

Needs assessment for small-scale livestock harvesting and processing facilities in Northern California

Many livestock producers in Northern California are increasingly exploring niche markets for their meat products. A small-scale USDA- and State-inspected meat harvesting and processing facility would facilitate entry into these new markets for many producers. To identify the scale and seasonal requirements producers have for such a facility, researchers surveyed 497 livestock producers. The survey asked producers to rank their current satisfaction with existing processing facilities, their interest in using a small-scale processing facility, their total and seasonal needs related to meat processing, and the distance they are willing to travel to use a specialized meat processing plant.

Key Findings:

- 56% of respondents who indicated interest in using a small-scale processing facility identified access to slaughter and processing services as the largest barrier to entry into alternative niche markets.
- Livestock producers are generally satisfied with the quality of the work performed by the existing processing facilities, but the production capacity of the facilities is still not adequate to meet current producers' demand. 72% of respondents indicated that the current facilities are not meeting their current demand.
- Distance to livestock processing facilities was ranked as very important to most producers. Almost 90% of respondents are willing to travel up to 60 minutes to reach a facility, but only 55% are willing to travel up to 90 minutes.
- Producers identified their local and adjacent counties as their primary preference for a final market, followed by the Bay Area and the Sacramento region.



The study concludes that the proportion of producers willing to experiment with new markets through slow conversion of a portion of their business to niche production may increase if options to alternative meat processing services become more readily available.

Next Steps:

- John Harper, Livestock Advisor for Mendocino County, and Shermain Hardesty, Director of the Small Farms Program, received funding to complete a feasibility study for an approximately 20,000 head/year processing facility in the North Bay region. This study will further work to identify the most appropriate location for such a resource.

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Seasonal Availability Calendar for Placer County Produce

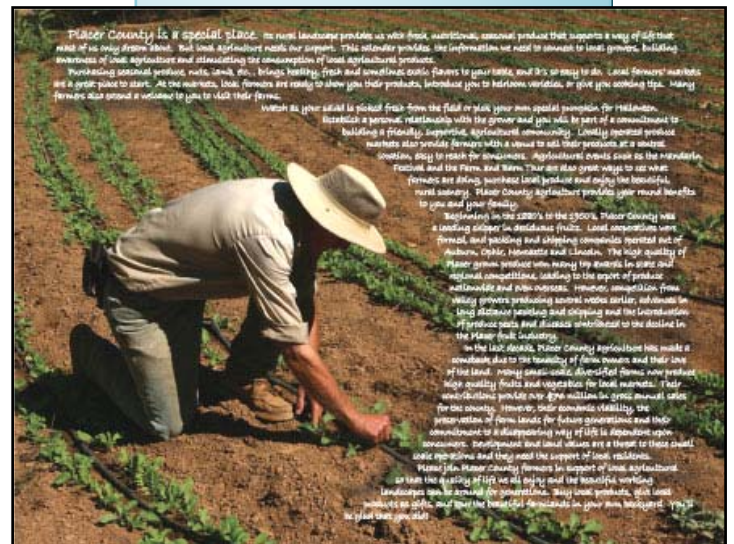
Consumers are less likely to seek out local produce if they do not have adequate information on the seasonal availability of produce and livestock products. The Placer County Tour Committee addressed this problem by creating a calendar containing specific Placer County information encouraging the purchase of local agricultural goods. The calendar includes information on seasonal availability of agricultural goods, local growers, agricultural events and market opening dates, and nutritional information on key agricultural products. The calendar is user-friendly and aimed at raising consumer awareness of local agriculture while serving as a marketing tool for local growers. It was released in time for the *Placer Farm & Barn Tour* in October 2006, and calendar sales continued through January 2007.

Project Impacts:

- More than 600 calendars were sold and the remaining 250 were distributed to local decision-makers as promotion and education pieces.
- A small survey of calendar purchasers revealed that 80 percent use the calendar regularly. These users also tended to buy local produce weekly. The general comments received were uniformly positive.
- Calendar profits were used to support the 2007 *Placer Farm & Barn Tour* and to publish the next informational product, a series of "Placer Produce" notecards.
- Some calendar customers reported that they attended a farmers market or other agricultural event specifically to purchase a calendar.
- Growers appreciated being able to buy the calendars as gifts for their loyal customers.
- Information compiled for the calendar has since been featured in other publications.

