

Sustainable Growth Succeeds in a Rural California City

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A wind turbine in Gonzales, California.

By Irwin Speizer

You don't need a wind turbine to run a vegetable-processing plant. Or a solar panel array to make wine. But you will find both in [Gonzales](#), California, a town that makes a point of promoting sustainable growth in its economic development effort.

Situated in the heart of California's Salinas Valley agricultural region, Gonzales is proving that even a small city – it has a population of fewer

than 10,000 – can make a big difference in the lives of its citizens by being both ecologically aware and business friendly.

The Gonzales move into sustainability practices has become a central part of its economic development effort and is now used by the city as a way to distinguish itself from others competing for new business. The city not only works closely with companies to assist them in relocating or expanding, but it also often partners with those companies on sustainability projects.

“We are about sustainability, using the environment better, saving energy,” says Gonzales City Manager René Mendez. “It provides additional value to companies besides breaks on fees. This is something else we bring to the table.”

The sustainability-fueled economic development methods employed by Gonzales appear to be working. The city saw its property tax base grow by 16.65 percent from 2014 to 2015, double that of the next closest municipality in Monterey County. It has done that while simultaneously reducing the city’s carbon footprint thanks to the addition of solar and wind power, creative recycling programs, and other efforts organized under a city initiative called [Gonzales Grows Green \(G3\)](#). The G3 initiative is built around three principles: economic vitality through diversity in growth, environmental responsibility, and social equity.

Among the companies that responded to the Gonzales style of economic development and moved to town:

- [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 and also partnered with the city on the towering wind turbine that was erected on city land near the plant. The wind power helped Taylor cut its electricity costs while also reducing its carbon footprint.

- [Ramsay Highlander](#). The manufacturer of custom harvest equipment that is shipped around the globe moved to Gonzales in 2000 and has expanded since then. The company's custom-made machines are designed to improve efficiency and reduce waste in the harvesting process, both pluses in the sustainability drive.
- [Healthy Soil](#). The company produces additives that enhance soil health rather than simply promote plant growth as most fertilizers do. It moved to Gonzales in 2002 and has expanded since then.
- **Pure Pacific Organics**. The processor of organic vegetables and salad mixes opened its new plant in Gonzales in 2010 and has plans to expand. The company applauds the city's sustainable and green outlook, which it says compliments its own organic product line
- [Constellation Brands](#). The sprawling Constellation winery in Gonzales has its roof covered with solar panels, which serve not only the winery but also a municipal water pumping station.

Executives of these companies praise Gonzales for both its flexibility in working on business development projects and its promotion of sustainable principles.

Gonzales expects to more than double its population to 24,000 by 2035 while sticking to its ecologically sensitive standards. “We are determined to grow responsibly,” Mendez says. “We will be a model of sustainability and provide a good quality of life, beginning with our children who will become our most valuable resource in the future.”

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