



UC Cooperative Extension

April 2026

San Luis Obispo & Santa Barbara County News

Science-based solutions for healthy and resilient communities, food systems, and environments.



Message From the Director

Volunteers are at the heart of UCCE's education and public service mission. In Ventura, Santa Barbara, and San Luis Obispo counties, UCCE supports more than 980 trained and dedicated volunteers. These community members give their time, their local knowledge, and their unique skills to help others.

In 2024 alone, our volunteers gave more than 87,000 hours of service. They share science-based information about gardening, safe food preservation, youth development, and caring for the environment. Their work reaches deeply into our communities and makes a real difference. Volunteers also help guide UC research by asking local questions and collecting local data. In our three-county region, the value of their time and service is more than \$14.4 million each year.

April is Volunteer Appreciation Month, so we are dedicating this newsletter to our volunteers. This month we want to shout out **all of our 4-H Volunteers**, highlight **30 years of our UC Master Gardeners** program in San Luis Obispo County, and showcase a UC Master Food Preserver Volunteer, **Debbie George**, who has given so much of her time to serving our communities. Read below to learn more about their work.

Through our volunteers' steady support, knowledge, and commitment, our programs reach more people and better meet local needs. I am truly thankful for the time and care they give, and I am proud to work alongside them to support UCCE's mission.

Shannon Klisch
UCCE Director in Ventura, Santa Barbara, and San Luis Obispo

UCCE Advisor Updates

**Building Resilience through
Reflective Practices: An**



Experiential Workshop for Students Preparing for Careers in Healthcare

By **Katherine Soule**

UCCE, in partnership with the San Luis Obispo Museum of Art, will host a 2-hour workshop on April 27th for students in the healthcare field: *Building Resilience through Reflective Practices: An Experiential Workshop for Students Preparing for Careers in Healthcare*. Sponsored by Adventist Health, this workshop uses art, movement and guided reflection to strengthen provider well-being and enrich patient care.

Set inside the San Luis Obispo Museum of Art's exhibition *Once Upon Now*, this two-hour session invites students preparing to become healthcare providers to develop essential skills to sustain themselves and patients. Students will learn about and practice evidence-based techniques taught by Harvard Medical School. Participants will leave with transferable skills to deepen empathy, curiosity and cultural responsiveness in their daily work. These workshops are offered in support of SLO County Healthcare Workforce Partnership's effort to improve retention and provide meaningful training opportunities locally.

"At SLOMA, we believe art can be a powerful tool for presence and reflection. Partnering with the Cooperative Extension allows us to bring mindfulness into our galleries in ways that nourish both creativity and well-being and we are so grateful to Adventist Health for their support of this innovative pilot program."
— Leann Standish, Executive Director, San Luis Obispo Museum of Art

This workshop is scheduled from 9-11am on April 27th. Additional workshops for healthcare providers are planned during Spring. Interested providers can contact Dr. Katherine Soule, University of California Cooperative Extension at kesoule@ucdavis.edu for workshop details and registration.

Not open to public, media welcome, students encouraged to register.

[Register Here](#)

Disaster Resilience

By **Lilian Thaoxaochay**

How to think like a beaver

In March, I visited an active habitat restoration site at Walters Creek in the Morro Bay Watershed. The site visit was hosted by the SLO Beaver Brigade and Nature's Engineers, who are using Beaver Dam Analogs (BDAs) to help restore natural river systems.



BDAs are part of a long-term effort to improve stream health, support wildlife, and build climate resilience. These structures help slow water during storms, store water during dry periods, and strengthen local water resources. They are built using nearby vegetation, mainly coyote brush, which can also reduce wildfire risk by lowering fuel loads.

The public can learn more about this work by joining family-friendly guided tours offered in April and May. Space is limited.

Photo Credit: Lilian Thaoxaochay, UCCE – Cooper Lienhart of Nature's Engineers points at a Beaver Dam Analog built into Walters Creek from the previous year.

[Register Here Today](#)

Have a disaster resiliency story you'd like to share? Contact Lilian at lilthaox@ucanr.edu or 805-441-4119 to be featured. [Subscribe to the blog here.](#)

UCCE Community Education Programs



UC Master Food Preservers Volunteer Appreciation

The UC Master Food Preserver Program is small but mighty. We have 14 certified volunteers plus a new cohort of trainees coming on shortly. In 2024 our volunteers provided over 1500 hours of service and education valued at over \$61,000. Each volunteer contributes a minimum of 35 service hours and completes at least 10 hours of continuing education annually. We are thankful for all of our volunteers and are pleased to highlight one individual who regularly goes above and beyond in support of San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara counties.