Lessons learned:

- Marketing the calendar took considerably more time than the committee anticipated.
- Potential customers were lost because they already had been given a calendar elsewhere and did not need another one.
- The project would have been more successful if it had started at a smaller scale to build interest.





Next Steps:

- Surveys conducted during the project led to an 'Eat Local First' campaign to educate consumers on how to incorporate more local foods into their diet. The campaign is working together with the Foothill Farmers Market.

More Information:

- Look for the 'How to Eat Local' Web site at <http://cnevada.ucdavis.edu/> for information on Placer and Nevada Counties' produce and helpful tips on eating seasonally.

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Fake, Cindy. (2007) *Seasonal Availability Calendar for Placer County Produce Final Report*. Auburn, CA: Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program



Trinity Heritage Orchard Project

In March 2006 Trinity County Cooperative Extension began the Heritage Orchard Project to promote upkeep and renewed interest in the County's heirloom fruit trees. Existing heritage fruit orchards were promoted as a healthy and economical local food source through a series of workshops. Old fruit trees were identified and catalogued by the community, new trees were grafted and planted in public spaces, and events were held to generate knowledge and interest in using heritage fruit. Events were targeted at both producers and consumers in an effort to protect the horticultural heritage of Trinity County.

Project Impacts:

- UCCE-Trinity hosted a workshop on harvesting and preserving fruit, educated food bank employees on proper gleaning and use of fruit, and developed two brochures to distribute to community residents and interested organizations, one focused on proper gleaning techniques and one focused on incorporating heritage fruit into a healthy diet.
- UCCE-Trinity worked to raise awareness of fruit trees and their value-added products by combining events with the annual Salmon Festival. Events included a cider pressing with free juice, an apple tasting, an information booth and vendors selling fruit products. UCCE-Trinity staff also set up a booth at the Weaverville and Hayfork farmers markets and distributed information to potential vendors about producing and selling value-added fruit products. Children are routinely included in the gleaning and processing activities for these events, and conversations with teachers have begun to incorporate heritage fruit tree grafts in high school greenhouses.
- Staff conducted a survey of local heritage fruit trees, collecting information on trees from 27 locations. Heritage fruit from 62 trees was identified by an expert pomologist. The varieties encompassed a range of species typical of orchards planted before World War I and included rare apple varieties such as Hubbardston Nonesuch and Roxbury Russet. Scion wood used for grafting and propagating old varieties was collected from 14 heritage apple varieties and one pear variety.
- UCCE-Trinity hosted several community tree care and pruning workshops. A corps of volunteers was identified at these events to maintain heritage trees in local parks and community spaces. Groups such as the Girl Scouts and 4-H also have volunteered time to maintain community trees.



Learning how to restore neglected fruit trees at a pruning workshop

Next Steps:

- An IPM grant allowed for two additional workshops to be held, one focused on integrated pest management for gardens and orchards and another on summer fruit tree pruning. These workshops continued the community education and pruning maintenance that began with the 2007 project.
- Heritage apple tasting was featured at the Salmon & Heritage Fruit festival in 2007 and is scheduled again for October 2008 with help from local volunteers and Americorps.
- Heritage apple tree identification continues, with rare Catshead, Washington Strawberry, King David, Hyde King and Hoover trees added to the database.
- “Youngster” trees from scion wood collected in 2006 were planted in the Weaverville Children's Garden, Hayfork Children's Garden, Weaverville Community Forest, Lowden Ranch, and the Young Family Ranch.



Apple tasting at Salmon & Heritage Orchard Festival with assistance of Americorps staff.

More Information:

To find out more information about the Trinity Heritage Orchard Project please visit their Web site at www.trinityroots.org or <http://cetrinity.ucdavis.edu>. These Web sites are also featured on a large network of vineyards, local agencies and tourism venue Web sites.

