

### **Project Abstract**

## **Social Networks and Decision-Making in Sustainable Agriculture: Innovation or Cooperation?**

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Social networks are recognized as an important influence on decision-making for both innovation and cooperation. But what happens when a decision requires assessing both private benefits associated with innovation and the social benefits of cooperation? This research examines the role of social networks in sustainable agriculture by distinguishing between growers' information and cooperation networks, and analyzing which network structures have a more important influence on adoption behavior. The sustainable agriculture decisions of California winegrape growers provide a critical research site because the cooperation problems of environmental protection and regional reputation are particularly strong. Furthermore, many viticulture regions have local partnerships in place designed to change the structure of social networks and encourage the adoption of sustainable practices. The researchers will use a survey of winegrape growers in three regions of California (Lodi, Central Coast, and Napa) to analyze the effectiveness of local partnerships in reshaping social networks to facilitate sustainable practices.

The broader impacts of the research derive from its contribution to "sustainability science", which is the application of scientific methods to analyze the often vague and debated concept sustainability. Sustainable agriculture promises to change agricultural practices in ways that enhance economic, environmental, and social welfare. However this promise often goes unfulfilled as the term sustainability is used to justify maintaining the status quo. The research proposed here provides some empirical evidence about the social and institutional variables that will facilitate real changes in agricultural practices.