

# Expanding Agritourism In Butte County, California<sup>1</sup>

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## Chapter Summary

This case study examines the strategies and impacts of collaboration among diverse Butte County stakeholders to support agritourism development and increase agritourism participation by out-of-area visitors to the sparsely populated rural county. The three local initiatives implemented were: the Sierra Oro Farm Trails' Passport Weekend; the Tourism Business Improvement District's Explore Butte County marketing program; and the county government's agritourism-friendly programs. Overall, the hospitality industry's collaboration with an agritourism association and other community organizations, in conjunction with supportive county regulations, low permitting fees and helpful county staff, appears to be generating continued growth of farm and ranch agritourism businesses and increased regional tourism in Butte County.

While the new *Explore Butte County* marketing program's usage of the Passport Weekend's materials led to easy inclusion of agritourism in its initial marketing campaigns, this practice excludes agritourism operations that are not members of Sierra Oro Farm Trails. Additionally, the new marketing program distributed initial zone grants proportionate to the funds contributed by hospitality industry members in each zone, which left out those rural communities with no hospitality industry members. The Tourism Business Improvement District may find it beneficial to recognize and promote more rural agritourism assets as part of marketing the region. In order to take best advantage of the increased marketing initiated by the hospitality industry, Butte County's agritourism operations may benefit from committing to provide regular hours of operation at their tasting rooms and farm stands, and working to hone their hospitality skills.

Extension's involvement to date with the County's agritourism operations has been relatively limited. Targeted Extension support through a series of workshops regarding critical agritourism planning and operational challenges could strengthen the community's rebuilding after the devastating 2018 Camp Fire.

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## Learning Objectives:

1. Identify and explain the opportunities and challenges faced by small-scale farmers and ranchers in Butte County striving to develop financially successful agritourism enterprises.
2. Examine the strengths and shortcomings of Butte County government's agritourism-supportive ordinances and other measures that have been implemented since 2010.
3. Assess potential strategies for continued and expanded collaboration among small-scale farmers and ranchers, Extension, diverse organizations and policymakers to sustainably grow agritourism enterprises, events and activities in Butte County.
4. Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of the new Tourism Business Improvement District's inclusion of agriculture/agritourism in its marketing efforts.

## The Issue, Opportunity or Trend

Urbanization pressures and shrinking profits have led small-scale farmers and ranchers in California, and across the United States, Canada and Europe, to search for alternative strategies to increase their revenues. As public interest in local food and sustainable farming practices increases consumers' demand for on-farm experiences, a growing number of producers are considering diversifying with agritourism operations to spread risk and add value to their existing enterprises.

Most research regarding agritourism in the United States has focused on its economic benefits (Nickerson, et al., 2001; McGehee and Kim, 2004; Barbieri, 2013.) The results of a 2009 survey of agritourism operations in California indicated that their profitability varied significantly among geographic regions and by primary agritourism activity, and increased with the age of the agritourism operation (Rilla, et al., 2011). In the European Union, the change in agricultural policy from a production focus to a redeployment of farm resources into farm diversification has significantly increased the number of farms with agritourism enterprises (Ilbery, 1991).

There is limited government policy in the United States supporting agritourism. Agriculture departments in a few of the fifty states (such as Colorado, Kentucky, North Carolina, Vermont, Virginia and West Virginia) are collaborating with university Extension faculty to support farms and ranches operating or developing agritourism operations. In California, state level agritourism-related regulatory changes have been incremental. "Agricultural homestay" legislation was passed in 1998 in California to allow working farms to host a limited number of overnight visitors and permit farm families to serve meals cooked in the farm kitchen to visitors. In 2009, regulations were adopted that enabled farms in California to sell processed agricultural products, such as jams, preserves, pickles, juices, cured olives and other "value-added" products made with ingredients produced on or near the farm at their farm stands.

In California, county governments bear the primary responsibility for regulating agritourism operations on agricultural land within their boundaries. Recently, a few counties have added a combined agriculture and economic development element to their General Plans. They have followed up by revising their zoning codes to support their goal of expanding agritourism. In the case of Butte County, the county also created an

assessment district to fund tourism promotion activities. In this case study, we examine how farmers, local organizations, and government agencies in Butte County have joined forces to enhance agritourism and general tourism opportunities in their sparsely populated county.

