



HORTICULTURE & SMALL FARMS

Program Highlights

In 2015-16, Horticulture & Small Farms programs provided 122 hours of training to 602 producers.

Our focus on farm business training has resulted in positive outcomes for producers in Placer/Nevada. In a recent survey, 85.7% of local producers reported being profitable, as compared to the 24.8% reported in the last (2012) USDA Ag Census.

Small-scale family farms in Placer and Nevada Counties feed the growing demand for high quality local produce. These farmers produce a wide range of horticultural crops including fruits, vegetables, nuts, and nursery crops, but often cannot produce enough to meet demand. We need more farmers, and many existing farms need to build to scale to become economically viable.

The small scale of most Placer/Nevada farms is a challenge for economic viability and the overall stability of local agriculture. The romantic vision of a one- or two-acre farm growing our food does not provide a living wage to the farmer. Specific issues we address include: training new farmers and helping existing farmers build to scale; marketing and small farm economics; and implementing sustainable practices to manage soil, water, and pests.



Diane Bollinger of Foothill Roots Farm showing crops in a high tunnel, which extends the season, increasing farm income and improving economic viability.

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

- *Provide information, education, and technical assistance to help farmers build and sustain economically viable farming enterprises.*
- *Provide opportunities that encourage growers to work together to address local problems and needs.*
- *Connect growers with area residents and educate consumers about the importance of local agriculture and encourage them to support it by buying local produce.*



BEGINNING FARMER TRAINING

ISSUE

Along with the growth of local food, interest in starting small farms and ranches has blossomed over the last decade. Many prospective producers come to UC Cooperative Extension for help starting their new farm. Most of these beginning farmers have little agricultural experience and need extensive information, training, and support. Successful farming requires an understanding of the production environment as well as business and marketing skills.

WHAT WAS DONE

In 2015-16, UCCE held two sessions of our intensive Beginning Farming Academy with participants from all over California. Farm Advisors and producer-trainers facilitate the training which includes visits to local farms and farmers' markets. Funding from the USDA Risk Management Agency and Western Extension Risk Management Education support the Academy and our mentoring program; leveraging funds to increase services for farmers. We provided farmer mentors to 12 local graduates of the Academy.

UCCE provides on-farm production workshops and individual consultations for aspiring farmers and ranchers. Prospective and beginning producers are tied into local agricultural events, learning opportunities and regulatory updates through weekly e-mails which go to 177 new farmers.

IMPACT

- Two-thirds of new farms participating in the mentoring program reported production efficiency and scale-related changes to their production during the program. This indicates the importance of peer-to-peer learning in helping new farmers to build better farm businesses.
- 79% of Academy participants changed their plans or their timeline as a result of the Academy. Many cite the need to plan more carefully and focus on a business-oriented approach, which increases their likelihood of success.



Patrick Bollinger of Foothill Roots Farm explains production and management practices to Beginning Farming Academy participants, November 2015.

"I learned more in two days than in two years of living on our property!"

-Beginning Farming Academy participant



BUSINESS & MARKETING EDUCATION



Shannon Ousley and Michael Whamond of Hillview Farms at their farmstand which serves urban Auburn residents. Taking advantage of this niche market has helped these beginning farmers build a profitable operation in a short time.



ISSUE

Marketing and business skills may not be the first qualifications most people think about when it comes to farming. However, managing a successful small farm requires good business and marketing skills as well as awareness of and adherence to local, state, and federal regulations governing our agricultural production systems. Building those skills and keeping up to date on regulations can be difficult for busy farmers.

WHAT WAS DONE

UC Cooperative Extension conducted a number of workshops in 2015-16 to help producers improve business and marketing skills and keep up with changing regulations. Over 50 area producers attended a Food Safety workshop focusing on the new Food Safety Modernization Act regulations which was held in conjunction with the Tahoe Food Hub. At the Nevada County Food and Farm Conference, we provided a workshop on basic business requirements for farmers. 43 new and experienced producers attended. At the California Small Farm Conference in Sacramento, we delivered a workshop on Capital Purchases and another on improving farmers' market sales with produce tastings and recipes. Over 50 producers attended the two workshops. We also conducted a tour of several area farmstands and met with the owners to help producers understand what is involved in developing and operating a successful farmstand.

IMPACT

- Focusing training on business and marketing topics impacts the economic viability of local farms. In a recent survey about farm scale and income with Placer/Nevada producers, 85.7% of respondents reported being profitable, as compared to the 24.8% reported in the last (2012) USDA Ag Census.
- 36.7% of the survey respondents were earning the median per capita income from their farms. 68% had attended one or more business-related courses at UCCE.



CITRUS GROWER EDUCATION



Pruning is a key insect and disease pest management technique, but it also improves fruit quality and yield.



