

# **Orchestrating Local Investing in Small Food and Farm Entrepreneurs**

*or Rebuilding the Economy from the Ground Up*

by Jeff Wade, Chapter Leader

July 9, 2013 - Local, Organic, Sustainable, these are the terms that generate excitement these days when it comes to consumers caring about what they eat and identifying quality food. But, while the food conglomerates make an attempt to deliver these elements to meet the growing demand, truly only the small and regional food and farm businesses can fulfill these promises.

Slow Money is a National movement launched by the book *Slow Money* authored by Woody Tasch. A local chapter was formed in 2012 to bring the principles and benefits of this movement to San Luis Obispo County, we call it Slow Money SLO. Very simply, the group connects those who wish to invest locally in small food and farm enterprises with the entrepreneurs who need the funding.

But, the bigger picture benefits of such arrangements as espoused by Woody are about rebuilding the soil, putting back what we take out and bolstering the food and farm economy in a more sustainable manner. It is about protecting and restoring the natural systems that are most critical when it comes to food production. At the same time, giving people an opportunity to know where their money is invested, to be able to touch and consume the products of their investment and to know the farmer and his property where the fruits of the investment are realized. It includes helping to build the local supply chain that connects the farmer with the consumer.

Some of the greatest food now comes from local producers and the many chapters of Slow Money have had a role in developing some of these brands. In some cases, entire regions have been restored and revitalized by the recognition that local people benefit more from local investment and that the food produced is more satisfying from many perspectives.

The Slow Money SLO chapter has already helped three local food entrepreneurs and more are in process. The method is simple; the group connects those who want to invest locally with those who need it. An entrepreneur presents to the Slow Money group explaining the business and how it benefits the local food system and consumers. In most cases these businesses are already operating. Individuals who find the business of interest and wish to gather more information will arrange to meet one on one with the entrepreneur outside the Slow Money meetings.

Eventually, loan or investment arrangements and terms may be discussed and decided by mutual agreement. The Slow Money SLO chapter is not an investment club and funds are not pooled, but many other chapters have evolved into these models over time. Slow Money participants may also support food and farm businesses by providing advice, business connections and consulting which may be needed just as much as funding.

Slow Money SLO meets at the SLO Grange, 2880 Broad St. on the first Tuesday of each month, starting at 6:30, just after the Farmer's Market which is held weekly at the SLO Grange. New investors, borrowers and anyone interested in participating are welcome and there is no fee to join. Visit [www.SlowMoneySLO.org](http://www.SlowMoneySLO.org) to express your interest and you will be contacted with more details.