## The Innovation

### Case Context

Butte County is a primarily rural county in Northern California. A network of farmers, county staff and local organizations is striving to expand agritourism in the county to enhance the economic viability of smaller farms and to create assets that benefit the hospitality industry and community economic development in general. In 2017, the county had 229,294 residents, and its median household income was 30 percent below the state's median of \$63,783 (US Census Bureau, 2017).

The county's primary attraction for visitors is its natural beauty and outdoor recreational activities (Applied Development Economics, 2007), including a national park and 28 miles of scenic byway (Federal Highway Administration, 2015). Additionally, the nation's seventh largest brewery, Sierra Nevada Brewery, is based in Chico, the county's largest city (population of 93,983—US Census Bureau, 2017). Butte County is a one-and-a-half hour drive from an urban area with more than 250,000 people (Sacramento); its remoteness limits visitor numbers (see Fig. 1). Additionally, its lack of clustered venues makes navigation a challenge for visitors.

Fig. 1



Butte County's chief economic driver is agriculture, with walnuts, almonds and rice generating more than 77 percent of the county's agricultural income in 2016 (Butte County Agricultural Commissioner, 2017). Most of the county's large-scale crop and livestock production is marketed through conventional wholesale channels. Thus, agritourism operations in Butte County are usually part of smaller-scale farms marketing a broad range of products including wine, olive oil, citrus, apples, nuts, cheese, meat and nursery plants.

Small-scale growers in the county have been operating fruit stands for a century. Wineries and seasonal pumpkin patches started in the Oroville area in the 1980s, and a few olive oil producers have recently opened tasting rooms. Most of the wineries currently have small vineyards; they are essentially at a pilot stage, assessing the suitability of various grape varieties and testing consumer response to their wines (Dunne, 2017).

Extension's involvement with agritourism operations in Butte County has been relatively limited. The University of California (UC) Small Farm Program (part of UC Cooperative Extension) conducted a survey of California agritourism operators in 2009. They identified permits, regulations and risk management as their most significant challenges (Rilla et al. 2011, with similar findings in a 2015 survey). In 2011, the Small Farm Program organized a grant-funded workshop in the Northern Valley which included speakers and agritourism operators from Butte County. The daylong *Growing Agritourism* workshop covered the essential elements of assisting farmers and ranchers to establish, develop and market profitable agritourism businesses and sustainable regional agritourism organizations, using the UC ANR publication, *Agritourism and Nature Tourism in California*, and additional resources as curriculum materials. The Small Farm Program has distributed at least 600 copies of this guide book at workshops throughout California since 2011. In 2013, the Small Farm Program initiated a grant-funded *Building a Farm Trail* project to bring three newly developed agritourism associations in Northern California together to learn from each other, and to work with marketing, tourism and economic development experts to create Farm Trail maps, websites and collaborative events in each region. One of the agritourism associations was North Yuba Grown, whose 24 members currently includes four wineries, an olive oil ranch and a farm in southern Butte County; project details are described in Appendix A.

Thus, agritourism in Butte County is still relatively young; it is not a significant part of the county's agricultural economy. Tourism, hospitality, planning and economic development entities in the county have recognized, studied and supported the development of agritourism for more than ten years, but have not had much funding for most of that time to invest in the development of a marketing strategy.

## Stakeholders Involved

This case study examines the strategies and impacts of collaboration among diverse Butte County stakeholders to support agritourism development and increase agritourism participation by out-of-area visitors. Three local initiatives--Sierra Oro Farm Trails' Passport Weekend, the Tourism Business Improvement District's Explore Butte County marketing program and Butte County zoning ordinances favorable to agritourism development—have been implemented to increase agritourism activity of the region. Four major stakeholder groups were identified as being significantly involved with these initiatives: farmers with agritourism operations; the organizer of the Sierra Oro Farm Association; Butte County government staff and elected officials; and leaders of local organizations involved in tourism. The latter group includes members of Explore Butte County program, Chambers of Commerce and the local Farm Bureau.

## Approach Used and the Impact

To examine the impact of the three Butte County initiatives on agritourism development by small-scale producers and on general tourism development in the region, twelve agritourism stakeholders were interviewed for this study between 2016 and 2018. They included: three individual agritourism operators in the Oroville region; the organizer of the Sierra Oro Farm Trail Association; Butte County's Economic and Community Development Manager; the county's Principal Planner; and leaders of the Oroville Chamber of Commerce, Butte County Farm Bureau, and the recently formed Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID). A consultant hired by Butte County to prepare a strategic marketing plan was also interviewed. The interviewed individuals are listed in Appendix B.

