



December 2009

California AgTour Connections Agritourism News & Notes

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Greetings!

Happy December!

This month, as farm visitors cut christmas trees, sample wine and cheese and shop for locally produced food and crafts, most of us think ahead to next year. This winter might be the time to map out a blossom trail, attend a workshop or conference or finally get around to business planning for the next project. 2009 has been a tough year for many businesses, but the forecast for more visitors is looking up, according to tourism experts.

I'm busy updating our online [agritourism directory](#) for visitors and [online resources](#) for operators, planning workshops for the [California Small Farm Conference](#), researching liability insurance options for California operators and learning how to be part of the social media world. I'm also applying for grants to continue funding my position, and am interested in talking about any potential projects or partnership ideas. If you have questions or thoughts, please contact [me](#) (530) 752-7779.

I hope this newsletter brings you useful ideas and connections, and that your holiday season is happy, prosperous and peaceful. Please stay in touch.

Sincerely,
Penny Leff, UC Small Farm Program Agritourism Coordinator

Create a blossom trail Merced County farm advisor tells how



Blossom trails can entice visitors to enjoy rural orchards, anticipate the fruits and nuts to come, stop at springtime attractions and perhaps stay overnight in the community. Farm Advisor [Maxwell Norton](#) has been creating [drive-by tours](#) for visitors in Merced County for many years, and offers some advice.

Know the trees! An almond blossom or apple blossom tour is pretty straightforward, as all the blossoms are pretty and will blossom at a similar time, says Norton. Peaches, however, have two major types of blossoms; the showy type are blazing pink, but the non-showy kind are tiny red blossoms. You may have to drive around during peach blossom time to lay out the tour for the next year in order to

show off the brightest blooms.

Create a trail with a logical beginning and ending that someone from out of town can find. The path can be circular, but it doesn't have to be. It can start at a freeway overpass and end up in a town where visitors might find food or gas. The main point is to start and end where visitors will know where they are.

Be sure to include and go past other attractions, museums, farm stands, scenic areas, rivers, lakes, county parks and other places of interest. Point out picnic areas and restrooms on the route.

Don't let people get lost. Avoid planning the route through the middle of a good-sized town, even if it ends up in town.

The route should not take longer than three hours to complete.

Avoid left-hand turns onto or off busy two-lane highways.

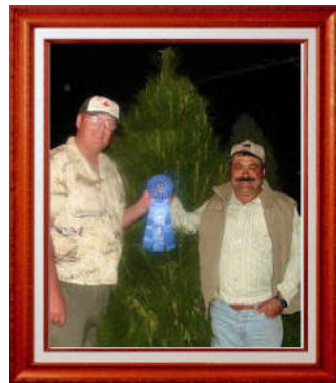
Remind people not to trespass in the orchards, and to take their pictures from the road.

Post simple maps of the routes on your website, and also post turn-by-turn directions for each route. You may, as in [Merced](#), have several maps for the different crops that blossom at different times. Clearly identify the range of dates for the expected blooms, but also give a phone number for visitors to verify the blossom time. The local chamber of commerce or Farm Bureau may be willing to list their phone number for this purpose.

Sometimes a local visitors center or chamber of commerce will print and distribute the maps. Be sure to check with them early and have the route ready with enough time for them to print and promote the beauty of your local orchards.

California Christmas Tree Association Many choose-and-cut farms smaller than 5 acres

Sam Minturn, Executive Director of the 350-member [California Christmas Tree Association](#), sees plenty of room for more small-acreage growers of choose-and-cut Christmas trees in California. About 55 percent of the Monterey Pines sold in California are grown in the state at elevations below 1,500 feet, often on smaller lots. Monterey Pines take typically three to five years to reach a size large enough for most customers, whereas the true firs, grown mostly on large plantations in Oregon and Washington and cut for sale at retail lots, take 10 to 15 years to grow to marketable size, says Minturn. Many association members in lower elevations also grow cedar and redwood trees, while those higher up grow varieties of fir and pine.



Although very few of the association members work full-time growing trees, it is a 12-months-a-year job. Sales are full-time for three weeks in December. January and February are planting time. The majority of the work is in the summer, with Monterey Pines requiring at least two shearings a year. Growers are always fighting weeds

and bugs, and most in the valley need to irrigate. Because the cost of water varies throughout the state, growers in Southern California charge higher prices for their trees than northern growers.

The California Christmas Tree Association is the second oldest such association in the country, started in the 1950s by growers around Santa Cruz who started growing trees on plantations rather than cutting them from the forests. In the 1970s, the association began including retail sellers, wholesalers, suppliers and nurseries.

Regular membership costs \$121, with lower fees for first-year members. The association holds three meetings and a farm tour each year. It also has a tradeshow, lists members on a website, and shares quarterly bulletins and information regarding production, marketing and pricing with members.

In addition, the association partners with [UC Davis researchers](#) to find solutions to pests and diseases like the gall rust affecting Monterey Pines in California. Other activities include fighting for market share being lost to artificial tree sales by marketing the environmental benefits of real Christmas trees. The National Christmas Tree Association is investigating the possibility of a national marketing order for the industry in order to promote purchases of real trees over artificial.

This week, you can help the association give Christmas trees to men and women serving in the armed forces by contributing to [Trees for Troops](#).

New insurance program approved

Agricultural general liability program now in California

The search for liability insurance to cover agritourism activities may have just become a little easier. The [American Association of Insurance Services \(AAIS\)](#) has created a new product, now approved for California insurance companies to offer as an option for farmers and ranchers who expand their operations beyond producing crops.

