

Fairground Farms & Farmyard Festivals; Showcasing California Specialty Crops

Shasta District Fair – June 14, 2012

Group discussion notes compiled by Penny Leff, UC ANR Small Farm Program

Discussion notes

Challenges facing fairs, specialty crop growers, agritourism operators and collaborative efforts

- Getting more exhibit entries such as baking and vegetables from adults and kids
- The difficulty of acceptance into the planning process by people who are outside of Farm Bureau, agricultural organizations or more traditional fair groups
- Historically people in agriculture have been a little out of step with technology and may need to be a little more open-minded
- Regulations
- “That’s the way we always did it”
- Specialty crop farmers hesitant to participate at fairs
 - The 4 or 5 day commitment – especially from agricultural producers. We would need organizers to do a “market place”
 - Cost of booth space is a barrier
- High public expectations for agritourism experiences – such as a nice map, all the growers showing up for the event
- Reluctance to pay a coordinator for agritourism, collaborative agricultural exhibits and events
- Volunteers ebb and flow
 - Volunteerism is diminishing because people are working more
- Need more public/private partnerships
 - community college interns
- Regulations and funding for fairs
 - Waste management reporting
 - Small staff responsible for state reports – no \$ but still responsible
 - Fundraising and grants impacted by unknown future
- There are fairs that will go out of business in 2013 and 2014
- Not sharing ideas due to egos
- Creating partnerships is a challenge due to individual egos and agendas that must be overcome
- Volunteer base with committees is hard to sustain.
- We tend to have ambitious agendas – things take a long time and we need to celebrate our small and large successes.

Opportunities for fairs, specialty crop growers, agritourism operators and collaborative efforts

- Kids don’t know how to prepare food – encouraging the organic/natural trend by teaching this at fairs
- “Brand” fairs as an idea
- Overcome regulation through restructuring
- Host workshops at fairs to bring farmers and involve community

- Collaborate more in such things as sharing equipment, stages, such as Shasta use of the Siskiyou Fair stage and forklift sharing
- Western Fairs Association is a collaborative association that can work for advocacy
- Look for commonalities in regulatory challenges
- Year-round restaurants at fair grounds
- Make homemaking cool
- Exhibits need encouragement
- Year-round growing and educational opportunities
 - Pizza Farm
 - Salsa Gardens
 - 4H grant
 - Green house for salsa garden
 - Give tours
 - Cooking demos
- Demonstrations year-round
- Shasta County store – Shasta market
 - Eating local
 - Local Specialty crops
- Farm and Food Community Assessment
- Locally-grown event
- Develop local economy
 - Educate the public about local growers, local crops
 - Build pride in ownership
 - Local grown needs local support
- First Harvest – community give-away
- Foster children education and support
- Agritourism = Fairs
- Work with 4H and FFA Programs to promote projects in livestock to sewing to canning
- Get a great volunteer base. Bring in folks that may not be on your usual radar for volunteer work
- Specialty crop farmers can enter in still exhibits – vegetable/fruit divisions – to promote their product
 - Not only helps the fair fill exhibit buildings, but educates the public about agriculture
- Collaborate with folks that can benefit from the idea or project at hand – outcome must be win-win for sustainable success

Next steps for fairs, specialty crop growers, agritourism operators and collaborative efforts

- WFA convention
- Find money
- Website
- Maintain dialog
- Getting someone to co-ordinate an activity such as the Marketplace or “Taste of Santa Cruz”

- Coming up with an activity that would be available all year on the fair grounds
- Working on increasing interim rentals
- Grant research & writing workshops
- Develop “meet the grower – meet the chef” events to showcase specialty crops
 - How they are grown
 - How they can be prepared
 - Possibly use the events in coordination with a fund-raiser
- Fairs need to:
 - Stay relevant
 - Recognize how much people value the rural experience
 - Be creative – Hook agriculture to large sponsors (Pizza)
- During fair – Go back to basics – promote agricultural products by adding demonstrations. I like the idea of the Pizza Farm and Salsa Greenhouse
- Add a marketplace, make the farm trail, and have the passport weekend during fair!
- Create ready-made educational or demo exhibits that fairs could use as an example and to build interest in future projects that can be produced by the fair
- Management structure and organization for fair to make sure it continues to exist
- Look for ways to share equipment to cut costs

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(Notes by Lisa Drury, CDFA Division of Fairs & Expositions)