## Agritourism Operators

The three agritourism operators who were interviewed (considered to be representative of the type and scale of Butte County agritourism operations) are described below. They are all members of *North Yuba Grown*.

### **Morse Farms, owners Glennda and John Morse**

Morse Farms has five acres planted in mandarin oranges. Both Glennda and John Morse are retired state employees. They bought the land in 1998, cleared it and began planting in 2002 while they were still working for the state. They also built a house and a small shop/farm stand. Morse Farms' agritourism activities include the farm stand, some RV and garden club tours, and six years on the Sierra Oro Farm Trail annual self-guided Passport Weekend tour (see Fig. 2, photo of Morse Farms during a Passport Weekend tour).

Fig. 2



The Morses employ three part-time employees during their short winter harvest and selling season. About 70 percent of the fresh mandarins are sold direct to consumers at the farm stand and about 30 percent at fairs and other events. Glennda also has a Cottage Food Operation permit (to produce limited quantities of non-potentially-hazardous foods in a home kitchen for direct and local sales) and also uses a co-packer to produce

other specialty food products to generate sales and make people aware of mandarins on a year-round basis. She also sells fruit to other local businesses that produce mandarin-infused beer and olive oil. About 30 percent of the Morse Farm's specialty products are sold through about 50 stores, with the rest sold directly to consumers at the farm stand, online and at events.

### **Hickman Family Vineyards, owners Alyse and Todd Hickman**

The Hickmans currently farm 11 of the 15 acres they own, planted primarily in wine grapes. They have no employees, and only use family labor. The Hickmans have been farming for about twelve years; their tasting room has been open for eight years. Ninety-nine percent of their sales are direct to consumers through the tasting room. The tasting room, as allowed by right for small wineries in Butte County, is open three days each week and hosted on average 50 visitors a weekend in 2017(see Fig. 3).

Fig. 3



The Hickmans regularly host and pour wine for 1,000 visitors on the Sierra Oro Farm Trails Passport Weekend (see Fig. 3). In addition, Alyse is one of the main organizers and promoters of the North Sierra Wine Trail, an association of 14 small wineries in Butte and neighboring Yuba County that market collaboratively and organize annual Wine Trail Passport Weekends, drawing about 500-800 people to these events.

### **Calolea Olive Oil, owners Monica and Michael Keller**

The Kellers farm twenty acres of mature olive trees in Butte County and another five acres in Yuba County. They have no regular farm employees, but contract with a picking crew for the harvest. Calolea sells at twelve weekly farmers' markets and several seasonal events in Northern California. In 2016, about 45-50 percent of its sales were direct to consumer through farmers' markets and the website, and 40 percent of sales were to stores. Distributors, including a local food hub, make up most of the balance of sales. They have an olive oil tasting room, which is open only for special events and by appointment. The only large-scale event they participate in is the Sierra Oro Farm Trail Passport Weekend, which they have done for the past seven years (see Fig. 4).



Fig. 4



In addition to these interviews, we sent an email invitation to participate in an online survey to 51 agritourism operators in Butte County. Twelve responded to the survey, for a 24 percent response rate. Although no generalizations can be made based on the low number of responses received, it is interesting to note that none of the respondents offered lodging or outdoor recreation activities which are often some of the more profitable agritourism ventures (Rilla, et al., 2011). Furthermore, eleven of the twelve respondents reported that:

- Their agritourism business is less than twenty years old;
- They generated less than \$25,000 in agritourism revenue in 2015;
- 85 percent or more of their agritourism revenue in 2015 was from direct sales of agricultural products to consumers; and
- They were open for agritourism activities 52 days or less in 2015.

## Farm Trails Passport Weekend

[Sierra Oro Farm Trail Association](#) (SOFT) has organized an annual [Passport Weekend](#) self-guided tour event of Butte County member agritourism operations every fall since 2005. The founder, director and core staff of SOFT is marketing professional Nicole Johansson. She and her husband operate Lodestar Farm's olive oil tasting room, which is adjacent to the farm's 80-acre olive ranch in the Oroville region.

