# Consumer Outreach to Enhance Awareness and Marketing of Specialty Crops in the Sierra, CDFA Specialty Crop Grant



## Purpose

Although Placer and Nevada Counties have a vibrant local food movement, less than two percent of the population buys local specialty crops regularly. Increasing consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables is critical to combating the growing health crisis of obesity, diabetes and other diseases. A wide range of specialty crops is grown locally, and increasing sales will lead to more economically viable specialty crop sectors in local agriculture. This project will improve healthy eating among residents and support local farms.



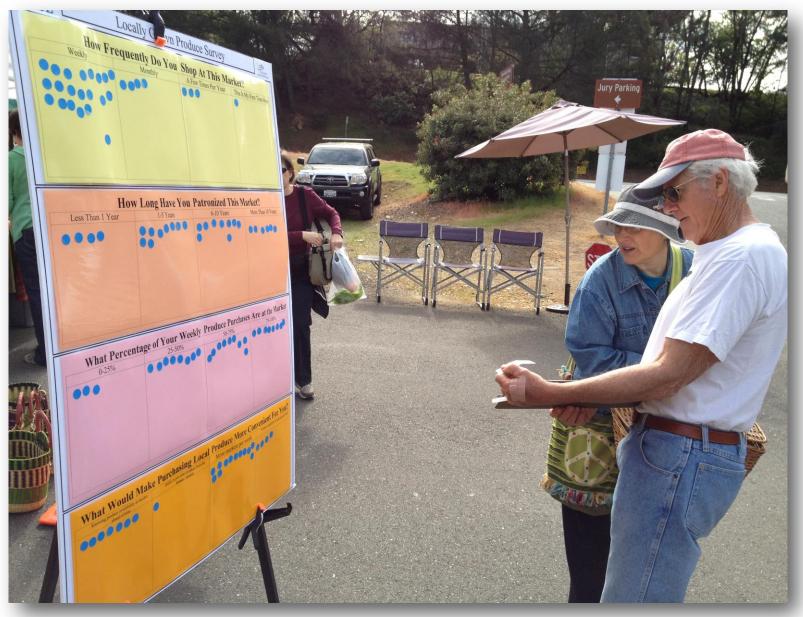*Tasting /sampling requires careful planning and organization*

## Dot Survey Results

- 4 Dot Surveys were conducted between November and March at the Placer County Mandarin Festival and Foothill Farmers' Market in Auburn, CA. Key findings from respondents:
- 61.1% shopped at the Auburn market on a weekly basis.
- 46.3% purchased 50% or more of their weekly produce at the Auburn market.
- 47.9% answered that convenience is the biggest barrier in buying more locally grown produce.
- 41.7% answered that more markets per week would make it more convenient to buy more locally grown produce.

## Objectives

1. Through outreach, increase consumer awareness and interest in purchasing local specialty crops. Outreach occurs through the "Eat Local" website, Facebook pages, and point-of-sale materials.

2. Educate consumers about seasonal availability, nutritional value, preparation, and purchase points for local specialty crops. In partnership with farmers' markets, UCCE provides tasting events.

3. Educate producers about the nutritional value of the crops and how to communicate these benefits to consumers in order to increase their sales.

4. Improve consumer connections to local farms and farmers' markets by reducing barriers to access. UCCE will identify purchase barriers for lower income consumers and find solutions by providing incentives such as produce vouchers for farmers' markets.



*Dot surveys gather information on consumer purchases of local food.*



University of California Cooperative Extension
Eat Local Placer & Nevada Counties

**http://ucanr.edu/sites/EatLocalPlacerNevada/**

## Farmers' Market Results

### Sampling / Tastings

- 6 samplings / tastings held January through March 2013 at the Foothill Farmers' Market Association Auburn market.

- Produce featured included: winter greens, kale, winter squash, cabbage, potatoes, and asparagus. Produce for tastings is purchased from area farms at market value, using Specialty Crops funds..

- 1,022 produce vouchers valued at $5 handed out at the six samplings / tastings

- 708 produce vouchers redeemed for a 69.3% redemption rate. This equals $3,540 in produce sales going to farmers at the Auburn market.

- Winter squash sales increased 191% as a result of the tasting; cabbage sales increased 174%.

- Farmers sold out of products featured that day and sales remained up for approximately three weeks afterwards.



*Consumers taste a local product, take a recipe card, learn which farms at the market sell the ingredients, and receive a $5 voucher to help purchase produce.*



*Recipe cards are developed for the highlighted crop that includes nutritional information*

## Other Audiences

### Sampling / Tastings

- 3 samplings / tastings held since January – March 2013 at three low-income Placer County schools.

- Featured produce was blood oranges. 110 lbs. were purchased from a local farm.

- 817 samples were conducted at low-income schools

- 40 produce vouchers valued at $5 per voucher were given to teachers whose classroom did a sampling.

- One sampling occurred at the Placer County Senior Center. 19 samples of butternut squash soup and 18 produce vouchers were handed out.



*Sampling of blood oranges at Auburn Elementary in Auburn, CA*

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