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Forero, Larry and Carol Fall. (2007) *Trinity Heritage Orchard Project*. Redding, CA: Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program



Northwest California Local Food Distribution and Web-Based Marketing Project

UC Cooperative Extension applied for a UC SAREP grant to hire a coordinator/broker to facilitate connections between food buyers and producers. This new position increased the ability of local farmers to meet the produce needs of schools and other institutions while securing new markets for their crops. Educating the institutional buyers about the availability of local produce and appealing to their sense of community participation and support were crucial components of the program. For the farmers, the barriers to participation revolved around price and volume of produce required. Providing marketing and post-harvest assistance was also critical for increasing new relationships. The project hired Jack Surmani to work as the initial broker. During the next season, UCCE and the Community Alliance with Family Farmers (C.A.F.F.) partnered to continue the project with Melanie Patrick as the broker.

Project Impacts:

- A broker who focuses solely on one-on-one interactions with local growers was found to be integral to creating new sales relationships. The broker was able to persistently contact institutions in ways that farmers do not have the time or expertise to do.
- A meeting was convened where buyers and growers met to discuss critical barriers to collaborating. The group identified transportation and storage of produce as major issues for farmers wishing to sell to institutional buyers.
- The project educated local growers and school districts on the concept of contract growing. One “open invoice” relationship between a farmer and a school district was established where the farmer was able to pack and deliver whatever produce he has available at the time to the school. Approximately \$5,200 worth of produce was delivered this way.
- The CAFF broker tracked \$20,000 worth of local produce moving into local schools and other institutions during a two month period. Several vegetable growers started to sell to the CSU campus.
- The program was presented during a Rural Sociology annual meeting in Santa Clara along with three other Extension programs. Other outreach has been achieved through the Farm to School Workgroup Web site, CAFF’s newsletter and Web site, and an article written in a Humboldt County newsletter.



Further Developments:

To assist the formation of direct buyer and grower relationships, UC Cooperative Extension, Community Alliance with Family Farmers (C.A.F.F.), and the Farm Bureau joined together to develop a Web site listing farm products available from producers within Humboldt, Del Norte and Trinity Counties. Through the Web site (www.Redwoodag.com), fruit and vegetable buyers can easily find local products listed either by category or by farm. The Web site caters to buyers from institutions like schools, hospitals, universities, restaurants and independent grocers. To ensure that the site remains easily accessible to the farmers, the team readily consulted individual farmers to address their needs and concerns. Based on these conversations, the project decided to provide farmers with the option of receiving direct assistance in setting up their farm or product profile.

The project team encouraged farmers to register during meetings and through individual phone calls and emails. A newsletter article encouraging use of the Web site was included in the UC Cooperative Extension mailing list and the Farm Bureau newsletter sent out to farmers. The business section of the *Times Standard* and the *Capitol Press*, two local newspapers, also ran articles featuring the project. The team has also developed a brochure to hand out to producers and buyers, available for free download on the Web site. The brochure was handed out during farmers market events and farmers market meetings.

Web Site Impacts:

- The Web site is currently serving 44 farmers who have posted approximately 60 of their products online. More than 30 buyers have registered on the Web site.
- There are currently 19 product categories, ranging from canned goods, dried goods, fresh or dried fruits, vegetables, wines, ornamentals or specialty food products, listed on the Web site.

More Information:

View the Web site at www.redwoodag.com.

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Giraud, Deborah. (2007) *Humboldt County Local Food Distribution Project*. Humboldt County, CA: Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program



Evaluating Farmers Market Opportunities for Southeast Asian Growers in Sacramento County

The Mien and Hmong farmers of the Sacramento Valley grow unique varieties of Southeast Asian vegetables that are in high demand as well as strawberries known for their taste. Yet Southeast Asian growers tend to be poorly represented at farmers markets in Sacramento. This study assessed Southeast Asian growers' participation at farmers markets and identified barriers and potential opportunities for inclusion in farmers markets. Researchers interviewed Southeast Asian growers to find out where they currently sell their produce and what would help them expand their market. Regional farmers market managers, flea market managers, grocery stores, chefs, and other buyers were also interviewed in-person and by phone to identify points of entry for small-scale Asian vegetable and strawberry growers. The staff then analyzed the data to find promising opportunities for the growers to establish new buyer-grower relationships. The project combined research and outreach to Southeast Asian growers with the goal of helping refugee farming communities expand their marketing strategies.