The SOFT Passport Weekend regularly sells out with a six-week on-line marketing campaign, capping sales of \$30 tickets at 3000 in 2018 to prevent overwhelming the 34 participating farms and wineries with more visitors than they can handle. SOFT charges farmers and wineries \$250 to participate in the Passport Weekend and be included on the map (see Fig. 5 and Fig. 6) and website. Additionally, wineries are expected to pour tastes and others to offer tours and/or samples to all ticketed customers.

Fig. 5

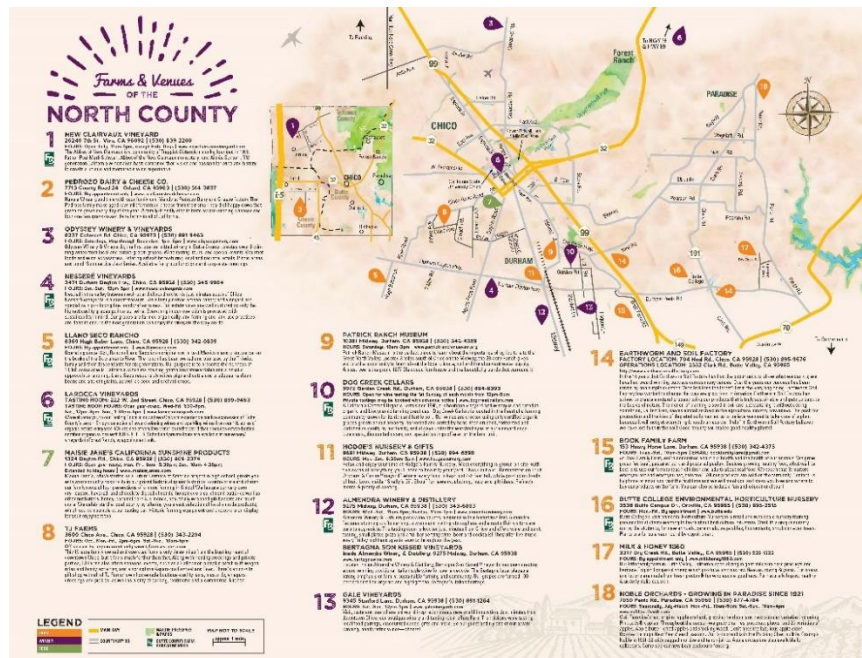


Fig. 6



SOFT is attempting to extend marketing efforts for participating farms and wineries beyond the October Passport Weekend by promoting their other events and holiday shopping offerings. In addition, SOFT is closely involved in marketing SOFT members through Explore Butte County, as described below.



## Explore Butte County

In 2007, the County commissioned a study to identify ways to diversify its economy and facilitate economic development. The Board of Supervisors accepted the report's recommendation to develop a countywide tourism marketing strategy. In 2012, the County appointed a Countywide Tourism Strategy Steering Committee, which identified a TBID as a potential funding source for implementing the tourism strategy. Butte County finalized the Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID) in November, 2015; it provided funds to develop the [Explore Butte County marketing program](#) in 2016. The TBID is funded by an assessment of two percent of revenues on overnight stays at participating members of the hospitality industry, while the Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) is paid by all guests to all lodging operations and then remitted to the municipality. The Butte County TBID is directed by a board composed primarily of hospitality industry members, but also includes SOFT's organizer. It adopted the slogan, "Explore Butte County," hired an executive director and launched a website (Fig. 7) in 2017. It also hired a marketing communications coordinator in 2018.

As of August 2018, the TBID had 55 hospitality industry members who collect lodging fees to fund the program. Membership locations are: 80 percent Chico (the county's largest town and home of California State University, Chico); 10 percent Oroville; 5 percent Paradise; and 5 percent unincorporated areas of the county. In 2017, 75 percent of the TBID revenue came from Chico, followed by 17 percent from Oroville, 7 percent from Paradise, and 1 percent from the county's unincorporated areas.

