



HORTICULTURE AND SMALL FARMS

Placer and Nevada Counties are home to a diversity of small family farms, producing a wide variety of horticultural crops. This feeds the growing demand for local produce. Fruits, vegetables, nuts, and nursery crops are all produced in the foothills of Placer/Nevada. While overall agricultural acreage declines, the small farm community is growing. Despite the growth in small farms, local producers often can not meet the demand for local products. 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. Keeping small farms economically viable is the key concern for the ag community. Specific issues include recruiting and training new farmers; marketing and small farm economics; and using sustainable, environmentally sound practices to manage soil, water, and pests.

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 with area residents and educate consumers about the importance of local agriculture.*



Sierra CRAFT Equipment Workshop at Riverhill Farm, Nevada City, July 2011

Program Highlights

- ◆ **Foothill Farming website** <http://ucanr.org/foothillfarming> has averaged about **14,000 hits** per month since it went online in Dec 2010
- ◆ Since 2005, UCCE has trained **more than 2,700** farmers and ranchers in business, marketing, and sustainable production
- ◆ UCCE provided **220 hours of training** to more than 325 farmers and ranchers in 2011-12



Beginning Farmer Training

“Loved the class. So much in such a condensed format, which I really liked. I feel like I can do this now.”

— Beginning Farming Academy Participant

Issue

Consumer interest in local food is driving demand for local agricultural products. To meet the growing demand, Placer and Nevada Counties need more producers. Many of our beginning farmers and ranchers have little ag experience and need extensive information and advice on resources, appropriate crops or livestock, and training in production, marketing, and business skills.

What Was Done

UCCE has been providing beginning farming training for 8 years. In 2012, for the first time, we offered an intensive 20-hour Beginning Farming Academy to jump-start new farms and ranches. UCCE Farm Advisors and a team of producer-trainers facilitated the training, which also included field trips to a local farm and farmers’ market. The Academy is funded in part by a grant from the USDA Risk Management Agency, leveraging funding to increase services to farmers. In addition to training, UCCE provides individual advice and consultations with aspiring farmers and ranchers.

Impact

- 13 beginning farmers and ranchers got their start in the 2012 Beginning Farming Academy. Over 320 more participated in other workshops and courses targeted to new farmers.
- Over 385 new and beginning farmers received individual advice, information, and/or farm visits from the Horticulture Farm Advisor.



Teri Ueki explaining practices during visit to Ueki Garden Flowers at the Beginning Farming Academy.



Sierra CRAFT

(Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training)



Alan Haight of Riverhill Farm explaining spreader operation at the Sierra CRAFT Equipment workshop, July 2011, Nevada City.



Jan Thompson of Twin Brooks Farm explaining transplant timing. Sierra CRAFT Cool Season Vegetable Workshop, Loomis, December 2011.

Issue

Farmers and ranchers need to constantly update their knowledge to stay abreast of markets and keep their enterprises economically viable. Networking with other producers 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 (Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training). Sierra CRAFT promotes collaboration and information sharing among area farmers and ranchers. Area producers, in collaboration with UCCE provide a variety of training, as well as mentoring and networking opportunities. In 2011-12, we delivered workshops on farm equipment, vegetable pest management, and cool season vegetable production.

Impact

- Since October 2010, more than 300 producers from 11 California counties have participated in Sierra CRAFT workshops.
- Both beginning farmers and ranchers and more experienced producers share information and learn hands-on skills from each other, which increases the likelihood of adoption.
- The interest in the workshops and demand for more workshops demonstrates the need for such collaborative, producer-driven training.



Foothill Farming Website

Issue

Access to information on production, marketing, and business management is fundamental 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 issues for our foothill farming community.

What Was Done

Our Foothill Farming website, <http://ucanr.org/foothillfarming>, was built in 2010-11 to fill this information gap. We continue to expand the information provided and the site has become the go-to resource for farmers and ranchers in the foothills and beyond. It is a key contact point for beginning farmers and ranchers to discover the resources and training available to them in this area.

Impact

- The Foothill Farming website has averaged almost 14,000 hits per month since it went online in December 2010.
- With more than 1,760 visitors a month, spending an average of 5 minutes on the site per visit, Foothill Farming is the go-to place for area farming information.
- More and more farmers and ranchers are finding their way to UCCE information and training through the Foothill Farming website. It has become a key referral route for new clientele.





Producer Education



Louise Ferguson, UC Olive Specialist explaining olive tree growth. Olive Pruning Workshop, April 2012, Monte Vista Orchard, Newcastle.



The 140 year old MonteVista Orchard in 2012, showing the results of rejuvenation pruning at the 2011 Olive Pruning Workshop. It is now producing high quality heritage oil.

Issue

Managing a successful small-scale farming or ranching operation takes a wide range of skills; not only production skills, but business, marketing, and risk management skills. There are few options in the foothill area for hands-on training appropriate to farmers and ranchers.

What Was Done

In order to meet the training needs of farmers and ranchers, UCCE offers an array of training throughout the year. In 2011-12, we provided a 6-week long Farm Business Planning course and follow-up business management support for participants. We offered workshops on Contingency Planning, On-Farm Food Safety, Mushroom Production, and Olive Tree Pruning. UCCE also organized a workshop for providers of beginning farmer and rancher training to enhance collaboration and mutual support. Many of these workshops were supported by grants from the USDA Risk Management Agency and Western Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education.

Impact

- Field workshops effectively communicate best practices to growers. Participants adopt sustainable practices such as pruning and composting, based on experience and demonstration at field meetings.
- Many old, abandoned olive groves in Placer County have the capacity to produce high quality oil. Our olive pruning workshops have rejuvenated trees and sparked interest in developing a heritage olive oil industry.



