



## Program Highlights

- ◆ 415 producers learn from UCCE sponsored classes, short courses and workshops, improving their production and business skills
- ◆ The 2008 Farm & Barn Tour connects more than 2,000 visitors with local farms and promotes eating local
- ◆ In the past 5 years, 31 mandarin orchards have released over 9 million tiny parasitic wasps to control scale pests; significantly reducing pesticide use

# HORTICULTURE AND SMALL FARMS

**S**mall farms are the foundation of agriculture in Placer and Nevada Counties. They produce a wide range of horticultural crops, including tree and vine fruits, nuts, vegetables, flowers and ornamental plants. Foothill topography creates a multitude of microclimates, allowing production of crops ranging from subtropical citrus and pomegranates to temperate zone Christmas trees and apples. While overall agricultural acreage declines, the small farm community is growing. Acreage of mandarins, winegrapes, ornamentals, as well as direct market vegetables and flowers is slowly increasing.

Most growers in Placer and Nevada Counties farm on small acreages, at the rural-urban interface. The overriding concern is keeping small farms viable in the face of high land prices and development pressures. Specific issues include marketing and farm economics, maintaining produce quality, 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.



*Growers Allen Edwards, Dan Macon, and Steve Pilz conferring in the field.*



# *The Ag Futures Project*

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## **Issue**

Development-driven land prices and an aging producer community without a new generation of producers are major threats to local agriculture. The Placer Ag Futures Project was conceived as a path to engage the farming and ranching community in developing programs to ensure the future viability of local agriculture.

## **What Was Done**

Through the Placer Ag Futures Project, producers across the commodity spectrum have come together to implement programs to build community, recruit a new generation of farmers through outreach and education programs, connect producers with available and affordable agricultural land, and expand local market opportunities. UCCE has been a pivotal part of this effort, convening and facilitating working groups, writing successful funding proposals, and providing coordination support. Producer outreach to area schools raised awareness of opportunities in local agriculture and helped recruit interns for an on-farm internship program. UCCE delivered the intern training and is coordinating the Summer 2009 on-farm intern program. We also continue to provide training to new producers and existing producers and facilitated an agricultural resources fair in Fall 2008. An Ag Futures website to inform and serve local producer needs is under construction.

## **Impact**

The Ag Futures Project has involved the efforts of a broad spectrum of producers and ag agencies in the planning and development of various projects to sustain local agriculture. Producers are working together to move toward the sustainable vision of agriculture they formulated as a group. The outreach to schools helped educate students about opportunities in agriculture and recruited three interns for the summer on-farm intern program. The Ag Futures project continues to be a positive force in the local agricultural community and despite the many demands of farming, producers continue to contribute substantial amounts of time and energy to make the project succeed, because they see it as important to the future of local agriculture.



*One of the Ag Futures Project on-farm interns, Carrie LaPorte, weeding at Pilz Produce.*



# Producer Education

## Issue

Foothill counties lack much of the agricultural support infrastructure that larger farming areas take for granted. With many new growers and producers who need to improve their skills in order to develop viable farming operations; education and connecting producers with available resources is a critical part of the Farm Advisor's function.



*Grower mentoring: Allen Edwards and Douglas Struble, Farm Business Planning Class meeting at Hillcrest Orchard.*

## What Was Done

In 2008-09, 415 producers participated in classes, short courses, and workshops provided by UC Cooperative Extension. In addition to providing training, many of the programs facilitate mentoring and support among producers. The farm business planning course helped 11 small scale farmers and ranchers apply effective business principles to their operations and plan for success. The 2008 class continues to meet regularly to provide on-going assistance and support to these small farm businesspeople. Twenty-two aspiring farmers participated in business and marketing short course for new producers. UCCE also assists new growers by providing information on appropriate crops, soil and climatic conditions, costs of production, and market potential for specific crops. Six vegetable growers collaborated with UCCE on a mixed vegetable cost study that will help aspiring

farmers and provide information to growers wishing to diversify or expand existing operations.

## Impact

Business training classes have helped put several farms on a more sound economic footing, even in these challenging economic times. Ongoing meetings of the 2008 farm business planning class helped producers diversify their enterprises and improved profitability.

- One producer struggled to figure out how to pay himself a salary in the 2008 class; but by 2009, he was able to plan for a \$50,000 salary.
- The beginning farm planning and marketing classes helped producers realistically assess their farming plans. Other classes and workshops helped current growers improve their skills and are helping new producers get their farming operations up and running.



