Position Title: Horticulture and Specialty Crops Advisor, Humboldt and Del Norte Counties

Position: (1) The advisor will develop, implement, and evaluate education and research programs for all North Coast commercial horticultural industries (vegetables, fruits, grains, and ornamentals) and support the region’s horticulturalists. The advisor will develop applied research projects that meet the needs of producers and will support the North Coast’s food systems, sustainability, resiliency, marketing, innovation, and competitiveness.

(2) A graduate degree in plant science, horticulture, agronomy, crop science, or related field is required. Familiarity with multiple cropping systems, organic farming practices, regenerative soil management, integrated pest management, plant pathology/entomology, weed management, and direct market farming is highly desirable. The ability to work with clientele across a wide range of socio-economic classes and ethnicities is essential.

(3) This position will provide technical support of plant-based agriculture in Humboldt and Del Norte and may affiliate with the Diversified Farming - Food Systems PT, Vegetable Crops PT, Environmental Horticulture PT, SAREP, State Master Gardener Program, and the Small Farm Workgroup. This position is critical and widely supported by these PTs and WGs because there is extremely limited agricultural expertise in the North Coast, with no personnel from Humboldt State University or community colleges, no pest control advisors, no crop consultants, or CE plant science advisors within a 3-hour (Humboldt) to a 5-hour (Del Norte) drive of this region.

Justification: Humboldt and Del Norte Counties have numerous vegetable, fruit, and ornamental growers, including 150 certified organic producers (22% of the region’s agricultural production). The North Coast has an abundant supply of water, and the region’s agricultural value will likely increase in importance with prolonged drought and climate change stimulating crop migration. North Coast farmers grow a variety of crops sold at farmers’ markets, roadside stands, community-supported agricultural programs, grocers, and restaurants. These entrepreneurs are the backbone of local food production, which supports agricultural businesses, provides rural family incomes, sustains economic diversity, and enhances the regional quality of life. The North Coast hosts an internationally important bulb and lily industry. Del Norte County produces 95% of the nation’s Easter lily bulbs. The region’s young producers, along with socially disadvantaged and underserved Hispanic, Native American, and Hmong agricultural entrepreneurs, seek extension support.

By filling this position, ANR will support several critical issues with local and regional impact. This position will provide research and education support to 1) diversified farming systems, 2) food security, 3) farm stability, and 4) climate resilience. The ANR Strategic Vision (2025) outlines ANR’s need to support Enhancing Competitive, Sustainable Food Systems, where the economic viability of agriculture depends on our ability to adapt to climate change, population growth, water and land availability, technological change, and fluctuating markets. Furthermore, tackling food security and farm stability in low-income, geographically remote areas is essential and supports the ANR condition changes of community health and wellness along with emerging food economies and markets and food security. The advisor will work with local farmers, the North Coast Growers’ Association, the Community Alliance of Family Farmers, the Humboldt Food Policy Council, and others to assist producers and consumers in supporting local and regional food systems and meet the growing demand for access to local food.

Extension: The advisor will provide research-based educational programs to farmers, consumers, decision-makers, and other stakeholders involved in agriculture and food systems in support of
environmentally sustainable and economically sound communities. The advisor will assist producers with regional farming challenges such as developing diversified farming programs; water quality compliance; soil health; soil carbon; organic pest management; enterprise and market analysis; succession planning; beginning farmer programs; direct marketing; labor laws; farmland preservation; and community food security. The advisor will provide technical support to the Master Gardener programs and utilize these volunteers to disseminate information to the public and support environmental horticulture needs. Local Native American tribes have a strong interest in food sovereignty, crop production, community gardens, and youth development extension programming. Leadership opportunities serving tribal communities in California and nationally continue to expand and highlight the potential for growth of this program at a state level.

Research: There are numerous opportunities for collaborative research that addresses the North Coast’s unique coastal climates and highly productive soils, which are well suited for small-scale producers and niche marketing. Research needs into emerging specialty crops (e.g., cold hardy citrus, quinoa, wasabi, grape varieties, etc.), organic production systems, new crop varieties crops, and pest management issues. The region's large-scale floriculture and lily bulb producers seek localized research to help manage nematode and fungal disease challenges. Local tribal communities have also identified traditional foods and food sovereignty as research priorities.

ANR Network: The advisor will collaborate with ANR specialists and farm advisors, campus-based colleagues (Amelia Gaudin, Cassandra Swett, Ian Grettenberger, Loren Oki, Don Merhaut, Becky Westerdahl, Jennifer Sowerwine, Christy Getz, Keith Taylor, Steve Fennimore, Houston Wilson, Joji Muramoto, Sonja Brodt, and others). The position could also complement a network of future hires and collaboratively address a range of horticulture, IPM, specialty crop, and small farm issues, especially focusing on coastal agriculture systems where ANR has limited expertise.

Network External to ANR: The advisor will work closely with a variety of stakeholders and partnerships, including the North Coast Growers Association; Humboldt and Del Norte Farm Bureaus; Tribes (Yurok, Hoopa, Karuk, etc.); NRCS; Small Business Development Corporation; and the Klamath-Trinity, Humboldt, and Del Norte Resource Conservation Districts.

Support: Support for this position, including office space, travel, clerical support, and office supplies, are provided in existing budgets from both counties.

Other support: Grants funds from CA Department of Food and Agriculture Specialty Crops Program, USDA Rural Development, USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service, Organic Research Foundation, WSARE, and private foundations can lend additional financial support.

Location: The advisor will be housed in either the UCCE Del Norte (Crescent City) or Humboldt (Eureka) office. The Humboldt and Del Norte CE unit has historically had horticultural experience, and there is significant gap created by the 2017 retirement of the Plant Sciences advisor. The Del Norte office has been without an advisor since 2010. The new advisor would complement Jeff Stackhouse (Livestock Advisor) and Yana Valachovic (Forest Advisor), along with the youth and nutrition expertise of Dorina Espinoza. Lakeport is the closest CE office with plant science expertise, and the travel distance is too far for program delivery from that office.

Developed and proposed by: Yana Valachovic, Humboldt-Del Norte County Director with support from Humboldt and Del Norte Boards of Supervisors; North Coast Growers Association; Community Alliance with Family Farmers; Humboldt and Del Norte Farm Bureaus and Resource Conservation Districts; Easter Lily Research Foundation; and the Buckeye Conservancy.