Direct Marketing Education



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Placer County Agriculture

The diversity and high quality of local produce available in certified farmers' markets feeds a growing number of area residents. Marketing education helps maintain the diversity and increase the customer base for local agricultural products.

Issue

Farms in the foothills are small, diverse operations, focused on producing fresh, high quality fruits and vegetables. Most of Placer and Nevada's produce is direct marketed; but farmers are often focused on production and do not have the marketing skills necessary for success.

What Was Done

UCCE works with individual growers, the Foothill Farmers' Market Association, and other organizations to help farmers select profitable crops and market them effectively. In 2012, a team of two Farm advisors and two farmers taught an 18-week Direct Farm Marketing course at Sierra College. We also provided intensive, individual training at a Farm Marketing Academy. In collaboration with the Foothill Farmers' Markets, we presented workshops on selecting profitable crops and opportunities in local markets. We also assist growers by providing research and information on suitable crops and publishing the annual wish list for local markets.

Impact

- The Sierra College Direct Farm Marketing class provided hands-on experiential learning about market research, marketing strategies, regulations and customer relations to 25 potential farmers and ranchers.
- Despite the economy, local certified farmers' markets continue to flourish, providing fresh, local produce to growing numbers of area residents.



Fostering Community

Issue

Communication among regional farmers is often limited by geographic barriers, the diversity of production, and lack of time due to the demands of farming and ranching. There are few regional events bringing farmers together that serve to create enduring ties. Producers often work in isolation on their farms, and have few opportunities for peer-to-peer dialogue and building support networks.

What Was Done

UCCE has made it a priority to provide opportunities for farmers and ranchers to discuss issues, exchange information, and share concerns. We hold on-farm meetings to facilitate farmer to farmer sharing. These include business planning support groups as well as field meetings. Starting in November 2011, UCCE organized monthly “Farmer-to-Farmer” Breakfasts in various locations throughout Placer & Nevada Counties. Most meetings have a brief presentation on an agricultural topic, but the focus is on discussion and conversation. We hosted seven breakfasts through June when the cropping season got into full swing. They will resume in the fall.



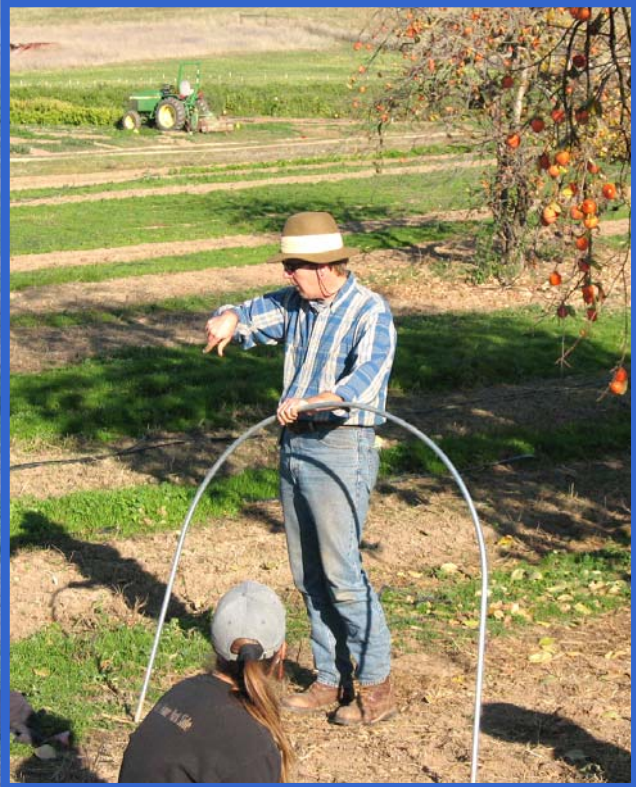
Beginning and experienced farmers talking at an on-farm workshop at Twin Brooks Farm.

Impact

- Over 70 farmers and ranchers have participated in the breakfasts. Average attendance for each breakfast is about 20 farmers and ranchers.
- The breakfasts are very popular among producers and helped many growers make connections with producers they did not know. This fosters networking and community connections which strengthen the ag community.



Pest Management Education



Low tunnels can protect young vegetable crops from pests. Jim Muck explaining their use at the Cool Season Vegetable Workshop, December 2011.



Mandarin growers monitoring for pests at a field meeting.

Issue

New crop pests and new management tools require growers to regularly update their pest management practices. In 2011, a European grapevine moth find in Nevada County triggered a quarantine, and this spring, locusts have been devastating some crops in western Placer County. Growers have to be aware of new developments in managing these pests.

What Was Done

In 2011-12, UCCE delivered workshops on European grapevine Moth and Powdery mildew management to grape growers; sponsored a vegetable IPM workshop, and updated citrus growers on the threat of Asian Citrus Psyllid and Huanglongbing disease. We also coordinate the *Aphytis* wasp release program which helps citrus growers manage California red scale without pesticides. Through e-mail updates, individual consultations, and regular on-farm meetings, we help growers prevent and manage new and existing pests.

Impact

- Growers depend on UCCE for timely information and advice on the best management options for their crops.
- In 2011-12, about 130 producers participated in pest management workshops, field meetings, or seminars.
- Citrus growers annually release about 3 million tiny parasitic wasps to control scale insects, rather than spraying.
- As a result of UCCE field meetings and IPM workshops, more growers are using natural enemies and other low risk options instead of pesticides.