Traditional farm commercial liability programs usually exclude coverage for educational and recreational activities undertaken for compensation, but the new Agribusiness Commercial General Liability (AgGL) program covers B&Bs, mazes, tours, hunting and fishing, farm parks, and other activities offered by agritourism operators.

AAIS Vice President Debi Summerlin explains that the new program gives the insurance company tools to be able to charge premiums for these activities by providing ratings for many classifications of tourist activities. Most exposures to risk for agritourism activities are rated based on receipts earned, so an operator can pay a lower premium when starting small.

If you are interested in this new program, ask your current insurance agent to investigate how AgGL might work for your business. Your agent might need to contact AAIS to find a company carrying this product.

Profitable Niche Farming workshops

December north coast workshops



Two Profitable Niche Farming workshops, sponsored by the UC Small Farm Program and local UC Cooperative Extension offices, will focus on specialty crops for the North Coast region. These are not agritourism workshops, but some of you may be interested in the possibilities. The workshops will be held:

[In Eureka](#): 12 p.m. - 5 p.m., Dec. 15 at Humboldt County Agriculture Center, 5630 S. Broadway.

[In Ukiah](#): 9 a.m. - 3 p.m., Dec. 16 at Hampton Inn Ukiah, 1160 Airport Park Blvd.

These regional workshops will focus on specialty crops and strategies that local, small-scale farmers can use to select new enterprises and increase their likelihood for success. Presentations will focus on specialty crops, including orchard planning and management, season extension strategies, small-scale mushroom production, and blueberry production.

[Registration](#) is \$10 and includes lunch and materials. On-site registration may be available, but lunch and materials are not guaranteed. For more information, Eureka: (707) 445-7351, Ukiah: (707) 263-6838.

California travel outlook improving Forecast predicts upturn in number of tourists

The [California Travel & Tourism Commission](#) has released a [report](#) that predicts an increase in both domestic and international tourists visiting California over the next five years as the world economy recovers.



2009 was a hard year all round for most traveler-serving businesses, but the worst seems to be over. The report predicts 2010 will see positive growth in both domestic and international travel, with peak growth coming in 2011. Global economic recovery and a weaker dollar will aid the rebound in international travel, with increasing numbers of travelers to California coming from China and India.

For ideas about how to attract some of these visitors to your farm or ranch, contact your local city or county visitors bureau or staff at your closest [California Welcome Center](#).

The travel outlook report comes from the California Travel & Tourism Commission's [tourism industry website](#) that provides a vast store of research and promotion resources. You can even list your own favorite five California travel stops on the Visit California website. Check out a few and then [Create Your Five](#).

List your business on CalAgTour.org [Sign up now online](#)

The UC Small Farm Program hosts a searchable, [online directory](#) of California agricultural tourism operations, for use by visitors looking

for a farm or ranch to visit. The directory is located at www.CalAgTour.org.

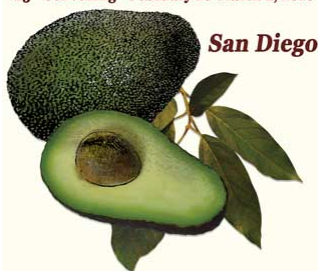
If you are a working farmer or rancher operating an agritourism business, we invite you to complete the [application online](#) so we can include your business in the directory. If you're already listed, please [check your listing](#), and update it if needed. (You can use the sign-up/application form for updates. We'll contact you if we have questions.) We are currently updating and planning new promotions for the directory and would love to include more California farms and ranches open to visitors.



Save the date!

Small Farm Conference in San Diego Feb. 28 - March 2, 2010

California Small Farm Conference
23rd Convening • February 28-March 2, 2010



The [California Small Farm Conference](#) is the state's premier gathering of small farmers and those who support them. The three-day educational conference includes on-farm tours, focused workshops, general educational sessions and opportunities for peer networking. A tour of San Diego agritourism operations will be held Feb. 28.

The conference theme, "Sustaining our Bounty," reflects the incredible bounty of agricultural products that the state of California produces. [Scholarships](#) are available for farmers, farm employees, students and farmers market managers.

Pedro Ilic awards

Seeking outstanding farmers and agricultural educators



Nominations are open for the [2010 Pedro Ilic Awards](#), which will honor a farmer and an educator who are dedicated to small-scale farming. The awards will be presented at the California Small Farm Conference, February 28 to March 2 in San Diego.

The awards are named for Fresno County small-scale farm advisor Pedro Ilic, whose untimely death in 1994 prompted the UC Small Farm Program to annually honor those who carry out his legacy of personal commitment to small-scale and family farming. Ilic was one of the original advisors when the Small Farm Program was established in 1979.

The annual awards honor an educator and a farmer who embody characteristics that helped make Ilic a success.

The deadline for nominations is Jan. 15, 2010. Nominations are reviewed by a committee from the UC Small Farm Program and UC Cooperative Extension in Fresno County, as well as associates of Pedro Ilic.

Nominations are [online](#). For questions, call (530) 752-8136 or e-mail [Linda Vieira](#).

NAFDMA Convention

Network and learn with agritourism operators from U.S. & Canada

The North American Farmers' Direct Marketing Association, which is a 25-year-old networking association for farm direct marketing and agritourism, is holding its annual [convention](#) from February 5 - 12, 2010 in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.



Thanks for reading and doing what you do. Please forward this newsletter to anyone who might find it useful (click on "forward email" below).

Sincerely,

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