

**Fairground Farms & Farmyard Festivals; Showcasing California Specialty Crops  
Napa Town & Country Fair – August 9, 2012**

**A few notes from presentations** compiled by Penny Leff, UC ANR Small Farm Program

**Marin County Fair – Always Fresh, Fun and Local; Building partnerships with an agricultural theme**

***Charlie Barboni, Marin County Fair Exhibits Director:***

The theme is selected about 18 months before the fair time. This year's agricultural theme brought in Marin County UC Cooperative Extension and the Agricultural Institute of Marin as partners. Exhibits and activities included a barnyard exhibit, backyard chickens, a cheese-making contest, a cheesecake contest, meet the cheese-maker, meet the farmer, aquaculture exhibits. Whole Foods helped. One of the displays featured Clover Stornetta billboards from over the years. The historical agricultural photos taken by Marin County's first UCCE farm advisor in early 1900s were very popular. Signs were put up to explain agricultural facts. Used real estate signs worked well for this. Every year, new contests complement the theme of the fair.

***David Lewis, County Director, UCCE Marin and Napa Counties:***

The theme was a great way for fairgoers to make connections – to history, as well as to what's happening and what's living now. The meet the farmer events were popular with the local farmers, but needed a little preparation. Lewis held orientations for the farmers a couple of weeks before the fair, and provided tips for the farmers about displays, samples, and other suggestions for making the event successful and engaging. When Lewis asked Barboni for a small space to show a few of the old, recently discovered historical agriculture photos, he was surprised to learn about the agricultural theme, but was happy to participate in helping organize the various aspects of the exhibit and to display large versions of the photos. The historic photos, taken by M.B. Goissevain, have now been compiled in a book titled "Marin Agrarian Roots", which was sold at the fair and other outlets.

***Leah Smith, Director of Programs, Agricultural Institute of Marin:***

The Agricultural Institute runs 8 farmers markets every week, so it was hard to staff the fair for 5 days, but the staff all pitched in. They organized a big tent with 4 things going on at the same time: cheese-making demos, a beanbag toss, a do-it-yourself plant identification exhibit, and butter making. The butter-making was especially popular. It involved the customers simply shaking some whole milk for 20 minutes in a small container in order to turn it into butter. The key to the program, said Smith, was to make it interactive. The exhibit also contained other exhibits of California agriculture such as displays of cross-sections of different fruits and discussion of local dairies.

**Healthy Food Options at the fair – Chef Rachelle Boucher, Teri Rockas, Healthy Choice Showcase**

The program to provide healthy food choices at the fair grew over ten years or so. It currently involves 35 food vendors and non-profit organizations providing food at the fair. A couple of years ago, the fair began requiring all fair food vendors to offer healthy food options. Boucher and Rockas brought this in as a partnership. They started early to build up trust, and communicated a lot with the vendors. There was push-back from the vendors, but they overcame it by using several methods. They brought vendors into the program by saying "We

want to feature you”, and organizing a contest among the vendors for their healthy food choices. They made it exciting, gave each vendor time on stage to talk about their products. “Hosting” them is important, Boucher explained. She also wrote a blog, tweeted about the program, and kept the promotion up. She suggests approaching hospitals as potential sponsors. They kept communication going, and ran the healthy choice items past a nutritionist to make sure that they were really healthy. They formed a cadre of “youth ambassadors” to help promote the healthy food, had youth panels as judges, and gave out \$2000 in prizes for the contest. Another suggestion: Have youth use social media during the fair to promote the healthy food choices, contest, etc.

