

Fairground Farms & Farmyard Festivals; Showcasing California Specialty Crops

Ventura County Fair – August 2, 2012

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

Discussion notes

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

- Lack of funding or budget
- Regulations – farms and fairs are over-regulated
- Displays and vendors are only at the fair for a limited time
- Exhibits and displays get pushed to the back of the hall – making it hard to make money at the fair
- It's expensive and takes lots of labor to put together exhibits – not always worth it
- It's hard for customers to buy and carry goods from the back of the fair
- Fried vs. fresh – What is “fair food”?
- Environmental Health restrictions on sampling food are particularly strict in Ventura County
- Farmers lack of participation
- Farmers are shy
- Marketing
- Staffing a feature booth
- Lack of refrigeration for perishable products at displays and booths – hurts produce displays and sales
- Informative signage
- Keeping plants fresh
- Finding a leader for a volunteer-created and staffed booth
- A farmers' market needs good returns, sales and lots of customers to make it work for farmers
- Customers at fairs want fried food – Healthy fair food is a hard sell!

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

- “Meet the Farmer” activity
- Farmer/Chef collaboration for demos, samples, meals, etc
- Building relationship with community
- Feature exhibits at fairs – Call the fair. They might pay for exhibits
- Show innovative and user-friendly packaged foods
- Have an option to select days for booths and demos at fairs, rather than requiring full staffing on all days
- Use fair facilities more of the year
 - Quality assurance classes for Cattlemen Association
 - Create a Culinary Incubator program – off-season for 10 months
 - Garden program off-season
 - Farmers' Market on the fairgrounds
 - Events on every holiday

- Pumpkin festival in October
 - Apples
 - Spring: strawberries and eggs at Easter
- Ag Day/Farm Day with the Farm Bureau
- Use certified kitchens more
 - Consider contracting kitchens as commissaries for food trucks
- Separate agricultural activities on the program and schedule so that they are easier to find
- Let farmers do business, sell products at fairs
 - Smoothie booth
 - Have FFA and other youth run a food booth
- Work with the county to ease kitchen and food selling regulations
- Sell agricultural products to fund the exhibit program
- Work with a professional food marketing company on branding “Ventura Fresh”
- Ventura as an agritourism “hub”
- Provide internships at the fair for agricultural students
- Watch “Losing the West” - <http://www.losingthewestthemovie.com/>

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

- Inspire other people about this process
- Contact my local fair about a potential hay-ride concession
- Share the passion – It’s not all about the money
- Come up with an interesting program and take it from fair to fair
- Attend other fairs/farms workshops in this series. Check out times, locations, agendas at <http://sfp.ucdavis.edu/events/12fairs/>

Who else should be part of this conversation?

- L.A. County Fairs
- Environmental Health officials
- CDFA Direct marketing and Inspection department representative
- Cliff for Siskiyou Fair
 - Working on a year-round fair
- Farm Bureau
- Young Farmers and Ranchers
- Heifer International
- USDA Rural Development
- UC Cooperative Extension
- City Parks and Rec.
- Salvation Army
 - Certified kitchen facility
 - Job training potential connection with kitchen incubator program
- Farmer Veteran Coalition