



HORTICULTURE AND SMALL FARMS

Small farms are the foundation of agriculture in Placer and Nevada Counties. They produce a wide range of horticultural crops, feeding the increasing demand for locally grown produce. Foothill topography provides a multitude of microclimates, allowing production of fruit, vegetable, nut, and nursery crops. While overall agricultural acreage declines, the small farm community is growing. Despite the growing number of small farms, local producers often can not meet the demand for local produce.

More farmers are needed, and as the farming community ages, the need for a new generation of farmers becomes more critical.

Most growers in Placer and Nevada Counties farm on small acreages, at the rural-urban interface. The



Sierra CRAFT Vegetable Soil and Water Management Workshop in December 2010.

overriding concern is keeping small farms economically viable. Specific issues include recruiting and training new farmers, marketing and farm economics, and managing soil, water, and pests with sustainable, environmentally sound practices.

The mission of the UC Cooperative Extension Horticulture and Small Farms Program is to:

- Provide information, education, and technical assistance to help farmers develop and maintain economically viable farming enterprises.
- Provide opportunities that encourage growers to work together to address local problems and needs.
- Help connect growers and area residents and educate consumers about the importance of local agriculture.

Program Highlights

- ◆ **Foothill Farming website** <http://uncanr.org/foothillfarming> has averaged 14,000 hits per month in the last six months
- ◆ **42 UCCE workshops** and seminars reached more than 950 farmers and ranchers in 2010
- ◆ **On the 2010 Farm & Barn Tour**, about 1,800 area residents learned about local agriculture and connected with local farmers and ranchers
- ◆ More than 420 farmers and ranchers receive e-mail updates and newsletters several times a month



Beginning Farmer Training

UCCE Placer/Nevada provides the only beginning farmer training in the foothills and surrounding area, meeting a clear need for those starting small farms and ranches.

Issue

Farming and ranching require a constant learning process to stay abreast of markets and keep enterprises economically viable. Networking with other producers to share ideas and techniques helps producers make more informed decisions and facilitates adoption of new practices.

What Was Done

In 2010, a group of producers and UCCE farm advisors from a six-county area formed Sierra CRAFT. Sierra CRAFT promotes collaboration and information sharing among area farmers and ranchers. We developed a program of on-farm workshops based on a survey of area farmers and ranchers. Workshop topics have included topics such as greenhouse production, orchard management, soil and water management for vegetables, direct marketing, and ranch diversification.

Impact

- Since October 2010, over 240 producers from 11 California counties have participated in Sierra CRAFT workshops.
- The interest in the workshops demonstrates the need for such collaborative, producer-driven training.
- The six-county area covered by the original project has expanded and more producer-trainers are involved.
- In fall 2011, UCCE Placer/Nevada will be training more foothill producers and ag professionals in order to expand the project.



New farmer Shaun Clark of Melon Jolly Farm in Auburn at the Foothill Farmers' Market.



Sierra CRAFT

(Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training)



Chris Bierwagen of Donner Trail Fruit demonstrates pruning at the Sierra CRAFT Orchard Workshop in April 2011.

The Sierra CRAFT workshops provide opportunities for farmers to share their experiences and evaluate the value and appropriateness of different techniques for foothill farming.

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Foothill Farming Website

The Foothill Farming website was designed to be a one-stop shop for farming and ranching information for the foothills. Producers from all over are “stopping” and using the information they find there.

Issue

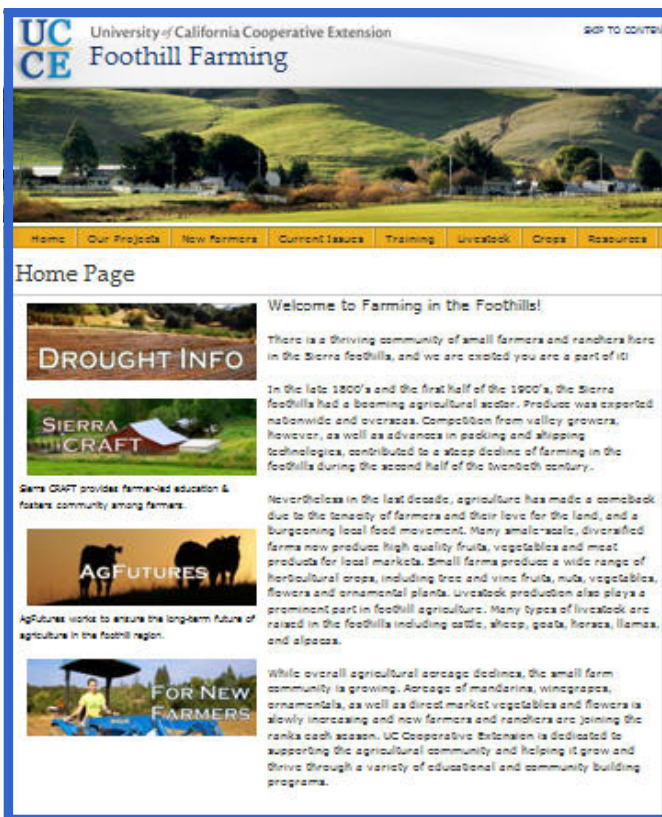
Appropriate information on resources, crops, marketing, business, pest management and other topics is critical to the success of beginning and experienced farmers and ranchers. The internet provides a wealth of information, but it is often not appropriate to foothill conditions or does not address critical needs for our foothill agricultural community.

