

Alternative Crops for Mendocino and Lake Counties



Agricultural Diversification Conference
January 10th, 2004 Kelseyville



Lake County Strengths:

- Clean water and air
- Smart growers (really!)
- Moderately good capitalization
- Close to major markets
- Diverse community—good source of ideas
- Supportive local government
- Adequate labor



Lake County Weaknesses

- Lack of grower/shippers
- Limited and Unstructured market place for specialty growers
- Very cold winters, hot summers limits opportunities
- Growers tend to be conservative
- Production approach vs. market approach



Trends (Negative):

- Globalization: bean counters are in charge!
- “Free Trade:” American Fantasy!
- Grow more stuff for less: will ultimately destroy agriculture as we know it
- Fewer Handlers, Customers and Processors: tendency to pit growers against each other, unfair or unethical pricing structures
- California Growth: many people interested in our real estate and water for urbanization. Nice way for growers to end it all= big \$\$ to cash out



Trends (Positive): Community Food Systems Security Movement

- People want a safe and reliable food source that is locally produced
- Value is placed on food grown in places that are unpolluted—clean air, water and soil
- Farmer to consumer direct links



Marketing Costs!

- Getting closer to the end customer is expensive—marketing costs are normally 20-40 percent of business overhead
- Time consuming—direct marketing can easily match production efforts in terms of time



Some Direct Links:

- Farmer's Markets: Locally limited; average growers making about \$10,000 per season. Bay Area Farmers Markets a possibility, but time consuming.
- C.S.A.'s: Possible, but complicated to set up. Almost exclusively requires organic certification
- School cafeteria purchases
- On farm sales
- Restaurants
- Mail Order



A Quick Review of Different Horticultural Crops: Fruits and Nuts

Apples: Oversupply

Stone Fruits: Oversupply for any processing fruit, some possibilities for fresh fruit

Walnuts and Almonds: Oversupply, but opportunity for organic producers

Berries for local production: Limited to what can be sold locally; otherwise, no handlers and shippers



Ornamentals and Cut Flowers

- Some possibilities, but very labor intensive
- Understanding of market niches essential
- Field grown and liner nurseries; materials for stream bank restoration
- Christmas trees rebounding
- Dry cut flower market good
- Specialty cuts: flowering trees, shrubs



Other Crop Possibilities

- Specialty fruits and vegetables
- Pomegranates, figs, jujubes
- Chestnuts, pecans
- Heritage vegetables
- Asian vegetables



Agronomic Crops

- Seed crops, especially grass seed
- “Gourmet” hay, such as timothy and red clover



Marketing the Farm Experience

- Agritourism
- Hunting clubs
- “Resident” campers