

Monthly Newsletter



3 April, 2026



SUSTAINABILITY AND NATURAL RESOURCES TOPIC DAY

Sustainability and Natural Resources Topic Day Team: Jeimy, Phil, Manny, Lazaro Advisors: Antony Ojeda, Lee-Volker Cox

Sustainability is often thought of in terms of protecting resources, but during our recent Leadership Topic Day, it came to life through stories, shared experiences, and local innovation. From personal reflections to hands-on tours, the day highlighted how leadership and natural resources are deeply interconnected.

The morning began with a powerful life story from **Keith Madison**, who set the tone with an honest reflection: "Everything is fair until it happens to you." His words grounded the group in empathy, an essential quality for leaders navigating complex community issues.



Jeimy, Phil, Manny, Lazaro

Sustainability & Natural Resources
Speakers: Erica Jane Flores Ramon Elias
Engel & Gray
Dewlson Farms
Presqu'ile Winery
Life Stories: Keith Madison Jeny Antunez



Erica Jane Flores

People Helping People

That theme carried into the Leadership keynote by Erica Jane Flores, CEO of [Santa Ynez Valley People Helping People \(PHP\)](#) who spoke on "The Power of Storytelling." She opened with a deeply personal story about discovering she was pregnant (after thinking she was not going to be able to) at the same time her mother was hospitalized. While emotional, her story ultimately centered on resilience and hope. Flores emphasized that effective leadership requires emotional connection, sharing, "To change people's minds, you have to change their hearts." She also encouraged leaders to be authentic and engaging, noting that having a spontaneous way to capture attention matters; and that a leader's most powerful attribute is simply being themselves. She reinforced her message with a practical framework: "What, so what, and now what," guiding leaders to connect ideas with meaning and action.



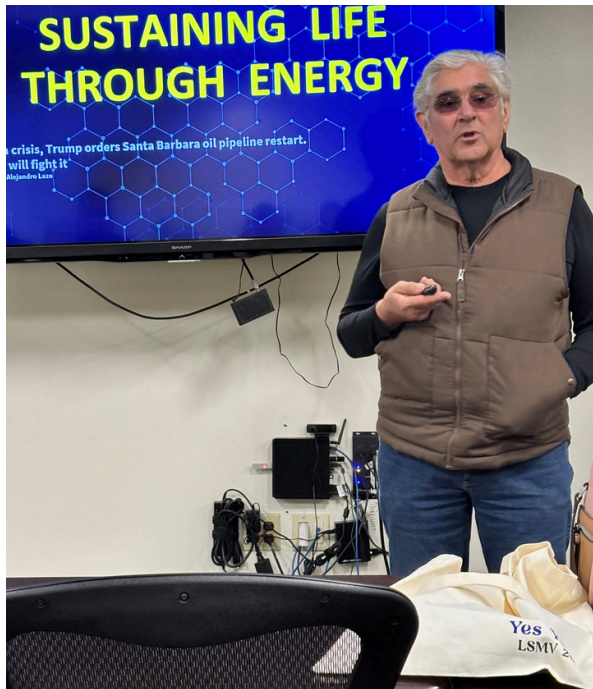
Engel & Gray

The group then toured Engel & Gray, where sustainability efforts are put into action daily. Through a partnership with the city, the company processes green waste into compost (called Harvest Blend) for wholesale distribution. In addition to municipal collections, they also receive large volumes of agricultural clippings from Windset Farms, further expanding their impact within the local agricultural ecosystem. Seeing this process firsthand reinforced how collaboration between cities and businesses can turn waste into a valuable resource that supports long-term environmental sustainability.



Ramon Elias

Pacific AgriTec LLC



Adding another dimension to the conversation, guest speaker Ramon Elias (VP at Pacific AgriTec LLC) discussed the role of crude oil in the local economy. His perspective provided a balanced look at the challenges and realities of energy production, reminding participants that sustainability conversations often involve navigating complex trade-offs.



After a lunch featuring Mexican cuisine from Maya Restaurant (sponsored by the YMCA), the group heard a second life story from Jeny Antunez, who offered a refreshing perspective on uncertainty: “I have no idea what’s going to happen, but I love it.” Her outlook captured the spirit of adaptability and optimism that defines strong leadership.





Dewlson Farms

The afternoon shifted to agriculture with a visit to Dewlson Farms. Known for its organic coffee, the farm also cultivates 30+ acres of lemon trees and a variety of teas, including a rare blend from China. During the visit, participants were treated to tastings of locally produced coffee and house-made jams. The offers were so well received that many in the group chose to purchase products on-site, directly supporting the farm's sustainable business model.



Presqu'île Winery

The day concluded at Presqu'île Winery, where sustainability once again took center stage. The group was warmly greeted with a glass of wine before beginning the tour. The vineyard operates organically and uses creative, environmentally friendly methods to maintain its crops. Pigs help manage vegetation, owl houses provide natural rodent control, and lasers safely deter birds. The vineyard also incorporates organic composting, utilizes beneficial insects, and is exploring UV technology to combat mildew without relying on harsh chemicals. After the tour, participants gathered for a wine tasting and time to connect, reflecting on a day that blended learning, innovation, and community. The group also took some time at the end of the tour to relax and discuss the Legacy Project.



Thank you for reading!

From composting operations to coffee fields, and from personal stories to agricultural innovation, the day made one thing clear: sustainability is not just about resources; it's about people, perspective, and the connections that inspire meaningful change.