Certified farmers market in Sacramento

Project Findings:

- Surveys found that fewer than half of Southeast Asian growers with certified producer certificates (20 out of 42 farmers interviewed) actually sell to farmers markets in Sacramento, indicating a shortage of openings. Those without certified producer certificates sell predominantly at farm stands (Mien strawberry growers) or to local Asian grocery stores (Hmong vegetable growers).
- The key challenges confronting Southeast Asian farmers in marketing their produce generally are language barriers; centralized purchasing of many wholesalers, chain grocery stores, and restaurants; sophisticated food safety documentation and labeling requirements by larger customers; the high cost of transportation and competition with organic produce.
- Many flea market managers and several local grocery stores, chefs, schools, and wholesalers expressed interest in buying from local farmers.

Project Impacts:

- The results from buyer interviews were provided to over 100 Southeast Asian growers at two workshops. At the annual strawberry growers' meeting in Sacramento, 75 strawberry farmers attended a talk titled, "Beyond the Farm Stand: Where can I sell my berries." Handouts listing specific marketing opportunities with contact information, along with a list of necessary permits and how to get them for each market, were distributed.

- Two growers began selling at Soil Born Farms' certified farmers market and WIC farm stand, two growers began selling to Galt Flea Market, and two growers were linked with Monterey Market in Berkeley through the Growers' Collaborative.

Project Recommendations:

- At the policy level, explore making 'off-farm' stands legal and work with various local institutions to integrate fresh, local food in their food service provision.
- At the extension level, create culturally appropriate and durable training modules (DVDs) in proper food safety, pesticide and food handling practices to enhance marketability.
- At the marketing level, identify and support initiatives, such as the Growers' Collaborative, or marketing interns from local universities, to facilitate linking farmers with new customers.
- At the farmer level, encourage diversification of crops and marketing venues to enhance sales and economic viability.



Crop diversity, such as these three varieties of Asian long beans, helps pulls in customers



Jennifer Sowerwine addressing Southeast Asian farmers at annual growers' meeting

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Citation:

Ingels, Chuck; Jennifer Sowerwine; Nancy Peluso; Christy Getz. (2007) *Evaluating Farmers' Market Opportunities for Southeast Asian Growers in Sacramento County*. Woodland, CA: Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program.



PlacerGROWN Collaborative Community Supported Agriculture Project

PlacerGROWN piloted a collaborative Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) project to deliver produce from a group of local farms to Placer County residents. Placer County residents have expressed their support for fresh and local produce; individually, producers have had a hard time meeting this demand. PlacerGROWN found that the major problems producers face are a lack of crop diversity required to fill CSA orders, a lack of storage space and the proper storage equipment, and a disinterest in acquiring and cultivating relationships with CSA customers. PlacerGROWN assisted farmers by organizing and marketing a new CSA. Produce was pooled from sixteen to twenty local farmers to serve CSA members recruited from local institutions and government offices. The project also piloted the inclusion of an optional meat delivery along with the vegetable and fruit CSA.

Project Highlights:

- The CSA continued for two years, increasing its membership from 25 members to 49 in the second year.
- Producer participation increased from 16 to 20 local farmers in the second year.
- During the first year of the project PlacerGROWN purchased over \$3,000 of local produce. This grew to \$15,000 in the second year.

Project Impacts:

- The project incorporated new customers who do not normally shop at farmers markets.
- The pilot program created and documented a cost, quantity and delivery tracking system for organizing collaborative CSAs for future projects.
- CSA subscribers were given the opportunity to explore local agriculture with a free ticket to the annual *Placer Farm and Barn Tour* included in their baskets.
- In an email survey of CSA members during the second season, 65% of respondents checked “I love it!” as their opinion of the CSA.



Dan Macon, Highland Farms Grassfed Lamb, at the first Sierra Foothills Meat Buyers Club delivery at Sinclair Concrete. Customers were treated to BBQ samples of beef, pork, and lamb.

