

July 31, 2026

UCCE Santa Barbara County Q4 2025-26 Report

During the fourth quarter UCCE in Santa Barbara County conducted applied research and education projects reflecting the highest priorities in agriculture, natural resources, youth development and community health in the county. Q4 applied research projects included:

- investigation of **pest management in gerbera daisies** in support of the county's floriculture industry, (Production Horticulture Advisor)
- **high density planting trials for GEM avocados** (Subtropicals Advisor)
- evaluation and **demonstration of cover crops** for soil health and climate resilience (HAREC Director), among many other projects
- detection and management of emerging outbreaks of **lettuce Fusarium wilt** in support of lettuce industry (Integrated Pest Management Advisor), among many others

Agriculture Research & Education Programs

- Soils, Water, & Subtropicals
- Production Horticulture
- Integrated Pest Management
- Organic Agriculture – Education and Mentorship
- Small Farms

Changes this quarter: UCCE Santa Barbara submitted two high priority positions to the 2026 ANR position call, Vegetable and Berry Crops Advisor + Livestock & Natural Resources Advisor

Natural Ecosystem and Working Landscapes Research & Education Programs

- Disaster Resiliency Planning and Policy
- Natural Resources and Watershed
- UC Environmental Stewards

Changes this quarter: Royce Larsen, Rangeland & Watershed Advisor Retired June 30, 2026

Community Education & Youth Development Research & Education Programs

- CalFresh Healthy Living, UCCE
- Healthy Families and Communities
- 4-H Youth Development
- UC Master Gardeners
- UC Master Food Preservers

Mission: UCCE in Santa Barbara County 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.

Changes this quarter: Recruited a new 4-H College & Career Readiness Coordinator

Q4 Highlights

Supporting youth and community thriving

4-H enrolled over 420 youth during the 2025-26 program year. There are 11 chartered clubs from Carpinteria to Santa Maria where youth lead and learn to develop knowledge and skills while serving the community. In July, 4-H entered 416 individual exhibitors and over 800 entries at the Santa Barbara County Fair, showcasing the incredible hard work of our youth, adult volunteers and program staff.

Through County, UC, and donor support, Santa Barbara 4-H created a first-of-its-kinds bilingual College and Career Readiness Coordinator position. This new role establishes dedicated local capacity to expand afterschool programming, strengthen pathways from school-based programs into 4-H, train teen and adult leaders, and deliver accessible college and career readiness experiences in Santa Maria and across the county. Following a thorough recruitment process for this specialized role, the new coordinator will begin August 12, 2026. A Santa Barbara 4-H youth member also served on the interview panel, ensuring that youth voice directly informed the selection of the coordinator who will lead this work.



*Santa Ynez 4-H members at 4-H Exhibit Day.
Photo A Torres*

CalFresh Healthy Living, UCCE supported food and nutrition security with families at Hapgood Elementary in Lompoc through a pilot “Adopt-a-bed” summer garden program. Summer months are often a time when youth face hunger due to lack of school meals. Families signed up in June to adopt a garden bed and learn how to grow, tend, and harvest food at their school garden. Six families signed up to participate and as of writing, over 15 pounds of produce had been harvested and taken home to their families with much more on the way as the summer heats up.

At the end of June CalFresh Healthy Living began to wind down all programming and prepare for the closure of the federally funded program by September 30, 2026. This will leave a large gap in nutrition education programming in our low-income communities. UCCE is strategizing how to fill some of these gaps with our 4-H and other volunteer led programs, however, gaps will remain.



Family at Hapgood working their garden bed. Photo A Marrs.

