

Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau Ask Laura Newsletter Column
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Q: Where can I learn more about direct marketing, and marketing in general, for small farms?

A: There are a number of resources available to you, both on the internet and at in-person educational events. First I would recommend that you periodically scan through the Farm Business and Market Place website at <http://ucce.ucdavis.edu/farmbusinessandmarketplace>. The website was developed to provide small and mid-scale farmers along the Central Coast with up-to-date business and marketing information from a variety of sources including UC Cooperative Extension, the United States Department of Agriculture, and many other government and non-profit organizations that work in support of local and the nation's agriculture. New materials are uploaded to the website as they become available.

You might also consider attending local and statewide educational programs that UC Cooperative Extension and other partners organize and sponsor together with the goal of providing and sharing research and field based information with local farmers. Our local websites are a good source of information about upcoming events. They, too, are updated as new educational programs become available: <http://cesantacruz.ucdavis.edu> or <http://cemonterey.ucdavis.edu>.

Another option would be to consider attending the 26th Annual California Small Farm Conference, which is being held at the Radisson Hotel and Conference Center in Fresno from Sunday, March 10 through Tuesday, March 12, 2013. The theme is Harvesting Knowledge: Growing Small Farms. Besides being able to learn about direct marketing through Sunday field courses (tours), there will be a variety of workshops on Monday and Tuesday that highlight this essential aspect of farming. In addition the conference is a perfect opportunity to meet and network with other farmers, managers of Certified Farmers' Markets, educators, and speakers who are relatively new to farming as well as those with decades of agricultural experience.

The theme of two of the Sunday field courses might be of interest to you: The Diversity of Markets and Agritourism. Others will focus on Organic and Transition to Organic Farming, Diversity in Specialty Crops, and Natural Resources Management. In addition at least five workshops will highlight various aspects of marketing and five more are slated to focus on business related topics for small farms. So there is bound to be plenty to capture your interest and provide you with information and contacts.

There is a scholarship program to support conference participation of eligible small-scale farmers and farmers' market managers. In addition, there is an ever popular Regional Tasting Reception that features culinary treats from the area. More information about the conference, including testimonials from previous attendees, can be found at the conference's website, <http://www.californiafarmconference.com/>.

Finally, please visit the UC Davis based Small Farm Program website, which will surely have information of interest to you: <http://sfp.ucdavis.edu>.

Let us know if we can help with any other questions!