Next Steps:

- The project was discontinued for the following season because of disagreements surrounding the price of the box and the difficulties farmers faced in meeting the supply demands of the CSA. The project had trouble reaching profitability, and it was determined that scaling up to a larger member base for an extended season would have allowed the project to maximize both project staff and producers' time. The price of the box also needed to be slightly raised and the diversity of the produce offered modified.
- The meat ordering program has continued with great success. Approximately \$1,000 worth of local meat is purchased with each order and distributed to ten customers. Three local producers continue to be regular contributors to the program.

More Information:

To find out more about the Meat Buying CSA, visit the website at http://ceplacer.ucdavis.edu/Meat_Buyers_Club/



Karin Sinclair, Sinclair Farms; Jenny Brown, High Sierra Beef; Joe Kleinsmith, Meat Buyers Club customer; and Dan Macon, Highland Farms Grassfed Lamb at the first Sierra Foothills Meat Buyers Club delivery.

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Direct Market Potential of Five Heirloom Dry Bean Varieties

Farmers who market their products directly to the consumer are continuously challenged to find innovative methods of attracting new customers and maintaining the interest of their current consumers. New products that appeal to consumers' personal health, social, and budgetary concerns are important for direct market producers to keep their businesses sustainable. This project studied the market potential of five colorful heirloom dry bean varieties. The beans were bred for excellent yields, resistance to diseases and insects, and attractive color patterns that protect them from price competition with generic bean varieties. The beans can be grown under low-input conditions-such as organic-and offer innovative opportunities for producers to deliver greater food choices, particularly during the winter time. Producers and consumers from the North Coast, Yolo County, and the San Francisco Bay Area were surveyed to determine the potential to produce and market these specialty beans. Five producers were further involved in growing test seed and evaluating the beans based on the yields they achieved and production problems they faced. The study helped determine which varieties producers are able to grow well and which varieties are most appealing to consumers.

Study Results:

- The study determined that the heirloom dry beans are a viable product for both the producer and the consumer. The consumer is interested in products that are nutritious and non-perishable, a perfect fit for beans.
- Surveying of consumers at the three regional farmers markets and through flyers inserted into CSA subscription boxes showed that more than 50% were "very interested" in buying two of the bean varieties, Jacob's Cattle and Holstein.

Consumers reported that the nutritional value of a product was the most important attribute to consumers, a sentiment commonly overlooked by producers. Survey data also show that previous experience with a product is not as important to consumers as producers believe. "Locally grown" and "organic" were important attributes to consumers that producers understood and included in their marketing strategies. Producers who direct market products need to highlight the attributes important to consumers (nutritional value, locally and organically grown) in their marketing materials, on their packaging and when they are talking to consumers.

- Producer surveys revealed that dry bean production is relatively different than fresh vegetables and other direct market products. Planting and cultivation practices are similar to what producers normally do, but harvesting and threshing the beans was a new experience. Harvesting the beans also typically occurred when the farmer was busy tending to other fall



crops. In general, pest and disease problems were low. Farmers did experience difficulty with location-specific problems, such as soil compatibility and temperature fluctuations.

- Producers who grew the beans for two years in a row were able to increase their yields substantially during the second growing season. This signifies that bean production can be easily taken up and adapted by farmers to suit their needs.

Project Impacts:

- In addition to the surveys and visits to farmers markets to promote dry beans, the project staff also put on two “Bean Basics” workshops for consumers in Woodland, CA. Thirty-five participants, including five men and several minorities, learned about dry bean production in California and the importance of beans in our diet. Participants learned how to cook dry beans and left with several recipes.
- Diane Metz published a county publication titled “Bean Basics” and over 450 copies were distributed to consumers at farmers markets and in CSA boxes. The book has information on the nutritional value of beans as well as recipes that use different type of beans.



Next Steps:

- The next focus of the project will be to write a peer-reviewed publication summarizing the research results to further extend information to other communities.

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Small Farms Marketing Assistance Project (M.A.P.)

