



October 2009

California AgTour Connections Agritourism News & Notes

In This Issue

[UC closes Small Farm Program](#)

[Funding available](#)

[Corn maze in Dixon](#)

[Pumpkin patch ideas](#)

[Hoes Down Festival](#)

[Limited liability for agritourism?](#)

[No riders!](#)

[Join CalAgTour.org](#)

[Join the agritourism listserv](#)

[Small Farm Conference](#)

[Join Our Mailing List!](#)

Quick Links

[Join AgTour-Connect listserv](#)

[List your agritourism operation on CalAgTour](#)

[Newsletter archives](#)

[About Us](#)

Greetings!

Welcome to the [UC Small Farm Program's](#) AgTour Connections, a newsletter for everyone involved in the business of agritourism in California.

It's pumpkin patch and corn maze time! Learn a little about putting on the show from California experts, including the builders of the largest corn maze in the country. This issue also includes a harvest festival report, a reminder about tractor safety and news about how other states are supporting agritourism operators with limited liability regulation and promotion funding.

Closer to home, this month the University of California announced that it will [close the statewide Small Farm Program](#) (that's us). Although agritourism work will continue for at least several months, the closure of the Small Farm Program puts future agritourism support in jeopardy and many other activities would be scattered or discontinued. Read more below about this announcement.

Meanwhile, we'd love to hear how you're doing. Please join the [agtour-connect](#) email discussion group, and send us news of your activities and events. Thanks for helping keep California's small farms vibrant.

Sincerely,
Penny Leff, UC Small Farm Program Agritourism Coordinator

UC to end Small Farm Program

small farm program logo

The University of California has announced that it will [close the statewide Small Farm Program](#) permanently on December 31, 2009, in an effort to close a budget shortfall of the UC Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR).

According to USDA, California has 68,536 small-scale farmers. The Small Farm Program has served thousands of smaller farmers in California since being established 30 years ago in response to a lawsuit detailing how the University's mechanization research adversely impacted small-scale farmers. For many small-scale growers, the Small Farm Program's advisors are their first links to university research. The [Fresno Bee](#) reports how the loss of the program could hurt growers of specialty crops.

If you have questions or comments about the proposed closure, please contact the following leaders at UC ANR: Vice President [Dan Dooley](#), Associate Vice President [Barbara Allen-Diaz](#), Associate Vice President [Kay Taber](#)

"Know Your Farmer" USDA grant information

Funding available for local food, rural communities

The USDA has compiled a well-organized list of [grant programs](#) on its new "Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food" website. Funding from the 26 different agencies of the USDA include grants and loans available for farm storage facilities, community food projects, marketing, business development, specialty crops and more.

According to USDA, the new website focuses on "developing local and regional food systems and finding ways to support small and mid-sized farms."

World's largest corn maze

Some hints from the expert in Dixon



Most of the year, Dixon farmer Matt Cooley grows processing tomatoes, alfalfa, wheat, sunflowers and walnuts. In October, as his neighbors are winding down their farming activities for the year, Cooley welcomes thousands of visitors to [Cool Patch Pumpkins](#), home of the largest corn maze in the world,

according to the Guinness Book of World Records.

The pumpkin patch started in 2000. Cooley and a friend grew 10 acres of pumpkins for a wholesale buyer, but when the price offered suddenly dropped, Cooley told the driver to turn the truck around and bring them back for direct sale at the farm. Cool Patch Pumpkins now features 40 acres of pumpkins, all sold retail, a 43-acre corn maze, as well as a kid zone with go-carts and a hay pyramid. Other activities are a scarecrow contest and a pumpkin smash. Every year, to minimize pests, the pumpkins are rotated with the corn. A big painted hay-bale tractor and bright signs direct the crowds to the farm, right off Interstate 80.

Matt and his brother Mark have created a new maze every year for the last seven years. First they plant field corn on the entire plot, later than for a normal harvest (sweet corn is not tall enough). Then Mark plots the maze map on an Excel spreadsheet on his computer, creating a grid of squares. When the corn has grown to about a foot high, the brothers lay out the grid as 2,000 squares on the field, with flags at the corners of each square. They follow the map to mow 5-foot paths, and print maps to help maze-goers navigate the twists and turns. After the Halloween season, the corn is usually harvested for feed in November.

Inside the maze are three elevated platforms for viewing, named Ford Fortress, Starbucks Station and Ducati Island. Although none of the named companies sponsor the Cooleys, a photo of "Ducati Island" was posted to a motorcycle racing site, which sent 30,000 online visitors to the Cool Patch Pumpkins website.

Cooley says that the maze and pumpkin activities are usually about 10 percent of the farm's annual income. The agritourism

operation is very labor-intensive to build and take down, and means hiring an extra 15 to 20 people every weekend as well as a security crew of 8 or 9 for the maze after dark. The first few years the operation lost money, but now it usually makes a profit. Cooley says the trick is to figure out how to get people out to the farm. He says hiring a public relations professional was worth the investment, since resulting newspaper and magazine stories have brought customers from the Bay Area, Sacramento and even Las Vegas.

Unfortunately, the windstorm on October 13 destroyed this year's corn maze. Cooley estimates that half of the expected October income is lost, even though the pumpkin patch and other activities are still open.

More pumpkin patch ideas

Make 'em corny and kid-friendly



Giant Pumpkins - Dave Vierra of Vierra Farm ([Dave's Pumpkin Patch](#)) in West Sacramento grows his pumpkins huge and sets out a sampling of best and biggest, perfect for those toddler photo opportunities.