UC Cooperative Extension

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<https://ucanr.edu/county/santa-barbara-county>

Promoting fire and drought resilience, increasing community health

UC Master Gardeners of Santa Barbara County launched “Learning Labs at Mesa Harmony Gardens” in April. These Learning Labs are focused sessions for hands-on exploration including building a compost pile and avocado tree care. During the quarter, UC Master Gardeners hosted over 40 educational workshops, learning labs, and help tables across Santa Barbara County including Santa Maria and Buellton. Follow-up evaluations from Q3 (Q4 data not yet available) show that two months after attending a workshop, participants report adopting new practices to reduce pesticide application (63%, n=41), use plants that attract pollinators (75%, n=16), select low water-use plants (75%, n=51), clear plants and organic materials 0-5 feet from the home (67%, n=24), and felt more connected to their community (70%, n=97). The UC Master Gardener program includes over 90 volunteers and reaches over 1,400 local residents annually.

Improving the efficiency and profitability of agriculture

Evaluation and demonstration of cover crops

A demonstration field day was held at the Hansen Agricultural Research and Extension Center (HAREC) on April 17, 2026 for farmer cooperators of a multiyear California Farm Demonstration Network project on healthy soil practices. The event was led by HAREC Director Annemiek Schilder with Advisor Ben Faber, Agricultural Education Specialist Kristen Mussack, and collaborators from the UC Davis Cereal Breeding Program, Rodale Institute California Organic Center, and the Ventura County Resource Conservation District. Demonstrations included 20 types of winter cover crops, the effect of planting date, new cereal varieties from UC Davis, functional cover crops for orchards, and orchard floor management (crimping versus mowing). Of the 12 participants, 100% indicated that they had gained new knowledge and 92% indicated they intended to apply it in their operations. The event also stimulated farmer-to-farmer learning. One participant commented on the “demonstration and wealth of knowledge and experience shared by hosts and other farmers”



Photo: Dr. Alicia del Blanco describing new varieties of wheat, barley, oats and triticale at HAREC in Camarillo. Dr. Blanco is a Project Scientist and cereal breeder at the UC Davis Department of Plant Sciences, specializing in oat and malting barley improvement. Her work focuses on developing new climate-adapted and disease-resistant small-grain varieties for California agriculture.

Subtropical Crops Advisor Ben Faber completed harvesting on a GEM avocado high density trial in Santa Paula (Ventura County). High-density planting can increase the profitability of avocado production due to decreased land and water requirements. The trial will assess the yield outcomes of the high-density plantings. Some preliminary findings suggest changes to harvesting methods (i.e. using two hands to snap the fruit off vs. clippers) could increase harvesting efficiency. Yield data from this trial will be published and shared extensively with growers in Santa Barbara County in late 2026



GEM fruit hiding behind a branch. Photo: Faber

Articles published by or about UCCE during Q4:

Agriculture

AgAlert [Moth damage rises as growers await new insecticides](#). June 3, 2026 Impacts of diamondback moth infestations on the central coast and UC guidance on using available pesticides.

Topics in Subtropics: Over 35 [articles published on the blog](#) during Q4 (selected examples linked below)

- [Citrus Plant Growth Regulators](#) June 18, 2026
- [The Beetles That Could Threaten California's Avocados](#) June 17, 2026
- Winter 2026 Topics in Subtropics Newsletter Available in [English](#) (Spanish coming soon)

Natural Resources & Fire

PNAS. [Egress thresholds and wildfire fatalities](#). June 1, 2026 (Moritz). Wildfire fatalities drop sharply as communities gain more outward road access, but only up to about six exits. Beyond that point, additional roads offer little further protection. Article quoted in [YourCentralValley.com](#), [Santa Barbara Independent](#), [Sierra Sun Times](#) and the [Mercury News](#).

Earth's Future. [Evolving fire frequency in the western United States and its links to human influence](#). Also in AGU [Western U.S. Wildfires Have Gotten Less Frequent, Though Larger](#). April 2026 (Mortiz)

Community Education

Future. [A Pilot Study of a Youth Gardening Retrospective Survey Tool: Evaluating Outcomes of School-Based, Garden-Enhanced Nutrition Education Programs](#). April 2026 (Soule, Marrs).

UCCE Santa Barbara publishes a monthly newsletter. [Subscribe here](#) or visit our [home page](#) for events and new education and information or visit the [UC Master Gardener events page](#).