Farmers markets are often a good way for farmers to sell their produce and receive a close-to-retail price for their products. Farmers markets are often a challenge for small farm operations however, many of which have trouble meeting official market certification requirements given their limited resources. In south Fresno, a marketplace assessment found that consumers lacked local food shops offering quality produce. When asked about the possibility of buying produce from outdoor farmers markets, 48 percent of surveyed Fresno consumers were accustomed to the idea and considered them an acceptable location to purchase food. The goal of this project was to assist in the establishment of an “ethnic” farmers market; the resulting market gave local African American, Asian, and Latino farmers a means to increase their sales while offering consumers a venue to buy fresh produce.

Project Impacts:

- The Golden Westside Farmers Market (GWSFM) was established and operated for nine months. The market was subsequently moved to a temporary location at the Thyme for Tea Teahouse.
- A Harvest Festival took place in the fall of 2006. Over fifty residents of southwest Fresno attended the event. A Spring Festival was also held the next year at the market's new location.
- Volunteers conducted a survey of consumers attending the Harvest Festival to determine consumers' unmet need for fresh produce and how the farmers market could best serve the community. The survey concluded that 35 percent of those attending the Harvest Festival could not afford healthy food in their household and that 11 percent of those surveyed attended the farmers market regularly.
- Richard Molinar, farm advisor for Fresno County, gave two presentations at farmers market events. Market attendees and farmer vendors learned how to grow oyster mushrooms in plastic bags during his first presentation. His second presentation focused on organic certification and what benefits organic produce has for consumers.
- GWSFM committee staff are engaged in business development with a local CSA distributor to begin CSA delivery to west Fresno residents.
- GWFM committee partners applied for Food Stamp vendor status for the market to facilitate resident participation.



Selling medicinal herbs at the Golden Westside Farmers Market

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Citation:

Molinar, Richard, Jeremy Hofer, Edie Jessup, Stephanie Johnson, and Sheila Scott. (2007) *Small Farms Marketing Assistance Project*. Fresno, CA: Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Project



Farms of Tuolumne County Marketing Association

This grant funded the development of a local organization to support and expand the sustainable community food system in Tuolumne County. The Farms of Tuolumne County (FOTC) is a new marketing and educational organization that informs distributors and local consumers of locally grown and processed foods; increases agriculture production, profitability and opportunity for producers; creates a more sustainable community; and enhances and increases economic development and stability in Tuolumne County. To support and promote the new organization, the University of California Cooperative Extension partnered with FOTC to produce several new marketing materials.

New Marketing Tools:

- The project provided for the purchase of FOTC paraphernalia such as point of purchase cards, t-shirts, cloth shopping bags, and refrigerator magnets, all of which display the FOTC logo.
- Producers were given new metal road signs that can be used to indicate their membership and support of the organization.
- A popular new catalogue listing members and their products was developed that has been useful for distributors, local retail shops, the Tuolumne County visitors' bureau, and the producers themselves.
- The project has updated and improved the organization's Web site to promote producers' produce and assist consumers as they search for products.
- FOTC partnered with a local videographer to produce a 30 minute DVD highlighting agriculture in Tuolumne County. The video has received multiple showings on the local television network. It will also be used to promote FOTC and agriculture at Board of Supervisor meetings, City Council meetings, and meetings of local organizations.

The project has been enthusiastically received by the producers involved; many marketing tools, such as the Web site, product catalogue, and FOTC paraphernalia, would not have been otherwise developed by individual producers. Overall success of the organization will be measured over time by Web site visits, sales of FOTC materials, membership growth, and increases in product sales.



More Information:

Please visit www.farmsoftuolumnecounty.org for more information on FOTC and Tuolumne County agriculture.

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Citation:

Oneto, Scott and Ken Churches. (2007) *Farms of Tuolumne County Marketing Association*. Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program: Sonora, CA



Solano County's Agricultural Sustainability at the Crossroads

Solano County agriculture is struggling to survive in the face of competition from local development. This trend is intensified through the lack of opportunities agricultural entrepreneurs have to create new markets for themselves. To facilitate communication between producers and consumers and communication between individual producers, various activities-including community forums, educational workshops, and an agricultural exposition-were held on topics related to the future of Solano County's community food system and agricultural sustainability. Through these events urban consumers were able to connect with producers and discuss issues of local agricultural sustainability. Producers were able to gain access to new networking opportunities and participate in educational opportunities.

