



September 2009

California AgTour Connections

Agritourism News & Notes

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Greetings!

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

Harvest time is well underway, bringing fall festivals and curious visitors to farms and ranches all over California. Check out the list of events below. Please put [us](#) on your e-mail announcement list and we'll make sure to post and share your events.

This issue brings news of profitable education programs, organizing efforts, county plan updates, energy-raising ideas and self-guided tours. We've expanded our [website](#) and started a [listserv](#) so we can all share announcements and ideas with each other. Please take a moment to answer a [short survey](#) to help our work be most useful to you.

Have a beautiful harvest season!

Sincerely,
Penny Leff, UC Small Farm Program Agritourism Coordinator

Join the statewide agritourism conversation

[Sign up for AgTour-Connect listserv](#)



The [UC Small Farm Program](#) has set up an email 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.

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.

Farm tours for profit?
Successful public education at two small farms



A recent UC survey of California agritourism operators found that even though more than half of respondents conduct farm tours, most do not charge a fee for the tours.

Philip McGrath, owner of [McGrath Family Farm](#) in

Ventura, and Helene

Marshall, of [Marshall's Honey](#) in Marin, have both figured out how to operate farm tour programs that contribute to their businesses' bottom lines and don't take too much valuable time from the farmers' busy week.

McGrath always charges for tours of his diversified organic farm, about 50 miles north of Los Angeles and right off Highway 101. He offers walk-up tours starting from the farmstand for a minimum of four people. \$7 per person buys a 25-minute walk, and \$5 pays for a 15-minute visit with the animals. McGrath says most people are happy to pay for time with the farmer in the field, but the walk-up tours do take a little more work than organized groups because you have to have someone on hand, working not too far away and available to talk to people.

Three years ago, 4,000 students from Los Angeles Unified School District visited McGrath Family Farm, financed by grants. This year, McGrath is hosting groups from inner-city schools in Watts every month and is waiting for word about funding from the CDFA Specialty Crops Program to pay for more student field trips to the farm. He suggests that farmers who would like to host school field trips contact school districts directly to learn about such programs.

McGrath sees the tour business as a perfect fit for growers who are already involved in direct marketing. Farm tours, he says, are seasonal like anything else. 90 percent of his tours are in the springtime, and 90 percent of the tours are elementary school children. Fall is all about Halloween. Coming up soon are the pumpkin tours. For \$4 per child, the pumpkin tour includes a hay ride, a visit to the corn maze, and a small pumpkin to take home. "It's a lot of fun," McGrath says.

Helene Marshall has been showing curious people around her bee-keeping and natural, gourmet honey production operation since she started selling at farmers markets, but soon found out that this took valuable time away from the other million things that needed attention. Ten years ago she started charging minimum of \$100 for a group of up to 20 people, and formalized the tour a little bit to include a honey and food pairing and a small sample to take home. After she looked at the numbers and realized that she was hiring extra staff to deal with the tour groups, she decided that the price was too low. She now sets the price high enough to have a little wiggle room, such as being able to offer free tours to clients of one of her



best customers and negotiating lower prices for shorter tours or lower-income groups when needed.

The Marshalls now do tours by reservation only, and on limited days. Sunday tours, offered twice a month for \$25 per adult or \$10 for kids, are 2 hours long and include a 20 minute film (produced by the National Honey Board), a honey and food pairing, tastes of up to 25 varieties of honey, a look at an opened beehive, a taste right out of the beehive, and a demonstration of extracting and bottling the honey. The up-to-20 tourists group tour is now \$400, by appointment, on weekends only. School group tours are available on Wednesdays and Thursdays, at either 10 a.m. or 1 p.m. for a minimum fee of \$250. Marshall estimates that 40 to 50 paid customers per month take the tours during the March through October season.

Marshall says, "Farmers often forget to put a value on our time, and that's the one thing that we don't get back." Although tours of Marshall's Honey operations are not a huge money-maker, they are never a loss.

[More farm tour suggestions.](#)

New agritourism groups organizing

Merced, San Joaquin, Ventura, Mendocino, Yolo county actions



Farmers and ranchers are hooking up with tourism professionals and others in several counties to jump-start agritourism activities.

Valley Land Alliance in **Merced County** organized a well-attended kick-off meeting at the Farm Bureau office on August 17. Included were operators of farm stays,

festivals and farm stands, interested farmers and supporters, as well as Farm Bureau, Cooperative Extension, Small Farm Program, county planning and visitors bureau representatives. Top concerns for the group included liability insurance, agritourism regulations and agreeing on group goals and governance. The next meeting is Oct. 14. For more information, contact Valley Land Alliance president [Jean Okuye](#), (209) 394-2421.

San Joaquin Partnership, leading economic development for the benefit of **San Joaquin County**, has organized a committee to develop agritourism in San Joaquin. Representatives from the Stockton Conference and Visitors Bureau, Stockton Downtown Alliance, San Joaquin Cooperative Extension, San Joaquin Farm Bureau and others are meeting to plan farm trails maps and other promotions. They are wrestling with questions such as whether agritourism should be focused only on small farms or should also include large agricultural processing operations since much of the county agriculture is larger scale farms. For more information, contact [Wes Rhea](#), Stockton Conference and Visitors Bureau Director, at (209) 337-2721.

Other regional agritourism activities in the works:

Ventura County - contact UC Cooperative Extension County Director [Rose Hayden-Smith](#), (805) 645-1466

Mendocino County - contact Mendocino County Visitors Bureau Director [Richard Strom](#), (866) 466-3636

Yolo County - contact Yolo County Visitors Bureau Director [Diane Parro](#), (877) 713-2847

2009 Farm and ranch tour in Tuolumne

Hundreds enjoy five-stop tour

Llama petting, wine tasting and apple cider pressing demonstrations were all part of a self-guided tour organized by [Farms of Tuolumne County](#) in August.