TBID revenues were \$621,000 in 2016 and \$817,000 in 2017. The sharp growth in revenue is due to the fact that hotels were sold out in 2017 because of a major repair project at the Oroville Dam. The Camp Fire started in northern Butte County on November 8, 2018. It destroyed 13,972 residences and 528 commercial buildings in the county, with insurance claims totaling \$7 billion. Three agritourism operations are known to have been damaged extensively. Although the fire caused the lodging occupancy rate in Butte County to increase to 99 percent, TBID revenues declined because no TBID taxes are collected on long-term lodging (occupied for more than 30 days). Thus, 2018 TBID revenues are estimated to decrease slightly to \$785,000. None of these fluctuations are yet related to Explore Butte County marketing activities, which started in August 2018 with an agritourism focus. Marketing efforts were suspended due to the Camp Fire; they resumed in February 2019. The marketing plan is designed to increase lodging revenues, and thus TBID revenues, by about 3 percent year to year.

Below are descriptions of Explore Butte County funded programs:

- Its [website](#) launched in August, 2017. In addition to agritourism, the website features outdoor recreation, shopping, restaurants, breweries, and arts-related attractions.
- A media campaign featuring agritourism targeted to potential visitors from the San Francisco Bay Area ran for 3 months in fall 2018 with the theme, "Meet the Farmer in Butte County." This media campaign was built around the assets created by SOFT, including videos, and only shared stories of its members. A map of SOFT members will soon be added to the Explore Butte County website. Later campaigns include outdoor adventures with a family-friendly itinerary and a "restaurant week".
- TBID money is funding a [Certified Tourism Ambassador \(CTA\) training program](#) to build knowledge, local pride and hospitality skills among local workers who are most likely to engage with visitors. The initial sessions will be targeted toward hotel front-line staff. The CTA program will be a line item in the TBID annual budget, and will include quarterly field trips and a binder for each participant. The CTA program is

customized for each destination through extensive research. The learning material covers the important elements of tourism, regional attributes/attractions, resources, and a customer service refresher in four, in-depth modules.

- Zone marketing grants comprise 10 percent of the TBID budget. The grants are allocated to the zones in proportion to the funding raised in that zone. The application process favors event-based or larger project-based support, such as signage. One of the first zone grants of \$15,000 was given to the Oroville Chamber of Commerce. The grant was used by the Chamber to promote the Oroville area and downtown events to people from outside the Oroville region. It helped promote a farm-to-table dinner in October 2018 organized by the Oroville Downtown Association. The grant will also pay for boosted Facebook posts and the creation of “story maps” on the chamber’s website. Story maps are a multi-media tool used to show the locations of different attractions or events on a map, sometimes using different icons for different categories of activities offered. They combine maps--such as farm trail tour maps-- with narrative text, images and multimedia content to create enriched online marketing as well as education about a region. They allow the viewer to click on the location point to learn more about that location, activity or business using text, videos and pictures. The first story map is about local museums; the second will be a mini farm trail featuring promotion of local ranches, farm stands, olive oil growers, rice growers, and mandarin orchards.

### **Agritourism-supportive county government**

Agritourism-friendly measures adopted by Butte County’s government since 2010 are highlighted below.

- Small winery, olive oil, fruit and nut, micro-brewery and micro-distillery production facilities are allowed to open tasting rooms and sell products they produce with a relatively low-cost “administrative permit.”
- A [Unique Agriculture Overlay](#) (Overlay) adopted in 2010, allows many agritourism activities, including events, farm stays, tours, tastings and other activities “by right” within several agricultural regions.
- Special event facilities, used for weddings, parties, corporate events and other such gatherings, are allowed; however, they are required to apply for a more costly “Minor Use Permit” to operate unless they are within the Unique Agricultural Overlay zone.
- The county is finalizing its short-term rental ordinance, which will provide more visitor lodging options in rural areas. Butte County’s Principal Planner noted that the county Farm Bureau remained neutral on this new ordinance, on the condition that people offering such lodging within agricultural zoning areas sign an acknowledgement of the Right-to-Farm ordinance.
- Applicable zoning ordinances that detail the activities allowed in different scales of operations and in different zones are readily available and clearly written.
- The Planning Department publishes a list of approved Special Event Facilities in Butte County, and will soon publish a list of approved short-term rentals.
- The Environmental Health Department’s fees for the registration and licensing-of Cottage Food Operations, and for sales of these products at fairs and festival events, are lower than such fees in most other counties. Farmers report that Butte County Environmental Health Department staff is easy to work with.

