

Farms of Tuolumne County

You might have seen the sign – a steer chewing on a piece of grass surrounded by produce, grapes, olives, Christmas trees, roses, – all products of Tuolumne County - with the “Buy Local” sign in the center. This is the Farms of Tuolumne County (FOTC) logo.

Farms of Tuolumne County was organized in 2003 to promote local agriculture, and was incorporated as a self-sustaining non-profit in 2006. It has a Board of Directors and all work is done by volunteers. Since its inception, FOTC has been busy educating its neighbors about the benefits and availability of locally produced food, and establishing the Tuolumne County brand. FOTC understands that for farms, especially small farms, the first step to sustainability is economic sustainability.

FOTC currently has forty-six producer members, including cattle, goat, sheep, alpaca and llama ranchers, vegetable and fruit growers, a bee keeper, olive oil producers, vintners, nurseries, Christmas tree growers, and members whose emphasis is on-farm education. Many farms are certified organic, while others grow their crops organically, but are not certified.

KNOW YOUR GROWER. We hear a lot of the benefits of buying local. Food is more nutritious and fresher, the carbon footprint lighter. Money stays in the community. One of the most important benefits is the opportunity to know your grower. This is a basic difference between buying from a supermarket where product is trucked in, and buying from someone in the community. Your local farmer is accessible. You can visit his or her farm, see the operation.

Farms of Tuolumne County ranches and farms are family owned and represent a wide diversity of agriculture. Several members produce grass-fed beef, raised without added hormones or antibiotics. Rosemary Sawyer of Rosemary's Roses is a Master Rosarian who grows a thousand rose plants of tremendous variety. The Foothills are famous for their apple orchards: FOTC has three apple producers. FOTC has llama and alpaca whisperers, and members who truck their fresh produce to the farmers markets every week, sometimes babies in tow. At seventy-seven, (she doesn't mind revealing her age) Livia Meagher of M&M Suffolk still does her own lambing. Jack Frazer, a proud eighty-five year old, grows four hundred species of Japanese maples for sale and education in his arboretum. All these farmers and ranchers have these things in common – they are hard working, dedicated people, who value their agricultural way of life and want to see it succeed and continue for generations to come. They respect their land and animals. They farm with sustainable practices because they know that they need to be good stewards in order to reap the rewards.

Several Farms of Tuolumne County members are looking to agritourism as an additional enterprise that will benefit not just the farmer, but other business in the county as well. In an effort to foster agritourism, Farms of Tuolumne County sponsors its Farm and Ranch Tour. This is a great opportunity for growers to let people (both inside and outside the county) know who and where they are, show off their enterprises, educate people about what they do, and sell direct. It is self-guided in that visitors receive a map of the Tour farms and drive to the locations. Tickets can be purchased on-line, at venues throughout the county, or at the first farm they visit the day of the event. The Third Annual FOTC Farm and Ranch Tour will be held Saturday, August 7, 2010.

If you and would like to see FOTC's list of producers, are interested in membership, or in the FOTC Farm and Ranch Tour, go to www.farmsoftuolumnecounty.org, or e-mail info@farmsoftuolumnecounty.org.