Project Impacts:

- Five forums in three communities were held to discuss the value of local agriculture within Solano County's agriculture. The forums brought together citizens/consumers, policy makers, and local farmers in a format that allowed for frank discussion and educational exchanges. Thirty-five residents attended one or more of the forums and many asked that similar forums be held in other Solano County communities. Data collected on residents' concerns about Solano County's agricultural sustainability is being forwarded to the Citizen's Advisory Committee for the General Plan Update.
- Four workshops were held for producers to discuss priority business concerns. More than 100 local growers, ranchers, consumers, and policy-makers participated, many attending multiple events. During the workshops producers were able to network within the agricultural community as well as participate in educational forums on marketing. One notable Dixon farmer who participated in the workshops was able to take the information he learned on directly marketing specialty products and place his olive oil in a large-scale California grocery chain. This generated media coverage in the local newspaper and as a UC Delivers article.
- The workshops also provided an opportunity for producers to develop a list of "demands" related to promoting local agriculture. As a direct result of this activity, the Solano Board of Supervisors approved two "ombudsman" positions designed to help farmers as they seek information and support for their enterprises. These discussions also shaped three educational workshops and tours offered in 2008. These events included a day-long agricultural tour and seminar sharing the northeast Solano County's "agricultural footprint" with local county decision and policy-makers, a full-day advocacy and media training for fourteen Solano County agricultural leaders, and a tour of the National Clonal Germplasm Repository for local growers.

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FRIDAY 2 - 8 PM

October 19, 2007

Start the weekend right...
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at the
Vallejo
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- A large Ag Expo event was held at the City of Vallejo Ferry Plaza and Building. This event connected urban Vallejo and Benicia residents commuting home from San Francisco with their local farming neighbors. A dozen local growers set up booths and displays at this event; three of these farmers established a new CSA in conjunction with Solano County employees. The CSA is now in its second year and has 66 county employees participating.
- The project interviewed consumers, producers, and policymakers to identify appropriate “branding” topics for Solano County agriculture. Through surveys and individual interviews, the staff found that consumers understood the benefits of “fresh and local” and want to support local farmers, but they cannot find local produce in supermarkets, where they by and large do their food shopping. Farmers were likewise supportive of a “fresh and local” brand, but their current growing habits would be unable to meet a rise in demand, if the marketing venture would be successful. Producers are still focused on a “commodity” growing approach to farming. This and other marketing information obtained from the survey will be shared with the newly hired Farm Assistance, Revitalization and Marketing Coordinator (F.A.R.M.) located in the County Agricultural Commissioner’s office.

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About 40 tractors travel through downtown Fairfield in a show of support for the Solano County General Plan. The tractors parked in front of the county building where the farmers and farm workers attended the Solano County Board of Supervisors meeting.

Citation:

Paterson, Carole A. (2007) *Solano County's Agricultural Sustainability at the Crossroads . . . Which Way to Turn, What Choices Will Count?* Solano County, CA: Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program.



Factors Associated with Deregistration among Organic Farmers in California

To certify organic produce in California, a California producer must register with both state and federal agencies. Although not designed for this purpose, California's unique state-level registration process provides a database of organic producers operating within the state, allowing for analysis of trends in the organic sector. Registration data indicates an approximate 20 percent turnover rate among registered organic producers each year. The study answered questions on why organic producers deregister and what would keep them farming organically in the first place. Researchers surveyed 104 deregistered farmers via mail surveys and interviewed 21 producers in in-depth telephone conversations.

Key Findings:

- Of deregistered farmers, 35 percent had stopped farming completely and 63 percent were still farming. Of those still farming, 60 percent switched to conventional farming while 40 percent were still farming organically.
- The reasons offered for discontinuing organic registration or production were organic regulatory issues (45%); issues unrelated to organic production (26%); production issues (16%); market issues (16%); management issues (8%); and price issues (8%).
- Of the respondents who switched from organic to conventional farming, almost all (87%) cited reasons related to organic farming for discontinuing organic registration, with regulatory issues being the single most important factor (63%). Regulatory problems were an issue for 74 percent of current organic growers, compared to 55 percent of those who had reverted to conventional production.
- The findings indicate that paperwork and record keeping was rated as the biggest regulatory issue among deregistered producers. Fully 50 percent of all respondents cited paperwork and record keeping as severe concerns, followed by certification costs (44%).
- The percentage of respondents citing management challenges as serious concerns was higher than market access, price, and even production problems. Time requirements associated with organic farming ranked as a "serious concern" by 36 percent of respondents.



