

Position Title: Specialty Crops Advisor for Sonoma, Marin and Napa Counties

Position: The Specialty Crop Farm Advisor will be responsible for developing and conducting a rigorous and innovative research and extension program in Sonoma, Marin and Napa counties focused on high value specialty fruits, vegetables, olives and olive oils, specialty grains, and cut flower production that contribute to food security and viable local economies. These counties are home to pioneering, progressive, and successful small organic operations. In the position headquarters, Sonoma, there are over 800 small-scale commercial farmers who grow olives, tree fruits, nuts, berries, vegetables, herbs, cut flowers, and other specialty crops on about 10,000 acres. In Napa and Marin Counties, specialty crop production is also on the rise, with a combined 1,500 acres and additional 50 growers for this advisor to work with and serve. This position will assist farmers, processors, and marketers make a profit in local agriculture while promoting sustainable practices. Qualified candidates ideally will have a strong plant production background and must have a graduate degree in plant science, horticulture, crop science, or related field of study. Candidates will also have demonstrated written and verbal communications skills and use of field, classroom, and online educational methods. There is a burgeoning new and beginning farmer demographic; with active members in direct marketing channels such as Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), farmer's markets, institutional purchasers, grocery stores and farm-to-school programs. The Advisor will collaboratively develop opportunities for innovation and adaptation of niche production and marketing, resource sustainability, and appropriate-scale equipment and technology. The Advisor will also work with these rural and peri-urban producers to expand their role and contribution as foundational members of the area's food system and community. The position will manage the Sonoma County Master Gardeners program; with over 300 volunteers, educating home gardeners about pest management and good cultural practices. The advisor will interact with supporting units, including multi-county areas, the Agricultural Production Management Systems and the California Communities and Food Systems Program Teams along with Statewide Master Gardener programs.

Justification: Specialty crop, small scale, and organic agriculture has grown into a prominent sector of the agricultural industry in these counties. For many years, farmers in these counties have expressed the need for more organic production system assistance from Cooperative Extension. Sonoma and Marin Counties have Agricultural Ombudsman positions which provide additional support to this position as related to value added agriculture. A strong UCCE program that compliments these efforts with the specialty crops, organic and economic/marketing expertise will benefit producers at the local and statewide levels, and will provide a unique specialization within UCCE. This partnership will increase economic opportunities for small scale producers as well as increasing local food production. Due to pending retirement, Sonoma and Marin Counties will have no coverage from a farm advisor beyond June 2016.

The increase in niche food production, apple cider, artisan breads, and craft beers are just a few examples, which fueled a resurgence in agriculture crops, such as heirloom apples, specialty grains and hop production. The position will also continue to work on established specialty crops including olives and vegetables that have been grown in these three counties over the years. This advisor will aid in maintaining the established agricultural industries and support growth of beginning farmers and the resurgence of farmer's guilds.

Organically-raised crop production continues to grow in the area. Research is needed for many locally-grown specialty crops, and this advisor can be supportive to other advisors around the state for organic specific production. Furthermore, the increase in demand for ethnic crops has resulted in more minorities becoming involved in agriculture production, with a Latino population of over 40 percent in Sonoma County. This position will be an excellent link between the University and this underserved population in Sonoma, Marin and Napa Counties.

With the increase of local food production, the Specialty Crops Advisor will also work with the Local Food Systems Advisor across all three counties, providing a conduit of small scale agriculture production in the local food systems through burgeoning food hubs, farm to school partnerships, and innovative institutional sourcing opportunities, among others. Similarly, the Specialty Crops Advisor will work with the Area Watershed Management Advisor to support water resource use that balances the multiple competing demands on water in these coastal counties. This small farms advisor position fills a critical gap in the local area as well as in UC ANR programs, and is well aligned within the Sustainable Food Systems Initiative.

Extension: The specialty crops advisor is expected to develop a well-rounded and innovative extension program capitalizing on the progressive attributes of many local farmers and the proximity to UCCE specialists, AES faculty, the UC Davis Student Farm and other resources at UC Davis. Activities will include grower meetings, field days, and personal one-on-one farm visits. Extension material and methods should consist of a mix of traditional and new media to make information broadly available and easily accessible to clientele. Peer-reviewed and non-peer reviewed publications through professional journals, common media and UC ANR outlets will be part of a successful outreach program. Presentations to clientele groups and professional society meetings will be expected.

Research: A successful research component will include collaborative research and leadership addressing the needs of the niche clientele. Specialty crop, small-scale and organic growers in the three counties have unique climates, soils and production systems which will require that the advisor develop a local knowledge base and understanding of the region. Farmers have explicitly expressed the need for research in 1) the selection of crop cultivars for specialty (niche) and organic production, 2) appropriate horticultural practices for organic production, 3) marketing strategies for niche crops, 4) reduced tillage strategies, 5) the development of small-scale farm implements, 6) pest control strategies, and 7) the integration of crops and livestock, specifically poultry and sheep. All components of research will include attention to the underlying importance of the limitations of water as a resource.

ANR Network: Collaborations with AES faculty and UCCE specialists on other campuses and advisors throughout the State will be necessary to develop a successful research and extension program. The advisor will initially be expected and encouraged to develop a research and extension program through collaborative efforts with UC colleagues and assume greater leadership roles on collaborative research projects over time. The close proximity to UC Davis will greatly enhance the advisor's capacity to develop collaborative partnerships and will enhance UC Davis' capacity to engage local clientele in expanded research efforts.

Network External to ANR: Growers in all three counties are organized and actively participating in associations. Santa Rosa Junior College and College of Marin Indian Valley Campus have teaching farms and agricultural programs. The area is also home to the statewide offices for California Association of Family Farms and FarmLink. Additionally, each county has a local food policy council developing and supporting policy to increase production and access to healthy food. These bodies and organizations are a strong network of cooperators and collaborators for research and extension program activities for this position. The ability to build partnerships and to work with multidisciplinary teams to address the socio-economic challenges of small farm clientele is essential.

Support: The advisor will be stationed at the UC Cooperative Extension office in Sonoma County, where overhead and administrative support will be provided. Additionally, County supported staff will be assigned to assist with research and education programs. The CE Advisor will be administratively responsible to the UCCE Sonoma County director.

Other Support: Organic growers in the three counties have expressed enthusiasm at the prospect of having a UCCE specialty crops advisor specializing in organic production and will support the advisor in many ways through access to farms for on-farm research. As stated, this position will have county field assistant support in Sonoma County, along with a vehicle and/or mileage, clerical and office space. To achieve financial support for research trials, Sonoma County Director will partner with the advisor, in hopes of obtaining grants that will address sustainable crop and animal science production, including Western SARE, ANR Core and USDA NIFA grants. It is expected that the successful candidate will actively collaborate with members of associated Program Teams. Collaborations within the ANR network could provide opportunities for additional financial support.

Location: The Small Farms Advisor will be stationed in the Sonoma County Cooperative Extension office in Santa Rosa, CA

Developed and proposed by: Stephanie Larson and David Lewis, County Directors Sonoma, and Marin and Napa Counties, respectively. This position is strongly supported by Small Farm Workgroup and received their support. It is consistent with the Agricultural Production Management Systems and the California Communities and Food Systems Program Teams.