# *Eat Local, Start Now!*

## Issue

Despite the growing interest in and media attention to local food, many area residents are unaware of the agricultural bounty produced in Placer and Nevada Counties. Maintaining a local agriculture depends on good marketing opportunities, educated consumers, and consumers who “buy local first”. However, for consumers new to eating local, it can be a daunting task.

## What Was Done

Educational outreach to inform and expand the local consumer base is critical to the future of local agriculture. In cooperation with the Foothill Farmers’ Markets and local producers, UCCE

has engaged in efforts to help consumers understand how to buy local and make it part of their lifestyle. This outreach included talks to Sierra College classes, a local food luncheon, development of consumer brochures on mandarins, buying local, and ways to support sustainable agriculture, and working with the farmers’ markets on publicizing sources of local food. A series of web pages called “Eat Local, Start Now!” on the UC Placer/Nevada website helps consumers understand how and where to buy local. Information on locally grown crops and what is in season each month is available on the UCCE website at [ceplacer.ucdavis.edu/eat\\_local%2C\\_start\\_now/](http://ceplacer.ucdavis.edu/eat_local%2C_start_now/).

## Impact

The Eat Local pages of the UCCE Placer/Nevada website are becoming an important source of information for local consumers. While specific impacts from these programs may be difficult to measure, farmers’ markets are attracting new consumers, and providing fresh, local and nutritious food to area consumers, despite the economic downturn. A new year-round certified farmers’ market opened in Roseville in October 2008, and traffic in key markets in Auburn and Truckee continues to increase. The interest in eating local continues to increase, and more people are also interested in producing food for local communities.



*Local Organic Produce in the Roseville Foothill Farmers’ Market.*



# Small Farm Direct Marketing

## Issue

Farms in the foothills are small, diverse production operations, with an emphasis on producing fresh, high quality fruits, vegetables, and flowers. Most horticultural crops in Placer/Nevada are direct marketed, and expanding local marketing opportunities is important. Maintaining a local agriculture depends on good marketing opportunities, educated consumers, and producers who

understand marketing and selling.



*Kristin Thompson, Newcastle Produce at the Auburn Certified Farmers' Market.*

## What Was Done

UCCE works with individual growers, the Foothill Farmers' Market Association, and other organizations to help farmers grow produce to fill market windows and promote their farms. In 2008-09, we assisted more than one hundred new growers to assess their resources and market opportunities and determine suitable crops to grow. In collaboration with the Foothill Farmers' Markets, we presented workshops at the PlacerGROWN Farm Conference on getting started in farming and how to keep a farming business alive in

tough economic times. We also presented merchandising workshops to farmers' market vendors. We assist growers wishing to diversify production by publishing the annual wish list of crops needed in local markets; providing research and information on suitable crops; and coordinating orders of unique plant materials from the USDA Germplasm Repository for grower testing.

## Impact

Despite the economy, certified farmers' markets are flourishing in Placer and Nevada Counties, with increasing numbers of local producers and customers. A year-round certified farmers market opened in Roseville in 2008, increasing options for area consumers as well as local producers. Consumer demand for local produce is growing as a result of public education efforts and concern about imported foods and environmental impacts. The demand for local produce often exceeds the supply, so new growers and increased production are needed.



# *Farm & Barn Tour*

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## **Issue**

The rural ambiance in Placer and Nevada Counties is an important factor in the quality of life for many residents. However, most residents have an urban perspective and little connection to agriculture. To keep local farms and farmers viable and sustainable, residents need to connect with them and support them by purchasing locally grown products. Facilitating those connections and building an agritourism industry is critical to the future of local agriculture.

## **What Was Done**

2008 was the fifth year for the Farm & Barn Tour. The Tour was developed to promote agritourism and connect area residents with local farmers and ranchers. UC Cooperative Extension has coordinated the Tour in collaboration with a broad range of agricultural and service organizations. The 2008 Tour included 10 farm and ranch venues; a sheep ranch, a mixed livestock operation, two vineyards, a mixed fruit orchard, an historic fruit shed and nursery, two plant nurseries, an organic vegetable farm, and a flower farm. The Tour featured talks on various aspects of agriculture, local history, farm and ranch tours, animal demonstrations, and artists.



*Pumpkins, iris, and more at Horton Iris Farm, Farm & Barn Tour 2008.*

## **Impact**

The Farm & Barn Tour draws two to three thousand people each year from all over California and across the country. It has become a much anticipated local event which raises public awareness of local agriculture and contributes to increased demand for local produce. According to the 2008 survey of Tour participants:

- 55% of participants had not visited a farm before the Tour.
- 92% of participants stated that they were more likely to buy local produce after going on the Tour, which is a real indication of the importance of the Tour in connecting growers and consumers. The Farm & Barn Tour has brought a great deal of publicity to local agriculture and built support for local farms and farmers.