## Implications & Lessons learned

### Case Context

The hospitality industry's collaboration with an agritourism association and other community organizations, in conjunction with supportive county regulations, low permitting fees and helpful county staff, appears to be generating continued growth of farm and ranch agritourism businesses and increased regional tourism in Butte County. Additional Extension involvement, such as providing a series of workshops addressing key planning and operating issues with take-home exercises and facilitation of connections for ongoing support, could strengthen the development of new and existing agritourism operations.

**County regulations and ordinances:** Opinions regarding the success of the Overlay and other agritourism ordinances in developing successful agritourism operations are mixed. The ordinance has enabled small wineries to remain viable, with tasting rooms allowed by right. Some county staff consider it to be successful and well-received by the agritourism community. However, other staff indicate that the overlay has not generated the economic impact that the county had imagined. Regulations, including Americans with Disabilities Act's requirements and restroom requirements for an event facility, still present barriers to new agritourism operations. Tour busses are prohibited from visiting small wineries unless they are in the Overlay; this limits visitors to these facilities to some extent. Current agritourism operators were generally pleased with the ease of permitting created by the Overlay and other ordinances, helpful staff and low permitting fees, and have continued to slowly expand their operations and activities. During the two years of this study, several new agritourism operations have opened, including a U-Pick cherry operation, a few new pumpkin patches and a farm store located on a major highway. Several new special event permits have been approved.

**Sierra Oro Farm Trails:** Agritourism operators generally reported a positive return on investment from the SOFT Passport Weekend event, with the event growing in popularity and generating increases in product sales. They noted that the event raises visitor awareness and encourages return visits to buy more products, as well as generating subsequent sales online and at farmers markets. It is difficult to measure the spillover impact of the Passport Weekend on the community, but anecdotally organizers believe there are positive impacts resulting from visitor spending on food, gas and lodging. Hotels are usually sold out on Passport Weekend. In addition, many visitors stay with friends and spend money in town.

Some smaller wineries that participate in the SOFT Passport Weekend report that the increasing popularity of the event, along with the expectation that all visitors receive free wine tastings at each participating winery, is leading to decreasing returns on their participation. Some members of the North Sierra Wine Trail who participate in both SOFT and their own events noted that although their winery association's annual weekend event draws fewer visitors than the SOFT event, they sell more wine at their event while pouring fewer tastes and having more time to interact with customers. One winery and at least one other smaller orchard operation have dropped out of the SOFT Passport Weekend due to its growth and visitor expectations. However, the small orchard operator--Glennnda Morse of Morse Farms--stressed the continuing benefits and visibility of their operation resulting from several years of participation in the SOFT Passport Weekend. "They literally put us on the map," she said.

**Collaboration among community organizations:** Agritourism associations, including SOFT, North Yuba Grown and North Sierra Wine Trail, are important marketing organizations, dedicated to increasing their members' visibility and sales. The Chambers of Commerce have in recent years promoted local agritourism operations and activities to get visitors to "stay just one more night" in the region. The Farm Bureau runs the annual Farm City Celebration and the California Nut Festival. Butte County agritourism operators also market themselves individually through websites, social media, and email marketing. The collaborative efforts of these groups led to a recognition by the county's hospitality industry of the value and potential of agritourism as a draw for out-of-region visitors.

**Hospitality Industry's Tourism Business Improvement District efforts:** By including agritourism operations in TBID-funded tourism promotion and channeling funding to Chambers of Commerce and other local groups for events and promotional activities that benefit farms, the hospitality industry is supporting local farmers as it strives to pull in more visitors to stay in local hotels. Due to its newness, the impact of Explore Butte County program is currently unknown; however, it is expected to increase overnight stays by visitors to the area by 3 percent each year. In August 2018, two of the three agritourism operators interviewed had not yet heard of Explore Butte County, and had not been contacted by anyone connected with the program. Explore Butte County's "Meet the Farmer in Butte County" marketing campaign relies on videos and maps created by SOFT, and only features selected members of that group. By utilizing already-created promotional content, Explore Butte County was quickly able to start featuring agritourism in outreach campaigns to potential urban visitors. However, agritourism operations (including wineries) that are not SOFT members or are in more rural Butte County locations with little or no hospitality TBID members may be excluded by this approach.

## Lessons Learned

**#1 Community collaborations set the stage:** Many Butte County agritourism operations have been building momentum by collaborating with each other and with local nonfarm businesses. Their products are cross-promoted by breweries, restaurants and other businesses featuring their products; this builds a larger cluster of sites that can be visited. Small wineries recently opened in the region offer potential for further clustering to draw visitors. Support from community and agricultural organizations and county agencies contributed to a favorable environment for agritourism growth.