Pig Races - Vierra bought three cute piglets this year from a local pork producer, and keeps them in a run at the pumpkin patch. He contracts with a local vendor to operate the popular races, and feeds the pigs all the pumpkins they can eat. After Halloween, he'll fatten up the pigs for butchering.



Dave's Pumpkin Patch also offers **pumpkin chunkin** (pumpkins shot from a cannon), **pony rides** (through a contracted vendor) and a **hay maze** for little kids, as well as a **corn maze** designed and cut by a company that specializes in this service. Vierra says that all his pumpkin patch and corn maze activities together add up to about 30 percent of his annual income.

"It's not for everyone," he says. "It's a whole different mentality."

The rest of the year Vierra grows melons, squash, peppers, tomatoes and greens for wholesale and farmers market sales. He reports this has been an average year for pumpkin patch income. There have been more customers than last year, but per-customer spending is down.



Corn bath - Matt Cooley offers a rustic "swimming pool" of shucked corn kernels, perfect for playing and digging in the kids zone at [Cool Patch Pumpkins](#). (Kid zone admission is \$3 per child.)

Successful Hoes Down Harvest Festival

Hundreds of volunteers pitch in for community benefit

The [Hoes Down Harvest Festival](#) at [Full Belly Farm](#) in the Capay Valley of Yolo County was 22 years old this year, and those years of experience have grown a well-organized festival rich in authentic

rural-urban connections. This year's festival coordinator was second generation Full Belly farmer Hallie Rivers, daughter of farm owner Dru Rivers.



"It was a great year," said Hallie, "maybe even the biggest." She estimated the paying crowd at 5,000 to 5,500 people (\$20, \$5 for children), with more people camping overnight than ever before (\$20 per car to camp in the walnut orchard). Children and adults learned farm crafts and skills, played, danced, ate, drank, shopped at craft vendors' booths and at the all-organic farmers market, dipped in the river, and toured the 200-acre diversified organic farm on tours led by the farm's four owners.

Hallie was one of less than 10 paid staff members putting on the annual extravaganza. She started as coordinator at half-time in April, with the job becoming full-time for August and September. About 20 community members, many of them Capay Valley farmers, volunteered countless hours organizing the event, and much of the food was donated by local farmers. About 350 volunteers were the main weekend workforce, prepping and serving food, setting up and staffing the popular children's craft and games area, washing thousands of dishes (no disposables here), and everything else needed. Volunteers received free admission and free camping Saturday night.

The Hoes Down Festival is organized as a benefit for the [Ecological Farming Association](#) (EFA), which puts on the [EcoFarm Conference](#) every January. In addition to EFA, Hoes Down profits benefit agricultural organizations including local FFA, 4-H clubs and Community Alliance with Family Farmers. Equally important as the money is the chance to educate and share.

"To walk around and be able to see kids playing, getting to know the animals and learning about the farm, makes me know we're doing the right thing," Hallie said.

Limited liability for agritourism operations?

Other states have laws benefiting agritourism

The states of Colorado and Tennessee appropriate funds for promotion and development of agritourism; Georgia and Missouri give tax benefits to agritourism operators; New York makes grants available to farmers to expand into agritourism.

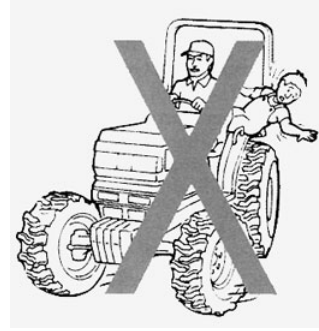
Illinois, [Louisiana](#), [Kansas](#), North Carolina, Oklahoma, Utah and Virginia have or are considering legislation that limits liability to agritourism operators. The [Arkansas Agritourism Initiative](#) has information about these laws. The [National Agricultural Law Center](#) has published information about state-based agritourism legislation.

Are you interested in the possibilities for limited liability for agritourism in California? The Small Farm Program will be investigating this issue further. If you are involved in working for limited liability for California agritourism, or are interested in updates on this research, please contact [Penny Leff](#), (530) 752-7779.

No riders!

Important tractor safety reminders for agritourism

Tractors are not passenger vehicles. They are built for one person to control and perform specific tasks. A person other than the operator who hops a ride aboard a tractor or trailing equipment can fall off or get caught in the machinery, becoming seriously injured or even killed. A "no riders" policy for tractors and other farm equipment is especially important for farms hosting visitors, offering hayrides or demonstrating equipment.



Operators often think they can stop the tractor in an accident, especially if the tractor is moving very slowly or no difficult tasks are being performed. The most common comment from people involved in tractor runovers is how quickly they happen.

The [Childhood Agricultural Safety Network](#) is working to spread the message, "Keep Kids Away From Tractors." [Read more](#) about safety and risk management for agritourism.

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.

Join the statewide agritourism conversation [Sign up for AgTour-Connect listserv](#)



The [UC Small Farm Program](#) has set up an e-mail listserv, hosted by UC Davis, as a simple communication forum for agritourism operators and associations, farm advisors, tourism professionals, county regulators and anyone else involved in the business of agritourism.

The results of the brief survey in the last AgTour Connections newsletter showed that those who answered the survey wanted to communicate with others statewide about agritourism, and also

showed that e-mail was the preferred method. We hope you might find the listserv useful for this communication.

Please [sign up](#) and feel free to use this unmoderated e-mail connection to post your announcements, ask questions of others around the state, or to share your thoughts about any aspect of sharing farms and ranches with visitors for education and enjoyment.

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.

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,

Penny Leff
UC Small Farm Program
(530) 752-7779
paleff@ucdavis.edu

Email Marketing by