The Asian citrus psyllid insect, which transmits the deadly Huanglongbing disease to citrus trees, poses a serious threat to the foothill mandarin industry. While the pest is not yet in this area, it continues to expand its range in California, as is an on-going source of concern to citrus growers.

ISSUE

Mandarins are the signature foothill crop. However, as citrus acreage increases, more issues arise. A global economy and mobile population mean constant vigilance for new pests. Asian Citrus Psyllid and Huanglongbing disease are an increasing threat to our citrus industry.

In order to continue to supply high quality citrus to area consumers, growers need to keep their knowledge and skills up to date on a range of topics and practices. These include pest management, food safety, drought, new regulations, and finding new markets for their fruit.

WHAT WAS DONE

Through weekly e-mails, UCCE keeps growers informed of developments affecting their orchards and works with growers to upgrade their skills and practices. Field and association meetings educate growers about effective practices, new technologies, and issues affecting citrus production. 2015-16 field meetings and workshops addressed pruning, soil moisture monitoring and water conservation, invasive pests and their management, and on-farm food safety. 18 new citrus growers learned the basics of production in an 8-hour class held in collaboration with Sierra College. A pruning workshop at a local orchard taught newer growers key practices and upgraded skills for experienced growers. We also helped coordinate a meeting with CDFA on Asian Citrus Psyllid and Huanglongbing disease.

IMPACT

- In the last decade, citrus growers have released over 17 million tiny parasitic wasps to control scale insect pests without pesticides.
- Citrus field meetings promote farmer-to-farmer information exchange. This has resulted in rapid adoption of best management practices such as pruning, mulching, and water conservation among area citrus growers.



SOIL & WATER MANAGEMENT

ISSUE

While high quality fruits and vegetables are the hallmark of foothill farms, our soil resource is limited. Foothill soils are shallow and not very fertile, so using conservation practices such as cover cropping and mulching are essential to maintaining quality production. Despite good rains in 2015-16, we are still in a drought so growers must carefully manage their irrigation and water use. In addition, increasing regulation of water and fertilizer use means farmers must constantly re-evaluate practices and reduce environmental impacts.

WHAT WAS DONE

In 2015-16, UCCE provided several workshops on soil and water management as well as assisting individual growers to improve the efficiency of their water use and adopt practices that improve and maintain soil fertility. We conducted a workshop to help growers translate their laboratory soil report into a fertilizer program. In conjunction with the Placer-Nevada-South Sutter-North Sacramento Sub Watershed Group, we provided a nitrogen management workshop to comply with new state regulations, and assisted individual growers to complete the records needed. We also conducted an irrigation and water conservation workshop in collaboration with Nevada Irrigation District (NID) and the Nevada County Resource Conservation District. We loan out soil moisture monitoring equipment to growers to help them learn to schedule irrigations for optimal crop production and water use.

IMPACT

- New nitrogen regulations and reporting are a burden on farmers. However, few of our farmers need to change their practices because they already use the “best management practices” to reduce nitrogen runoff recommended by the program.
- On-farm workshops allow experienced farmers to share practical knowledge and participants adopt best management practices more quickly than other farmers, primarily as a result of peer-to-peer sharing.



High quality fruits and vegetables require careful soil and water management.



WEB and SOCIAL MEDIA OUTREACH

ISSUE

Accessible, reliable and accurate information is critical in today's world. Local producers need information on production, marketing, and business management when they have time to look for it. Beginning farmers need a place to get basic information and their questions answered. The internet and social media are the tools of choice, especially for the younger generation. Effective outreach to recruit new farmers is essential as our farm population ages and demand for local products increases.

The web and social media provide a lot of agricultural information on-line. However, it is often not appropriate to foothill conditions, nor based on science, which can create problems for beginning farmers learning a new métier.

WHAT WAS DONE

The Foothill Farming website, <http://ucanr.org/foothillfarming>, provides access to a plethora of information developed for foothill agricultural conditions. It is a resource and contact point for beginning farmers and ranchers to find out about available resources and training. We update and expand the website regularly to meet producer needs. Local farmers write regular blog posts which address issues and techniques for foothill farmers. The Foothill Farming Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/FoothillFarming> expands our outreach, driving users to the website.

IMPACT

- In 2015-16, the Foothill Farming website had 13,215 visits from 10,664 individual users and logged 29,521 page views.
- The Foothill Farming Facebook page has 256 “likes” and a total reach over the last year of 13,279 people.
- Almost 80% of users are new to the Foothill Farming website, demonstrating its value as an outreach tool.
- Only 4.4% of local farmers are under 35 years of age, but 61% of website users are under 35. This bodes well for the future, as clearly there is interest in small-scale farming among the younger generation.