**#2 Regulatory change helps, but is not enough:** County regulations favorable to agritourism development are welcomed by farmers diversifying with agritourism activities, but are not sufficient by themselves to encourage development of agritourism operations successful enough to remain open to visitors for regular hours in a sparsely populated rural area. Keeping tasting rooms and other visitor facilities open is not cost-effective for the operations when they do not get enough visitors. Increased marketing to regional visitors could help draw attention to these operations and encourage them to remain open more often. Tourism professionals prefer to concentrate their marketing efforts on operations that are open to visitors for regular hours or larger events, causing a dilemma for newer start-up operations and limiting promotion of their occasional events and activities. Butte County's agritourism operators need to commit to providing regular hours of operation at their tasting rooms and farm stands, and work on honing their hospitality skills, in order to take best advantage of the increased marketing initiated by the hospitality industry. Additionally, targeted Extension support, such as the Agritourism Intensive three-session workshop series addressing key planning and operating issues, could benefit both new and existing agritourism operations. Several agritourism

operators from Butte County attended these workshops in neighboring Plumas County during 2015-2016.

**#3 Hospitality industry financing and leadership a huge boost, with challenges:** The TBID structure is welcomed by the hospitality industry as a means to finance increased tourism marketing to draw visitors from targeted urban regions. It also provides a needed source of funding to train community hospitality ambassadors. The existence of the well-organized and professionally promoted SOFT provided the new TBID organization with ready-made assets and promotional content – leading to easy inclusion of agritourism in initial Explore Butte County marketing campaigns. However, this ease of use of existing materials excludes agritourism operations who are not members of SOFT, or who are more rural and do not have tourism industry TBID members in their communities. The TBID distributed initial zone grants proportionate to the funds contributed by hospitality industry members in each zone, which left out those rural communities with no TBID members. The TBID may find it beneficial to recognize and promote more rural agritourism assets as part of marketing the region.

**#4 Continued participation needed:** From an external perspective, it would be beneficial for agritourism operators to track and participate in community efforts to encourage the county to: 1) provide road improvements and signage that would support their operations; 2) continue investment of some Explore Butte County funds for coordinated promotion of agritourism; and 3) reduce costly regulatory requirements for event operations that are outside the Unique Ag Overlay.

## Discussion Questions

1. How do the opportunities and challenges faced by Butte County agritourism operators compare to those in your area?
2. There seems to be a Catch-22: visitor numbers are limited due to limited hours of operation, and operators cannot afford to be open more hours without increased sales. What are your suggestions for helping small-scale operators to increase visitors and sales without increasing financial obligations?
3. Funding from the Tourism Business Improvement District appears to be an asset for Butte County tourism. How might agritourism operators throughout the county better engage with them for mutual benefit (with increased promotion for all parts of the county generating more lodging stays and higher TBID revenue)?
4. What are some ideas for engaging policymakers into making changes related to road improvements, signage and costly regulatory requirements?

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## Appendix A

### Extension Farm Trails Project Details

The UC Small Farm Program coordinated the 2013 *Building a Farm Trail* project and provided technical support. Grant funds were used to contract with experts to act as consultants with each group, develop websites, and design and print maps for an event in each region. At the first workshop, members of the three associations met with consultants, shared their challenges and plans, and received beginning lessons in farm trail development and agritourism marketing. The Project Manager (co-author Penny Leff), collaborators and consultants participated in a tour of each association's region, visiting with several members of each association at their operations. Each of the three tours concluded with a stakeholders/members meeting in which the consultants facilitated a group discussion helping association members to define their geographic region and membership. Each association selected a graphic designer, gathered members' information, drafted text, selected images and worked with the graphic designer and the Project Manager to create a farm trail map brochure for their association. Twenty thousand copies of each map brochure were printed. In addition, each group selected a website designer and worked with that designer to create or redesign a