- Twice as many (35%) farmers with less than 10 years total farming experience listed 'production' as their main challenge, compared with only 16% of farmers with more than 15 years experience.
- Growers who had adopted organic farming practices primarily for economic reasons, rather than a philosophical commitment to organic, were more likely to revert to conventional production with changing economic circumstances.

Study Recommendations:

- Programs and policies to help organic farmers continue farming organically should include efforts to assist with the paperwork associated with organic farming to help farmers pay for certification costs. The California Organic Program (COP) should consider a state-run cost share program to assist farmers in paying COP registration fees. The COP should also consider restructuring its fee schedule to assist low-income farmers.
- Technical assistance to farmers considering adopting organic methods should include explanations of paperwork and record-keeping, certification costs, the higher cost of organic inputs, and greater time requirements associated with organic production.
- Technical and financial assistance for organic farmers should target growers grossing less than \$100,000 per year and farming less than 50 acres.

More Information:

Visit the California Institute of Rural Studies Web site at www.cirsinc.org to read the full report.

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Sierra, Luis; Karen Klonsky; Ron Storchlic; Sonja Brody; and Richard Molinar. (2008) *Factors Associated with Deregistration among Organic Farmers in California*. Davis, CA: Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program



Sustainable Community Food Systems in Marin County: Connecting the Dots

This local food systems project focused on organized on-farm tours and trainings for interested food service workers and stimulating producer interest in the growing market of school cafeterias. Two events took place—the *Food Service Workers on the Farm* workshop and the *Farmers in the Cafeteria* lunch—to increase communication between food service workers and farmers and a commitment to use healthy local farm products in school cafeterias. Cafeteria staff toured Star Route Farm during a staff training day. Food service workers heard presentations related to farm-to-school initiatives and learned about the production and post-harvest practices of small farms. Farmers were able to hear from food service workers directly what they value in a finished product and what their needs are for fresh produce in school lunches. During the *Farmers in the Cafeteria* lunch, local farmers were able to talk to the student body about the benefits of organic produce and the ways in which organic farmers protect the environment. The students were educated about healthy eating as they enjoyed a lunch prepared from fresh, local, organic ingredients. The event was an opportunity for farmers to see the effects of their products and create new partnerships with school districts.



Miguel Villarreal, Food Service Director for the Novato and San Rafael school districts, speaks to food service workers during a staff training day at Star Route Farm in Bolinas

Project Impacts:

- The *Food Service Workers on the Farm* workshop drew 35 food service staff from the Novato and San Rafael Unified School Districts.
- The *Farmers in the Cafeteria* lunch was served to 400 school children at San Pedro School in San Rafael during an educational event featuring three local producers.
- The workshops and school lunch resulted in an expansion of both the Marin Organic School Lunch Program and the Food Service Program. The amount of food provided by Marin Organic producers doubled from \$16,000 in food orders in 2006 to more than \$35,000 in 2007.
- The program increased from 30 schools and 8 community centers receiving local food deliveries in 2006 to 42 schools and 11 community centers in 2007.
- The results of the project were reported in the Grown in Marin newsletter and presented at Grown in Marin workshops during 2006-2007.

- The school lunch event at the San Pedro School was featured in the *San Francisco Chronicle* on August 26, 2007.

Next Steps:

- The staff started a 6-acre farm and garden project at the local community college with conservation corps members and University of California Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners.
- Cooperative Extension created a half hour HD DVD, “Hidden Bounty of Marin” highlighting local farmers and food connection.
- Marin Farmers Market Association developed a proposal for a permanent farmers market pavilion in Marin.

More Information:

For a listing of Marin County agricultural events, resources for farmers and educators, and other information related to Marin farms, ranches or businesses that support sustainable agriculture, please visit www.growninmarin.org.



Students eat lunch during the *Farmers in the Cafeteria* event at San Pedro School

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