What Was Done

UCCE, with assistance from a WSARE (Western Sustainable Agriculture Research and Extension) grant, developed an extensive website for farmers and ranchers, called Foothill Farming <http://ucanr.org/foothillfarming>. It has information for new producers on specific crops and livestock species, area agricultural resources, farm marketing and business, as well as a blog and information on current issues affecting foothill growers.

Impact

- The Foothill Farming website has averaged almost 14,000 hits per month since it went online six months ago.
- With 800-900 visitors a month spending 4 to 6 minutes on the website, it has become the go-to place for information on farming and ranching in the foothills and surrounding areas.
- More and more people are finding their way to UCCE information and training through the Foothill Farming website.





Pest Management Education



Sierra CRAFT Vegetable IPM Workshop. Alan Haight of Riverhill Farm explaining the role of cultural practices in pest management.

Timely, targeted pest management practices reduce grower costs and alleviate impacts on the environment, which is better for both producers and consumers.

Issue

Our mobile population and global economy means new pests are constantly changing the pest management picture. A new fruit fly has begun attacking local cherries and berries and European grapevine moth has been found in grapes. Growers need to manage both perennial pests and these new pests, and work together to prevent invasion of new pests.

What Was Done

In 2011, UCCE organized a 5-part series of Integrated Pest Management workshops focusing on specific crop areas such as winegrapes, vegetables, citrus, and other tree fruit. We also cooperate with the County Ag Departments, grapegrower associations, Mountain Mandarin Growers and others to provide pest management information. Through e-mail updates and individual consultations, we help growers prevent and manage both new and existing pests.

Impact

- In 2010-11, over 220 producers participated in one or more pest management workshops, field meetings, or seminars.
- Growers depend on UCCE for timely information and advice on the best management options for their crops since we have few professional agricultural pest control advisors in the area.
- Citrus growers continue to release millions of parasitic wasps to manage scale insects. Other growers are testing predatory insects for controlling key pests.



Mandarin Grower Education

The use of many sustainable practices such as pruning for pest control and using compost or mulch along tree rows set the Mountain Mandarin® industry apart from others in the state.

Issue

Mandarins have long been the signature crop of the foothills, but more and more mandarins are being planted in California. This increased production means that Mountain Mandarin® growers must continue to produce high quality fruit and market it very effectively, while dealing with new pests, increased regulation, and increasing costs.

What Was Done

In cooperation with the Citrus Research Board, we hosted the annual Northern California Grower Seminar in Auburn in 2010. A full day seminar provided critical information to area growers. In order to assist growers to market their best quality fruit, we organized two workshops on fruit maturity testing with Andrew Valero of the California Department of Food and Agriculture. Monthly field meetings also help growers keep informed about effective practices and new technologies.

Impact

- More than 50 growers from throughout Northern California attended the Northern California Grower Seminar.
- The mandarin maturity seminars helped growers understand fruit maturity and quality and test their own fruit more effectively.
- Field meetings effectively communicate best practices to growers. Most participants adopt sustainable practices such as pruning, composting, and irrigation monitoring based on seeing them at field meetings.



Mandarin Maturity Testing Workshop in December 2010 with Andrew Valero of CDEA.



Grape Grower Education



Vineyard Field Day, Naggiar Vineyard.



A quarantine for European grape-vine moth is now affecting Nevada County grapegrowers.



Issue

Given the numerous small vineyards in the foothills, getting information out to growers in a timely manner can be complex. Information on emerging issues such as invasive pests and the effects of weather can be vital to a good crop year.

What Was Done

The Farm Advisor provides pest updates several times a year at meetings of the Placer County Wine and Grape Association and the Sierra Wine and Grape Growers Association. In 2010, as a result of late rainfall, Powdery mildew became a problem for many growers. UCCE provided information on the latest recommendations from the UC IPM (Integrated Pest Management) program. European grapevine moth was trapped in Nevada County in spring 2011, triggering a quarantine. UCCE cooperated with the Ag Department, CDFA to help growers identify the pest, understand its biology, and treat it effectively with minimal disruption to the vineyard environment.

Impact

Timely pest management information can prevent loss of a crop or of crop quality. Although a quarantine can be a burden on growers, most grape growers voluntarily treated for the European grapevine moth, due to the cooperation of UCCE, the Nevada County Ag Department, CDFA, and USDA. Such cooperative efforts which provide timely information and effective low-risk treatments make it easier for growers to take action.



Placer Farm & Barn Tour



Fresh produce for sale at Twin Brooks Farm in Loomis on the 2010 Farm and Barn Tour.

From one 2010 Tour participant: “We love to see the farms where our produce grows!”

Issue

Placer and Nevada Counties have a wide array of locally grown agricultural products, and a vibrant local food movement. However, many residents are unaware that agriculture exists in this area and do not have any connection to local agriculture of local farmers.

What Was Done

The Placer Farm & Barn Tour was a key agritourism event from 2004 to 2008, drawing an average of about 2,000 people to the annual one-day event. Due to popular demand, it was reinstated in 2010, as a biennial event. About 1,800 people attended the 2010 event at nine farms, ranches, and vineyards, connecting with farmers and ranchers, learning about local agriculture and purchasing local produce.

Impact

After the Farm & Barn Tour was discontinued for 2009, the public and members of the ag community made it clear that it was the most important local event to educate the public and build support for local agriculture. Participants in the Tour become more interested in local farms and local products. A large majority of those surveyed say that they are more likely to buy local produce after having participated. While many participants are repeat Tour-goers, many participants have never been to a local farm prior to the Tour, so the Tour fills a critical function of connecting area residents to local farms and building a consumer base for local products.