Visitors downloaded maps to the five featured farms, or picked up printed maps at any of the stops on the easily navigated route when they paid their \$10 fee for the tour. Farms of Tuolumne



County runs entirely on volunteer labor, but the fees paid all tour expenses. Helpful volunteers staffed check-in tables at each venue, while the farmers led visitors on tours, demonstrations and tastings. The organizers selected a small region of the county to highlight for this year's tour, and with only five farms featured, visitors were able to see them all between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m..

First stop was Gianelli Vineyards, with vineyard tours, winery tours and wine tasting, along with samples of grilled and bottled delicacies from neighbor farms and ranches, with everything offered for sale to tourists. Next, visitors met a free-range flock of laying hens and learned about water conservation at Red Earth Farm. The rescued llamas at LLamas of Circle Home were very popular with children. At Cover Apple Ranch, children of the farm family demonstrated hand-operated apple peelers and presses. Finally, visitors relaxed with live music and lemonade at Twain Harte Tree Farm, which doubles as a wedding venue. For more information, contact Farms of Tuolumne County President [Marian Zimmerly](#), (209) 928-2775.

Popular barn dance follows work day

Volunteers work and play at Pie Ranch



Pie Ranch is a 31-acre sustainable educational farm on Highway 1 near Pescadero, with a mission to inspire and connect rural and urban people to know the source of their food and to work together to bring greater health to the food system from seed to table.

Farmer Jered Lawson, with partners Nancy Vail and Karen Heisler and a crew of apprentices, interns, youths and volunteers, grows pie ingredients on the small pie-shaped piece of land, including wheat for crusts, fruits for filling, raising chickens for eggs, goats and cows for milk and butter, and vegetables for healthy meals. They sell crops from a farm stand by the road, to local bakeries and through a CSA program.

Community involvement is a big part of the action at Pie Ranch. On the third Saturday of every month, Pie Ranch invites volunteers to a community work day beginning at 2 p.m., followed by a potluck and an old-fashioned barn dance with a live band and dance caller. Volunteers put in a half day's work and pay a sliding scale fee which covers the costs of the party. Read more about [Pie Ranch](#).

Website new look and new content! County planning and regulations now online



The agritourism section of the [UC Small Farm Program site](#) is now updated with more resources for agritourism operators and others involved in the agritourism business.

Updates include a [new section](#) on changing the rules for agritourism. We posted examples of documents from different counties from various phases of the process of planning for and regulating agritourism, including:

- General plan updates
- Ordinances and zoning amendments
- Documents from advisory committees that include farmers, ranchers, winery and agritourism associations
- Samples of plain-language guides useful to operators
- Information about state regulations for agritourism

For information about general plan updates, ordinance changes, and participation in advisory committees in your county, contact your county planning department.

Keep checking back; more additions coming to the site soon.

USDA grant funding available

Value-added producer grant applications due November 30

The [Value-Added Producer Grant Program \(VAPG\)](#) is a competitive grants program administered by the Rural Business Cooperative Service at USDA to help producers move into value-added agricultural enterprises. This program aims to provide planning and/or capital investment for value adding enterprises started by farmers and ranchers. VAPG funds have been used for marketing programs in the past. For more information about what projects might be eligible, contact [Karen Firestein](#), Business and Cooperative Specialist at the California USDA Rural Development office, (530) 792-5829.

A [good explanation of the VAPG](#) is on the website of the Center for Rural Affairs.

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.



Upcoming Events

A sample of festivities from all over California

(Coming soon to www.CalAgTour.org: a calendar for agritourism events, where you will be able to post your own events on the site. Watch for this tool, coming soon.)

September 26 - UC Santa Cruz Farm hosts annual [Harvest Festival](#), with apple pie contest, music, hay rides, kids crafts - Santa Cruz County



September 26-27 - Mariposa Agri-Nature Trail [Weekend in the County](#) - Tour Mariposa County farms, bake bread, stomp grapes, see blacksmithing - Mariposa County

September 26-27 - Sonoma County Farm Trails [Weekend Along the Farm Trails](#) - Visit more than 40 local farms - Sonoma County

September 27 - Suisun Valley Harvest Trails [Fun Family Farm Days "A Taste of Suisun Valley"](#) - Solano County

October 3 - People's Grocery [Farm Work Party](#) - Meet in West Oakland for a volunteer work day at People's Grocery's 4-acre Sunol farm - Alameda County

October 3-4 - [Hoes Down Harvest Festival](#), Full Belly Farm, Guinda - Farm tours, magical children's area, hands-on workshops, organic food, live music, good times - Yolo County

October 10-11 - [Ardenwood Historic Farm Harvest Festival](#) - corn harvesting, magic shows, cider pressing, music and crafts in Fremont - Alameda County

October 10-11 - [Sierra Oro Farm Trail](#) Passport Weekend - A weekend of wine tasting and farm fresh food sampling in and around Butte County

October 11 - PlacerGROWN [Family Day on the Farm](#) - Music, games, tours, BBQ, wine, cider and more - Mandarin Hill Orchard, Penryn - Placer County

October 24-25 - [Hopland Fall Passport Weekend](#) - Wine tasting, live music, bocce ball, barbecue - Mendocino County

October 25 - [Taste of Capay](#) - Benefit dinner and Auction for Capay Valley Vision at Taber Ranch, Capay Valley - Yolo County

One-minute survey

Help direct the program

Please take a short moment to answer this five-question [survey](#). Tell us how the UC Small Farm Program can help develop and sustain California agritourism.

Your thoughts are much appreciated!

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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