

**Fairground Farms & Farmyard Festivals; Showcasing California Specialty Crops
Santa Cruz County Fair – September 13, 2012**

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

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

- Lack of public knowledge about agriculture
- Farmers don't have time to be at the fair
- Agriculture is put in a corner at the fair, making it hard to compete with rides and attractions
- How do we make agriculture more exciting?
- Not every farmer is an educator. We need guidance for farmers to help them educate the public
- People skip the ag building at fairs
- Miss-information about agriculture gets overblown and causes confusion among consumers
- School districts not encouraging agricultural education to continue
- Funding for fairs and education programs
- Regulations restrict farmers and other businesses
- Connecting fairs and farms is a challenge
- The cost of insurance for agritourism activities is a challenge
- More public exposure on farms pushes the insurance industry to change, come up with new coverage plans for agritourism on farms and ranches

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

- Fairs are interfaces between urban and rural people. How to take advantage of that?
- Consider asking for agricultural producer contributions from big growers to help fund fairs – donating a portion of a commodity check-off marketing program
- Lay out the fair/agricultural exhibits to better showcase farmers
- To interest youth, show off modern agricultural technology, show modern farming techniques and also involve more diverse ethnic farmers
- Get high tech corporations more involved with agricultural education & displays
- Tie the tractor exhibit together better with the farm displays
- Create an "agricultural alley" with interactive booths & prizes
- Require fair food vendors to purchase a certain percent of their produce locally
- Create traveling booths, with Ag in the Classroom, that can travel to different fairs during the season
- Tie food booths and cooking demos to agricultural displays – Farm to Fair plus cooking education
- Have more agriculture By the Front Gate
 - A salsa garden greenhouse, with demos, prepping & tasting/selling
 - Have 4H kids walk livestock by the front gate
- Mill a log and strap it back together as a display of lumber sourcing
- Have kids create animals on sawhorses

- Have a chef in the ag building – teach kids to clean, prep, cook & clean up afterward
- Have a separate stage hosted by local chefs using local produce, then create a cookbook from the recipes
- Santa Cruz County to do a comprehensive economic study, and create an economic plan involving farmers and agriculture in the process
- Revise zoning ordinances to allow more alternative usage on ag land, such as processing and agritourism.
- Increase use of the fairgrounds by concerts, etc, to increase revenue
- Create a “Pizza Farm” on the fairgrounds for youth education
- Farmers can conduct more agricultural-based activities on the fairgrounds in order to reduce insurance costs (California Fair Service Authority)
- The Cottage Food Bill – AB1616 – would provide new opportunities for farmers if it passes
- Engage university students of hospitality and tourism in working with farmers and agricultural businesses.

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

- Find more money for all this
- Use video to tell farmers’ stories at fairs
- Collaborate and share ideas about how to tell our stories and engage the public
- Bring Huell Howzer back to California Fairs
- Pool resources to put together a mobile ag display unit to go from fair to fair
- Share ideas and successes from other fairs
- Sustain the fair – try to stay in business
- Santa Cruz Ag History Project to do more agricultural education
- Plumas Fair to create a business plan and budget for greenhouse & crop processing business
- Apply for a Specialty Crop Block Grant
- Fairs talking with marketing boards about getting a share of \$ paid by grower/members in order to do more public education/promotion about regional specialty crops
- Look for diversified funding for fairs, using 501 (c)3’s
- Connect with health and fitness advocates and educators

Other suggestions & comments from evaluation forms:

- A clearinghouse (website) for information gathered at these meetings
- Utilize the programs outlined today
- Information sharing & follow-up contact info for attendees
- I believe that the first step has begun of getting the farmers and fairs to meet & understand each other. The next step will be the development of cross programs. I think that the challenge will be for fairs to convince farmers that fairs are worth their time, effort and participation.