website marketing the association. ([http://sfp.ucdavis.edu/events/Building\\_a\\_Farm\\_Trail\\_Project\\_2013\\_-\\_2015/](http://sfp.ucdavis.edu/events/Building_a_Farm_Trail_Project_2013_-_2015/)). North Yuba Grown collaborated with other community organizations to hold the North Yuba Harvest Festival in September 2014, which had 700 attendees. During the second workshop, members of the three groups discussed challenges and successes with each other, and learned from leaders of the Apple Hill Growers' Association and from project consultants. The third workshop was held as the *California Statewide Agritourism Summit* in April, 2015; approximately 150 members of the California agritourism community attended. SOFT's leaders, Nicole and Jamie Johansson, were the keynote speakers. To create the farm trail association development guide, the Project Manager interviewed leaders from 20 California agritourism associations about their activities, membership, management, growth, challenges, needs and plans, and transcribed the responses. She also requested materials from each of the interviewees for the resource library to be published online. The Project Manager synthesized the interviews and information from presentations by association leaders at project workshops into a guide, [Marketing Regional Farms and Wineries: A Guide for California Agricultural Marketing Groups](#). It was published online in November 2015 with the link distributed to everyone involved in California agritourism.

## Appendix B

### Stakeholders Interviewed for Butte County Case Study

Glennnda Morse, Morse Farms <https://morsemandarin farms.com/>

Monica and Michael Keller, Calolea Olive Oil <https://calolea.com/>

Alyse Hickman, Hickman Family Vineyards <https://www.hickmanfamilyvineyards.com/>

Nicole Johansson, Sierra Oro Farm Trail <http://www.sierraoro.org/>

Colleen Cecil, Butte County Farm Bureau <http://www.buttefarmbureau.com/>

Dan Breedon, Butte County Planning Division <http://www.buttecounty.net/dds/planning.aspx>

Casey Hatcher, Butte County Economic and Community Development  
<http://www.buttecounty.net/economicdevelopment/CommunityDevelopment.aspx>

Sandy Linville and Wilma Compton, Oroville Area Chamber of Commerce  
<https://www.orvillechamber.com/>

Carolyn Denero, Explore Butte County <https://www.explorebuttecounty.com/>

Carl Ribuado, SMG Consulting <http://smgonline.net/>

## Authors

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During the 10 years prior to her retirement in July, 2017, Shermain directed the University of California's Small Farm Program. Her research and extension activities focused primarily on local foods marketing, agritourism, values-based supply chains, food safety, and identification of new marketing and specialty crop opportunities for smaller-scale farmers. She also served as Director of University of California's Center for Cooperatives. Shermain co-authored two books, *Growing Local—Case Studies on Local Food Supply Chains* and *Cooperative Conversions, Failures and Restructurings: Case Studies and Lessons from U.S and Canadian Agriculture*. Along with multi-state collaborators, she recently completed [five factsheets](#) regarding expanding small and medium-sized farms' participation in the specialty food industry.

**Penny Leff**, Agritourism Coordinator, University of California Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program 530-752-5208 [paleff@ucdavis.edu](mailto:paleff@ucdavis.edu)

Penny has been statewide Agritourism Coordinator with University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE) since 2009, first as part of the Small Farm Program and currently as part of the UC SAREP Food and Society Program. In this position, she works with UCCE academics and staff to develop resources and connections for everyone involved in California agritourism. She maintains the UC Agritourism Directory and Calendar, organizes agritourism workshops, summits, webinars and classes throughout California, and participates in research projects relating to agritourism development. She also works with producer associations and communities on collaborative agritourism development and marketing. Penny has more than 20 years' experience supporting small and mid-scale farmers, including work as Program Manager for the Berkeley Farmers' Markets and with farmers' market managers around the state implementing systems for EBT SNAP access at farmers' markets.

**Holly George**, Emeritus University of California Cooperative Extension Plumas-Sierra counties, [hageorge@ucanr.edu](mailto:hageorge@ucanr.edu)

Holly worked for 33 years as a Livestock, Natural Resources and Community Development Advisor for Cooperative Extension, initially in Alameda and Contra Costa Counties in the East Bay before transferring to Plumas and Sierra in rural northeastern California. She co-authored *Agritourism and Nature Tourism in California*, University of California ANR publication 3484, along with several factsheets used at Agritourism workshops across the country. She has a long history of working with diverse interests (Art, Ag, Local Food, Recreation, etc.) to strengthen community vitality and continues to act as a network weaver. She has helped organize and facilitate diverse efforts to amplify rural voices and ag/art/stewardship events.