciated the central Salinas Valley location and easy highway access. But he also discovered a kinship in the concept of sustainability that is at the heart of his business. He says he has been grateful for the city's helpful attitude that includes letting him use city meeting rooms and allowing him to participate in government grants that aid his company. "They are extremely supportive of our business and the concepts of sustainability that we are trying to bring forth," he says. "That makes for a great relationship."

**Pure Pacific Organics:** The processor of organic vegetables and salad mixes opened its new plant in Gonzales in 2010 and has plans to expand in the city. Company partner David Black ticks off many of the same favorable attributes in Gonzales that other agricultural-related businesses cite, but stresses the importance of the city's pro-business outlook. "They are really good to work with," Black says. "The city staff are very accessible. They don't

just look at things from the point of government regulation. They are open to ideas and they are very business friendly." In addition, Black points out, the company's organic product line dovetails with the city's sustainable and green outlook. "Our consumers are environmentally conscious," Black says.

The city also has received kudos for its work aiding the development of the Vista De Santa Lucia industrial park. "The City of Gonzales and their staff are to be congratulated for working with the Herbert Meyer land trust and the private sector in the spirit of private public partnerships to successfully build and promote the Vista De Santa Lucia industrial park," says John Handel, project manager. "The wind turbine development along with future proposed solar, wind and water recycling developments to support both phase I and II of the industrial park will give Gonzales one of the first industrial parks in California where energy and water sustainability are at the forefront."

As Gonzales has continued to grow its industrial base, it has also instituted a range of programs within the city aimed at advancing the sustainable goals of its G3 initiative. The city added solar panels to its wastewater treatment plant to provide clean power to that facility, was the first city in Monterey County to adopt a Climate Action Plan aimed at helping the city meet statewide goals for reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions, and maintains commercial and residential recycling programs that exceed statewide goals. In 2011, Gonzales received the Governor's Environmental and Economic Leadership Award for its children's environmental education program, Environmental Leadership Academy.

City Manager Mendez says the sustainable approach is not just good for the environment but has also proven good for the city's economic development. In an age when companies around the globe promote sustainability, having a reputation as a city that advocates sustainable practices and is also pro-business provides Gonzales an edge. **ce**

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