



FARMS of TUOLUMNE COUNTY

PURPOSE

Farms of Tuolumne County (FOTC) is a non-profit organization whose goals are to promote locally grown sustainable agriculture; to educate county residents about county agriculture and buying local; to bring communities together for the support and growth of agriculture, agritourism, and preservation of open space in Tuolumne County; and to provide educational scholarships for high school seniors pursuing careers in agriculture.

How Farms of Tuolumne County Began

Jay Norton, University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE) Director and Farm Advisor for Tuolumne County had a mandate to promote agriculture in Tuolumne County.

In 2003, he saw that the county did not have any type of marketing organization for its farmers and ranchers, and felt that there was a need, especially for the small and niche farms and ranches. Several agricultural marketing groups had started in recent years in surrounding counties, such as Farms of Amador and Calaveras Grown, and they seemed to be making a difference in bringing awareness of local agriculture and its products to those areas.

The reasons for creating an agricultural marketing and promotional organization in Tuolumne County were as follows:

- Farmers and ranchers were busy doing what they do best – farming and ranching. Many of them were not comfortable marketing themselves.
- Niche groups such as grass-fed beef, lamb and goat ranchers, and olive oil and lavender growers needed a way to promote their unique product within the county.
- Agritourism was looking like a viable way for farmers and ranchers to add to their income, and to educate county residents on the importance of agriculture, and buying locally grown food.
- Smaller farmers and ranchers needed a method to network with each other in a way different from other agricultural organizations, such as Farm Bureau.
- The county was seeing a number of small start-up farms – especially organic - that could use marketing support.

Steps in forming Farms of Tuolumne County

- In 2003, as office manager for the Farm Advisor, I contacted the Tuolumne County Agricultural Commissioner's office explaining what we were trying to do. I asked for a list of farmers and ranchers in the county, which they kindly provided.
- Letters were sent out to the farmers and ranchers explaining that we were in the process of organizing an agricultural membership group in order to promote local agriculture, offering them the chance to be listed in a brochure which would be distributed throughout the county. Listing was free the first year.
- Many follow-up phone calls were made until finally there were thirty-five agricultural producers who agreed to be listed.
- Next I designed a magazine style brochure which was printed in-house.
- The following year, based on the model from Calaveras Grown, we asked for a \$50 annual membership fee from each producer. This fee scared a couple of farmers who backed out, but there were still thirty-three members. The membership money was put into an account set up by

the University of California for use by the Farms of Tuolumne County for printing costs. The brochure was updated and sent out for print to a local printing company in 2004 and 2005.

- In April of 2006 FOTC formed a Board of Directors from among its members.
- In May of 2006, Farms of Tuolumne County applied for and received a grant from UC SAREP (Sustainable Community Food Systems Grants) which was administered by UCCE. The purpose of the grant was “to help facilitate FOTC in organizing a non-profit, to engage producers, to inform distributors, and to educate consumers.”
- Some of the grant money was used to hire a local graphics designer, Molly Hart, to create a **logo**.

Incorporation

In 2006 the FOTC Board of Directors decided they wanted to incorporate as a **non-profit** to be independent from UCCE and to give FOTC more voice and leeway in what the organization could do.

- Using Calaveras Grown as a template, FOTC contacted a paralegal (no longer in business, unfortunately) who helped file the non-profit incorporation papers.
- The cost for the incorporation was as follows:
 - \$75 per hour for paralegal (3 hours)
 - \$30 for the purpose of filing the incorporation papers
 - \$15 counter fee when filing
 - \$20 for filing the Statement of Nonprofit Corporation

Important Note: When FOTC incorporated, as mentioned earlier, it used the same basic template as Calaveras Grown and Farms of Amador, describing itself as an agricultural marketing member-based non-profit. When FOTC received the certificate of incorporation from the state of California, the State gave it a 501 © 5 designation, as opposed to the 501 © 3. Later it was discovered that as a 501©5 there is no tax write-off for contributions. It also is limiting in applying for many grants, since many grantors are locked into granting to 501 © 3 non-profits. Consequently, FOTC will be looking into creating an educational branch for the organization designated as a 501© 3 non-profit corporation.

How is Farms of Tuolumne County Managed?

- The By-Laws require at least seven and not more than nine Board of Directors. The Board members volunteer their time.
- Officers are: President, Vice-President, Secretary, CFO/Treasurer and currently four general Board Members. There is also an ex-officio/non-voting member, Scott Oneto, the current UCCE Director for Tuolumne County.
- The Board meets monthly to conduct business, usually at the UCCE conference room.
- Board members are elected every three years, with two positions being staggered so as not to lose all experienced members at one time.
- The organization is financed primarily through membership dues and through its annual fund raiser, the Farm and Ranch Tour.