Deborah Lucero – Butte County Economic Development

- Teamed up with the Central Sacramento Resource Conservation and Development Council: highway 99 and 70 corridors “corridor travel Map” with farms, points of historical and cultural interest
- USDA grant paid for the map project with a 2005 grant to the Central Sacramento Valley RC&D Council
- Recommend combining a paper/website farm trails map with a mobile app
- \$35k total to market Butte County and Chico
- Sierra Nevada brewery and Lundberg Farms funded a county exhibit for the State Fair: lots of farm products given away
- Butte County Fair hosts “A taste of Butte County” fundraiser – connecting people with Food
- The Butte Fair has 78 acres – trying to convince them to do a Pizza Farm in conjunction with the high school next door and partner with a local pizza parlor.
- Chaffin Farms (Oroville): new this year - mini-cabins for “luxurious” camping. Butte County created a “Unique Agriculture Overlay Zoning” to streamline the planning entitlements/permitting process
- Network of local lavender farmers, honeybee keepers, wineries and olive growers: out of that came the Sierra Oro Farm Trails, 30 farms who pay to be part of a collaborative marketing campaign and operate a successful weekend farm tour and tasting event each fall.
- How about hosting tastings at fair commercial kitchens for local growers – could be a regularly scheduled event, like every Friday.

Bob Nash: Nash Ranch Shasta County pumpkin patch & corn maze

- “Keep the day job!” Financial success is weather dependent
- Started the pumpkin patch 20 years ago by accident. The patch pumpkins make more than selling pumpkins on the commodity market. Surplus crop goes to small animal operations (hogs)
- There is a lot of overhead and hidden costs with this kind of entertainment oriented business – like insurance. They have a train, petting zoo, bounce house and haunted house.
- Can you tolerate to have the public on your property? Some people can’t
- What’s the connection to fairs? Since the Shasta Fair is a Spring fair, there isn’t much crop to show. The Grow Local thing is good.
- For many years fairs have had to go where the money is – that might not be Ag.
- Revenues: avoided getting that intense in the entertainment side. Their competitor has 100 staff compared to Nash’s that just has 12. 80% of revenues come from pumpkins.
- Corn Maze does well if it’s not too wet and generates more revenue than commodity corn
- The competitor does double the volume but Nash’s is more profitable.

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- Need to examine the entertainment: they found out the wagon ride was competing with the train ride.
- Not many permanent improvements
- Outside vender for the pony ride
- No gate fee
- High School FFA handles the food concession
- School group directs parking and collects the \$2 fee as a fundraiser

Kari Todd – Tehama County Farm Bureau

- There are three community projects sponsored by Farm Bureau:
 1. Passport weekend
 2. The Marketplace
 3. Farm Day at the fair
- The “Market Place”: sells all the county commodities during fair – staffed by volunteers. The first couple of years were rent-free but the Farm Bureau gave a donation back to the fair. This year 20% of sales and rent for outside space. This year Farm Bureau is expanding to include other products from outside of Tehama County. The Marketplace as an organization is not making any money. Consider a gate surcharge to experience “the Marketplace” – similar to “A Taste of Nevada County” hosted at the 17th DAA.
- Farm Day: Farm Bureau partners with the school district and education foundation for Farm Day at the fair for a Sixth-grade education day. About 800-850 sixth-graders come for a day of rotations in Ag, math and science plus 2 carnival rides: in conjunction with a discussion on centripetal force.

Dave Dillabo: Seasonal worker housing

- The 10-A DAA at Tulelake and the Lassen County Fair in Susanville have been contracting to house migrant workers.
- Primary crops are potatoes and alfalfa; specialty crops are mint and horseradish
- New ag crop in the area is strawberry plants: these are high in profitability but are very labor intensive during harvest. Federal H2B migrant worker program: 700 workers for a 2-month harvest. Harvest begins one week after the fair is over in Tulelake.
- Last year 150 workers in one fair building with on commercial kitchen.
- This year: 450 workers renting the entire fairground with one commercial kitchen serving 3 meals a day.
- Tulelake population is 1,000 so bringing in 450 people will have a huge economic impact

Ryann Newman – Happy Day Pony Rides

- They are ag tourism: they are entertainers, farmers and ranchers. They travel to fairs, Bishop’s Pumpkin Patch and the Gilroy Garlic Festival.

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- We underestimate how interesting agriculture is to other people: Can we come to your ranch? Can we visit the ponies off-season? Happy Day is thinking of installing webcams so that their fans can see the ponies and what they do.
- Their product is memories and experience: when you mix agriculture with entertainment you get ag tourism.
- Other businesses she has visited:
 - “Ag Ventures” kids pay to milk and clean up after a cow; pretending they are little ranchers and farmers
 - Bishops: kids buy a cup for \$5 and go pick flowers for a bouquet
- Every fair is a trade show for Ag tourism: Ag tourism should be shopping the fairs for entertainment.
- What is a viable event for Happy Day? They have had to drop a few smaller fairs. Happy Day has 5 staff because they are “free rein” with 14 ponies to rotate: overhead is higher
- Insurance: pony rides fall under the category of “hazardous” so they must use special carriers that are on the approved CFSA list.

Other notes from discussion

- Locally Grown: We can raise the level of economic activity and provide jobs – maybe not the most lucrative jobs but a lifestyle that may be more attractive than an \$8 job in a cubicle.
- Educating consumers about the value of quality product: may cost a bit more but you won’t throw it away