Debbie George

By Kelly Hong

Debbie has been a Master Food Preserver volunteer for almost 9 years, and with over 200 hours completed for this year alone, she continues to carry out the UC Master food Preserver mission and engages residents all throughout Northern Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo Counties in safe home food preservation education. She is a go-getter and loves to connect with community members, especially youth, to help reduce barriers and to pass on research-based practices related to food preservation.

Photo Credit: UCCE Staff : Volunteer Debbie George



UC 4-H Youth Development Program Volunteer Appreciation

The UC 4-H Youth Development Programs in San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara counties benefits from 362 adult volunteers who contributed more than 39,000 hours of their time last year. These volunteers make a lasting difference by mentoring youth, modeling leadership, and building essential life skills. Research shows that even one supportive adult can improve a young person's



mental health, school success, resilience, and overall well-being. For many youth, a 4-H volunteer is that trusted adult.

Latest News

By Ana Torres

On April 8, 4-H youth and staff from Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo counties took part in a full-day experiential learning trip to Santa Cruz Island in Channel Islands National Park.

Learning began before the boat even left the harbor. Youth joined a safety briefing and quickly became engaged in the experience. During the boat ride, they were excited to see humpback whales breaching, a highlight for many. After arriving at Scorpion Cove, the group ate lunch and were joined by one of the island's most famous animals, the island fox. A naturalist guide then led a hike, teaching youth about the island's history, unique ecosystem, and current conservation efforts. Participants also met a park ranger and spoke with conservation volunteers working on projects across the island.



To close out the day, youth gathered on the beach for a storytelling activity led by 4-H Advisor Melissa Guillen before returning home.

Photo Credit: Ana Torres:4H youth (above) Island Fox (left)

UC Master Gardeners of San Luis Obispo County



Volunteer Appreciation & Recognition

The UC Master Gardener program in San Luis Obispo County includes more than 133 certified volunteers. Each volunteer contributes a minimum of 35 service hours and completes at least 10 hours of continuing education annually. All of our volunteers are essential to our impact. For Volunteer Appreciation Week, we are pleased to highlight their 30 years of service to the County.

By Christopher Greer

At the April 7, 2026 meeting of the San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors, the UC Master Gardener Program was recognized for 30 years of service to the community. The Board honored volunteers for providing residents with research-based information on home gardening, pest management, and

sustainable landscaping. The resolution also proclaimed April 2026 as UC Master Gardeners Awareness Month in San Luis Obispo County.

The UC Master Gardener Program in San Luis Obispo County was established in 1996 under the leadership of former UC Advisor Mary Bianchi. Over the past 30 years, the program has trained more than 500 volunteers and contributed over 151,500 hours of volunteer service to county residents.

We are grateful to our volunteers for their dedication and for representing the University of California throughout San Luis Obispo County.

Photo Credit: County of San Luis Obispo Staff



April 18th Master Gardener Plant Sale 9:30 AM to 12:30 PM • Garden of the Seven Sisters

The plant propagation team has been busily growing some great plants. Come on out to the [Seven Sisters Demo Garden](#) on April 18th to see what we have . There will be a nice selection of California natives + more .

Please bring cash or checks. *checks must be made out to UC Regents



Achillea mix
SLO MG Kathy Cinowalt,
Photographer



Ceanothus 'Blue Jeans'



Heuchera-maxima-Island-Alum-Root4



Salvia apiana

Calendar of Classes & Events

[Roses: Pruning, Pests, and Diseases](#): Saturday, April 18, 2026
10:00am-12:00pm: San Luis Obispo:
Garden of the 7 Sisters.
[Hands-On Class: Spring Food](#) :
Tuesday, April 22, 2026: 2:00pm
-3:30pm: Lompoc Library
[Vertebrate Pest Control Workshop](#):
Saturday, April 25, 2026: Paso
Robles, Centennial Park Oak Room.

[How to Grow and Preserve Your Own Herbal Bounty](#): MG & MP
Collaboration Saturday, May 16th,
2026: 10:00am-12:00pm San Luis
Obispo, UCCE Auditorium
[Hands-On Class: Peach Salsa](#):
Saturday, May 9, 2026: 10:00am-
11:00am: Paso Robles Library Study
Center

Funding Opportunities

Small Farms

Compiled by Claire Tuohey-Mote

Grants Available for Small Farms

- New Producer Grant from AgWest Farm Credit. This up to \$15,000 grant is designed for farmers that have 2 years or less of operation and is meant to assist with the large capital investment that farming requires. Find more information about the application on [AgWest Farm Credit's grant page](#). Applications are open until May 31, 2026.
- Tractor Replacement Incentive Program from SLO County Air Pollution Control District. Farmers can replace their old diesel tractors with newer, cleaner models, including electric tractors. Find out more about the program on the [District's Grant page](#). Applications are open until August 2026 or until funding is fully contracted.
- California Underserved and Small Producer Grant from California Department of Food and Agriculture. For any small scale farm that has sustained extreme weather related losses from 2017 - present, this grant will reimburse you! Please see the [California Underserved and Small Producer Grant page for more information](#).

