

Fairground Farms & Farmyard Festivals; Showcasing California Specialty Crops

Amador County Fair – July 26, 2012

Notes compiled from group discussions by Penny Leff, UC ANR Small Farm Program

Discussion notes

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

- Lack of funding for fairs and collaborative efforts
- Lack of local farmer involvement
- Timing for farmer involvement – hard for most farmers to attend workshops and be part of planning during the growing season; winter is better time
- The “dumbing down” of consumers about seasons, local food production
- Farmers are not usually marketers – partnership with others in the community needed to promote local farms and to organize marketing projects
- It is a challenge for fairs to support farmers’ markets
- No strong statewide agricultural marketing program
- Fairgrounds are often taken for granted
- Fairgrounds are used as emergency facilities – generating funding on an irregular schedule, but no funding in the good times
- The words we use can be a problem – Is “agritourism” the right word to attract visitors? In the livestock division, calling the young participants “producers”, rather than “exhibitors” gave them more respect and recognition
- The impact of agricultural education and promotion of local farms to the public is unknown and hard to measure
- Regulations limit what farmers can do on the farms with visitors and value added products, and limit the USDA funding options for DAA fairs
- Access issues, hours may be challenges for use of fairground facilities by community for ongoing programs such as production kitchens, cooking classes and gardens

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

- School salad bar with local products
- Healthy fresh food at fairs
- Utilize the fairgrounds for commercial production
 - Commercial kitchens available for rent to local producers
 - Animal harvesting facility (slaughterhouse)
 - Wine-making facility
 - Fiber mill
 - Saw mill
- Use fair facilities as an aggregation/distribution hub for local growers
- Fairs provide an opportunity for growers to showcase their products
- Partner with other farmers for a fair booth

- Develop a “county fair” brand and label – producers pay a percentage to the fair management for use of this brand
- Offer cooking classes
- Partner with community foundations to develop programs and facilities
- Develop year-round programs on the fairgrounds – Treat fairs as community facilities by having more going on. Examples:
 - Community gardens on the fairground, with rental plots for the community
 - Year-round animal facility for 4H children
 - Rental kitchens
 - Restaurant
 - Library
- A statewide fair theme, “Let’s Return to Our Roots”
- Good things always happen around good food

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

- Restore fair funding
- Deal with the DAA limitations to access to USDA Rural Development funds
- Partner with non-profit or producer group to apply for Rural Development funds
- Meeting planned with Calaveras County Fair organizers to discuss animal harvest facility at the fairgrounds
- Hold a workshop for farmers when it is not growing/harvest time
- Plan in a business-like manner – pencil it out for sustainability beyond grant or loan funding
- Check out www.livingeconomies.org for tools, reports, handbooks to assist with community development
- Become a Business Alliance for Local Living Economies (BALLE) network - <http://www.livingeconomies.org/netview/>
- Develop marketing campaigns to encourage fair kitchen rentals
- Partner with other fairs and other neighbors in the region – think regionally in planning
- Attend other fairs/farms workshops in this series. Check out times, locations, agendas at <http://sfp.ucdavis.edu/events/12fairs/>