# Small Farm Progress Day

## Issue

Foothill farming techniques and equipment may be quite different from those in the valley because of the topography, soil, and microclimates. Local growers often have difficulty finding appropriately scaled equipment for their operations and available information on production practices is often not suitable for small-scale foothill farming.



*Vegetable Field Day participants check tillage depth in a spader demonstration at Natural Trading Company.*

## What Was Done

In order to help growers learn foothill-specific farming techniques and about appropriately-scaled equipment, UCCE and local agricultural organizations presented a series of Small Farm Progress Day workshops in Fall 2008 and again in Spring 2009. The 9 workshops and a “Farmer Fair” information and community event were partially funded by a grant from the Western Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education grant. Each of the day-long workshops focused on a specific type of production: fruit crops, vegetables, winegrapes, forestry, and livestock. Each event provided hands-on workshops on various aspects of production and demonstrations of appropriate equipment. ATV, tractor, animal drawn, and hand equipment demonstrations provided something for everyone. The Farmer Fair provided information and an opportunity for community building and networking among diverse groups of producers.

## Impact

Over 230 producers and prospective producers participated in Small Farm Progress Days. The events received very

positive reviews about the learning opportunities and networking. Participants from other counties expressed the wish that they had events like Small Farm Progress Days in their communities. More and more collaboration among growers is occurring as a result of these types of events. For example, to prepare for the vegetable field day, organic growers collaborated to produce a list of organic seed sources for others to share.



# Mandarin Production

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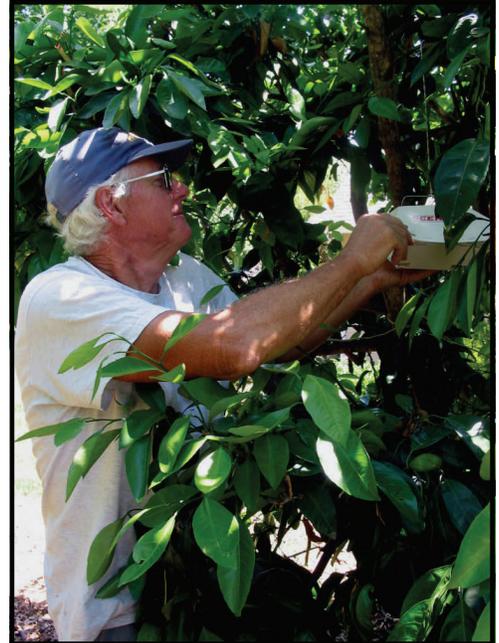
## Issue

Placer County mandarins are recognized for quality and flavor, and are now also known for their synephrine, a natural antihistamine. However, with more mandarins being grown in California, it is important to differentiate ours from the rest. Foothill production occurs on small, scattered acreage, with a focus on quality. As acreage grows, pest concerns rise, marketing becomes more challenging, and maintaining quality is vital.

## What Was Done

Grower education is critical to dealing with mandarin production and marketing issues. UCCE works with the Mountain Mandarin Growers' Association to provide education and update growers on evolving issues. UCCE citrus programs include:

- Field meetings focusing on pruning, pest, soil, and water management.
- Citrus scale biocontrol: UCCE organizes wasp releases to control scale pests.
- Variety Trials: early mandarin varieties are being evaluated for the foothills.
- Northern California Citrus Seminar, provided information to over 40 area growers.
- Asian Citrus Psyllid and Huanglongbing seminar updated growers on a new insect pest and deadly disease threatening California citrus.
- Mandarin Cost Study: Six growers worked with UCCE to revise and update the 2002 Mandarin Cost Study which was published in Fall 2008.
- Provided data for the Synephrine study on the ecological situation and production practices of the orchards involved.



*Bob Roan checking a California red scale trap.*

## Impact

The mandarin cost study update highlighted significant changes in mandarin production practices over the last six years. It is now standard practice to use natural enemies and pruning to control pests, reducing pesticide use significantly. Over the past 5 years, over 9 million tiny parasitic wasps were released to control red scale in 31 mandarin orchards. Compost or composted manure is now used in most orchards as well to reduce water use, improve soil fertility and reduce the need for expensive fertilizers. The practices have been adopted as a result of growers sharing information and working together, strengthening our local mandarin grower community.