Small Farm Staff Research Associate Claire Tuohey-Mote is available to assist with any of these applications and others that farmers are interested in. Please contact Claire at ctuoheymote@ucanr.edu or 805-704-9098



Supplemental Disaster Relief Program

(SDRP, Deadline: April 30, 2026) – The **USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA)** began accepting applications on November 29, 2025, for *Stage 2* of SDRP for producers with uninsured or shallow drought-based losses from 2023 and 2024 that were not previously covered by *Stage 1* of SDRP. Applicants who receive funds from this program must purchase federal crop insurance or NAP coverage for the next two available crop years at the 60% coverage level or higher.

For more information about San Luis Obispo County, contact the Templeton Office (65 S Main Street, Suite 106, Templeton, CA) at (805) 434-0398. For more information about Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties, contact the Santa Maria Office (920 E Stowell Road, Santa Maria, CA) at (805) 928-9269.

Partner Resources

It's baaaa-ck! Join us for City Farm SLO's 5th Annual Sheep Shearing Shindig!



Get ready for an afternoon of hands-on agriculture at City Farm SLO's 5th Annual Sheep Shearing Shindig & Ag Festival on Saturday, May 9th, from 12 PM to 4 PM!

City Farm SLO is a regenerative urban farm in the heart of San Luis Obispo, growing food, raising animals, educating youth, and building a stronger local food system, together with our community. Every year, the farm opens its gates for an afternoon celebrating Central Coast agriculture, and this year marks a big one.

Join us for our 5th Annual Sheep Shearing Shindig & Ag Festival — a free, family-friendly afternoon of live demonstrations, hands-on activities, farm tours, live music, with local food, beer & wine. Whether you've been a friend of the farm for years or you're visiting for the first time, there's something here for everyone of all ages.

More information can be found at [the sheep shearing shindig page](#).



California Strawberry Commission's 3rd Annual Production Research Meeting - April 24, 2026

The California Strawberry Commission's 3rd Annual Production Research Meeting will take place April 24, 2026 at the Santa Maria Inn in Santa Maria, CA. [View meeting flyers in English and](#)

[Spanish](#) for agenda and registration.

Santa Barbara County: Ag Pass Program Training Dates Announced

The Santa Barbara County Agricultural Commissioner's Office has announced the 2026 training dates for the Ag Pass Program. Commercial agriculture operations (40 acres or larger) are encouraged to apply and/or renew in the event of an emergency or disaster.

New applicants need to attend the in-person training on April 27 in Santa Maria. Existing pass holders will be required to attend a zoom session on either May

19 or June 2. Please see the [County of SB website](#) for more information and to see if you qualify for this program.

2026 SOD BLITZ May 1st–May 5th

Sudden Oak Death (SOD), a serious exotic disease, is threatening the survival of tanoak and several oak species in coastal forests of California, between Del Norte and Monterey Counties. The disease spreads during wet years on leaves of California bay laurels and tanoaks. The presence of SOD symptomatic bay leaves generally precedes oak infections. So timely detection of the disease on bay laurel leaves is key. SOD blitzes inform and educate the community about SOD, get local citizen scientists involved in detecting the disease on bay laurel and tanoak leaves, and produce detailed local maps of disease distribution.

Additionally, the samples collected during the SOD blitzes allow for genetic screening to detect if a new and more aggressive variant of the disease is present. Given the late rainfall in 2026, SOD is expected to be spreading and may have arrived at a site near you. Currently we do not have SOD on vegetation in San Luis Obispo County but we it is very close and surveying symptomatic bay laurels is critical so we can act promptly if found. If you want to be part of the solution, become a volunteer at one of the 2026 SOD Blitzes: schedule, locations, and other info at [SOD Blitz Info Page](#).

UCCE in Ventura, Santa Barbara, and San Luis Obispo counties improves the lives of local residents by working with growers, families, volunteers, and partners to advance science-based solutions in agriculture, natural ecosystems, community health, and youth development.

Your support helps in many ways.
Thank you.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
Agriculture and Natural Resources

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