
News Release

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Imperial County sees promising future in lithium, solar production *Local, regional forecasts to be unveiled Thursday at SCAG Economic Summit*

The Imperial Valley has seen its economy stabilize heading into 2022, while billions of dollars of investment in solar energy production and battery storage are beginning to create significant opportunities ahead, a new forecast shows.

The report, prepared for the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) by top economists, offers a promising, but cautious post-pandemic forecast for Southern California as a whole, noting that the strength, resilience and diversity of the regional economy helped avoid what could have been a far more serious downturn.

For Imperial County, heavily reliant on agriculture production, unemployment has stabilized at 19.4% – near the county’s 10-year average. Agriculture production reached \$2.1 billion in 2020, the 4th highest level on record.

In the meantime, Imperial is seeing significant investment in solar production and, more recently, battery storage. There’s also emerging investment in the region’s rich lithium resources, which is needed for battery-powered vehicles and mobile communications equipment.

“The past 18 months have been difficult, for businesses and our residents. But we’ve also seen what a critically important role Imperial County plays as a food producer, supply chain hub and alternative energy provider. Looking ahead, we see our role in emerging technologies creating even greater opportunities for our communities,” said Cheryl Viegas-Walker, Mayor of El Centro and a Past President of SCAG.

For Southern California as a whole, most of the economists who participated in the SCAG study expect that the region will regain all pre-pandemic employment losses by mid-2023. Today, the six counties that comprise SCAG are more than a half million (507,000) jobs below their February 2020 totals, even after having added 1.21 million over the past 19 months. As a result, the region’s unemployment rate – 7.2% in September– has remained above both the state and national averages.

“We are starting to see what the post-COVID economy will look like, and it’s clear that we have significant challenges and opportunities ahead,” said Clint Lorimore, President of SCAG and an Eastvale City Councilmember. “On the plus side, Southern California’s role as a supply chain leader has never been more important. We’re also seeing remarkable advances in technology and innovation across

multiple industry sectors. At the same time, our tourism industry was essentially shut down for months, while staffing shortages have hurt many of our retailers, restaurants, manufacturers, trucking operations and small businesses.”

The report will be released Thursday, December 2, during SCAG’s 12th Annual Southern California Summit, “From Inclusive Recovery to Inclusive Growth.” More than 400 leaders in business, public policy, housing and education are expected to participate in the virtual summit.

“Across our region, COVID-19 has provided clarity on the strengths and weaknesses within our economic structure. While we are optimistic about 2022 and beyond, we also have our work cut out for us to ensure that we grow the right way, with a resilient and inclusive recovery,” said Kome Ajise, SCAG Executive Director.

The Imperial County portion of the economic outlook was prepared by Michael Bracken, Managing Partner & Chief Economist for Development Management Group Inc. For a copy of the complete report for the six-county region, please [click here](#).

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About SCAG

SCAG is the nation’s largest metropolitan planning organization, representing six counties, 191 cities and more than 19 million residents. SCAG undertakes a variety of planning and policy initiatives to plan for a livable and sustainable Southern California now and in the future. For more information about SCAG, please visit: www.scag.ca.gov.