Membership:

Currently there are forty-six Producers, six Corporate Sponsors and eight Associate Members. (In the information provided to you, there is a membership form listing the various levels of membership.)

How Does FOTC Benefit Its Members?

Marketing

- **Website:** FOTC created a website, www.farmsoftuolumnecounty.org in 2008 for \$414.00. The host for this website is Small Farm Central at www.smallfarmcentral.com. They specialize in websites for farmers and made accommodations for our particular situation (which is a collection of farmers and ranchers) on one website. The annual cost is \$756. This includes
 - Webpage for every member, including pictures
 - E-commerce set-up for on-line sales both by FOTC or an individual FOTC member
 - Tech support
- **Tri-fold** brochure with Farm Trails Map of our members
- **Annual Farm and Ranch Tour** which educates people regarding agriculture and its benefits, showcases the specific tour farms, and brings agritourism to the county. This year's tour is Saturday, June 8. In your packet you will find tour brochures from past years, FYI. A portion of the income from the tour is designated for \$500 educational scholarships for three Tuolumne County high school seniors pursuing careers in agriculture.
- **Farmers Markets**
 - FOTC distributes its farm guide, tour brochures and other FOTC material at Farmers Markets.
 - Many of FOTC members sell at the Farmers Markets and display the FOTC logo.
 - FOTC has arrangement with Sonora and Tuolumne Farmers Markets to have an FOTC booth to sell Farm Tour tickets during Farm Tour season.
- **Facebook** page which was just set up
- **Promotional material:** getting the “brand” out through use of promotional items bearing FOTC logo - T-shirts, canvas bags, refrigerator magnates, product stickers
- **Large tin sign** with FOTC logo is given to each new producer or corporate sponsor to be displayed on their property or at their farmers market booth
- **Fairs and special events:** Participation at County Fair with an FOTC booth, and at the California State Fair where FOTC brochures are distributed and where FOTC members volunteer at the Tuolumne County booth. Also participate in festivals and educational seminars and workshops, such as Farm Bureau's School Farm Day.

Advocating for Agriculture

Unlike Farm Bureau, FOTC is a non-political organization; however it does **advocate**. FOTC has gotten a reputation for being the “go-to” organization in the county for things agricultural. FOTC has mutual memberships with organizations such as Tuolumne County Chamber of Commerce, Columbia Chamber of Commerce, and the Tuolumne County Visitors Bureau. We also collaborate with other organizations such as the county Resource Conservation District (RCD), Farm Bureau, Agriculture Commissioner, Economic Development Director, and of course the University of California Cooperative Extension of Tuolumne County.

Recently Farms of Tuolumne County attended numerous meetings of the Tuolumne County Agricultural Advisory Committee to help revamp the Agricultural Element of the County's General Plan. It has been a two year process. Through the input of FOTC and its members, along with Farm Bureau, and with extensive input by the Agriculture Commissioner, the County's General Plan is becoming friendlier to agriculture and has made way for more agritourism.

I believe that because of Farms of Tuolumne County's efforts, including its Farm and Ranch Tours, the county administrators and supervisors have become more aware of agritourism and its benefits to Tuolumne County, and consequently have become more supportive.

Here are some steps I recommend to begin your agricultural association:

1. Identify what you want from the agricultural association/organization you are creating (such as marketing local farms and ranches, promoting local food, promoting sustainable agricultural practices, organizing a farm trail or farm tour).
2. Talk with your Cooperative Extension Office. Present your ideas and find out how that office can support your efforts. Ask about in-kind support, information about possible grants, etc.
3. Find a source that will provide you with a **list of farmers and ranchers** you can contact in order to have a concrete starting point. UCCE or your Agriculture Commissioner office might be helpful here.
4. You will need at least one person (hopefully you will have more than one) who has a passion for the project – someone who will have the energy and enthusiasm to keep making those follow-up phone calls.
5. If you haven't already, introduce yourself to other groups such as your county Farm Bureau, Agricultural Commissioner and Visitors Bureau, Resource Conservation District, county Chamber of Commerce, and create working relationships with them.
6. Keep in touch with the Small Farm Program.

My personal thoughts:

My roots are in Tulare where my father farmed cotton and alfalfa, and my grandparents were dairymen. My husband Allan's family has roots in Ohio agriculture. We are FOTC sponsors, not growers. Here are some reasons we are devoted to Farms of Tuolumne County:

- We honor agriculture as a source of food and other products.
- We honor its work ethic.
- We value the agricultural landscape and open space.
- We want our local farmers and ranchers to succeed.
- We honor those farmers and ranchers who are doing their best to make a living on their land and to be good stewards, and who want to be able to hand it down to their families.
- We enjoy the agricultural community and the Farms of Tuolumne County members.

Contact Information

Feel free to contact me if I can be of any assistance to you.

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or

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