**Redwood Acres Humboldt Made Fair – A Community Kitchen at the Fair - Diana Paluszak for Cindy Bedingfield, CEO of Redwood Acres Fair**

Redwood Acres Fair received a \$61,000 grant from the Headwaters Fund to create a community kitchen at the fairgrounds. They have created 2 new certified kitchens to use for tourism activities. Tourists can now go fishing for salmon on the coast and bring their fish back to the fair and cook it up. Hospitals are partnering with the fair to offer cooking classes. The fair put on a Farm to Table dinner at the fair. They are considering bringing in a freeze-drying operation for fish. There is a farmers’ market on the fairgrounds. Suggestion for a possible funder for this type of activity: California Endowment

**Day at the Farm/Napa County Farm Bureau – Michelle Risso**

The Napa Valley Expo donated the fairground facility for this annual Farm Bureau educational event. More than 1400 local students and 70 teachers participate in the one-day event showcasing Napa County agriculture. Solicitation was sent to more than 60 wineries, and 10 of them sent in donations to help pay for the busses to take the children to the event. Included in the Day at the Farm are farm animals, farm equipment, sheep shearing and other demonstrations, beekeeping, grape growing, and more. Other Ag in the Classroom youth activities include the children putting seed packets together and selling produce and seeds at the farmers’ market in October.

**Napa Certified Farmers’ Market – Lia Bettinelli, Market Manager**

The market currently operates 2 mornings each week in the Oxbow Market parking lot. Bettinelli and the market board are looking into the possibility of an evening market. Activities include a story time for young children that brings in lots of parents, and a “Rethink your Drink” campaign to encourage less soda consumption. The farmers’ market is a good launching pad for agritourism. Bettinelli will suggest that growers advertise their farmstands and agritourism activities more at the farmers’ market. Many farmers also have their own events that they might promote at the fair. As for the potential for collaboration between fairs and farmers’ markets, Bettinelli says it would be good to have a permanent home on the fairgrounds if they ever had to leave the Oxbow site. She would also like to see other activities at the fair to benefit farmers, such as the Heirloom Festival in Santa Rosa. She would like to see a commercial kitchen, perhaps available to farmers so they could do something with excess produce, or so

others could use this produce to make value-added products. The fair might also consider an add-on field trip to local farms as an offered activity.

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

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

- Not enough money or sources of funding
- People are scared of change
- Farmers participating in an event – Organizers have to make sure that the event is going to be worth it for farmers to be part of
- Inactive Fair Board members are a challenge
- Promotion is a challenge
- Keeping up with the changing styles/tastes of youth
- Accurately collecting data about customer demographics
- Farmers very busy, hard to staff booths
- Demographics of customers in some regions not supportive of farmers
- Getting city manager to buy-in to fair and not plan other big events during fair time
- Balancing the business of the fair with engaging the community

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

- More use of the commercial kitchens
- A farmers' market on the fairgrounds when fair is not going on
- Cross-promotion of fair and farmers' market
- Obtaining more community partnerships
  - Partnering with groups that allow children to benefit
    - Example: Farm Bureau (?) Tractor Pull with 4H/FFA vendors
  - Partnering with specialty crop growers
- Greater wine industry involvement
  - As a non-profit "Friends of the Fair" sponsor
- Have a local grower section at the fair
- Farm to table demos
- Invite city council members to the fair or to dinner
- Presentation to city council about potential use, availability of fair facilities
- Celebrating the region, using the fairgrounds outside of fair time
  - Example: Yolo County olive oil festival
- Agricultural education for at-risk youth
  - Gardens
  - Animals
- Agricultural education for adults through gardens, etc.
  - Interactive
  - Urban farming education

- Farmers, agritourism operators could put up an unstaffed feature booth at the fair for information and promotion
- Fairs need to get back to basics, engage community

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

- Find more good fair board members
- Promote the fair at the farmers' market
- Farmers' Market manager talk with fair board about facilities
- Submit content to Visit California website for promotion
- Fairs educate decision-makers about non-monetary benefits of fairs
- It doesn't happen overnight
- Have big ideas; take baby steps that make business sense
- Build long-term partnerships that are there for the long haul
- Partner with RCD, NRCS on setting up an agricultural center on the fairgrounds that could house many agricultural groups together:
  - Agricultural Commissioner's office
  - Farm Bureau
  - UCCE
  - Grape Growers' Association
  - First step: Get square footage needs from each group
- In Napa – healthy food options, healthy food contest for vendors

#### **Other suggestions from evaluation forms:**

- Connect with:
  - "Visit Napa Valley"
  - Napa County Fair – Calistoga
  - Napa Valley Vintners
  - Napa County Historical Society
  - Preservation Napa Valley