



April 2011

California AgTour Connections

Agritourism News & Notes

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Greetings!

Hello again. I hope you're drying out and enjoying springtime. It's been a while since our last newsletter, but a busy winter for California agritourism and the [UC Small Farm Program](#).

Many farmers and ranchers made good contacts with each other and with tourism professionals, learned some new tools, and had a chance to discuss needed changes in zoning, regulations and permitting with county regulators at the recent "[Growing Agritourism](#)" workshops throughout the state. The Central Coast region workshop has been rescheduled and you are all invited. At the workshops we heard from county planners and stakeholders working diligently in their counties to ease the regulatory burden on agritourism operators, but we still have a lot to learn from other states about what can be done on a statewide level.

New regional groups are organizing collaborative marketing and events. Many of you are learning to use social media to connect with your customers. Farm stays have a new national networking and promotional site. We started a [Facebook](#) page which we hope you will "like" and use.

Our statewide online agritourism directory and calendar of events, [CalAgTour.org](#), has been getting increasing attention from visitors looking for farms and ranches to visit, and has benefited from a growing network of links and mentions on other websites, blogs and social media. Listing is all free for working farms and ranches with agritourism operations.

Thanks for opening this newsletter. Please stay in touch. We'd love to write about your farm or ranch activities in the next newsletter.

Sincerely,
Penny Leff, UC Small Farm Program agritourism coordinator

Join our Facebook page & listserv to connect Let's stay in touch

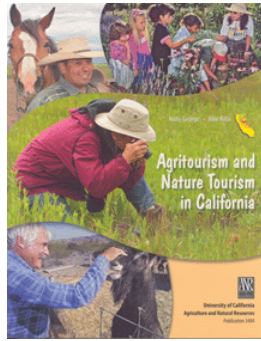


We're on [Facebook](#) as "AgTour Connections." This is your page; please feel free to use it to share your activities, events, pictures and thoughts! Don't forget to "like" the page.

Also, please join the conversation on Agtour-connect listserv, hosted by UC Davis. This is an

email discussion group for everyone involved in the business of California agritourism. [Sign up here](#) to share your thoughts, questions, news, or updates with other list members.

UC Davis Extension Online Agritourism Course First 10 week session starts now



You may be interested in knowing about an *online* course I'm teaching this spring for UC Davis Extension - [Agritourism Development: Selling the Experience, Supporting the Farm, Building the Community](#).

Developed in partnership with UC Davis Extension and the UC Small Farm Program (a UC Cooperative Extension Program), the course examines the growing demand for agritourism and the expectations of agritourists and works with students to assess local opportunities, create a plan, develop and market an agritourism enterprise, and to collaborate with others in the community for success.

More information is available on the [UC Davis Extension website](#). If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. I hope to see you *online* soon! The course will probably be offered again this fall.

New farm trails groups organizing around state Groups design logos, maps and events

Sacramento River Delta: A group of Sacramento River region farmers and ranchers along Highway 160, coordinated by pear grower Tim Neuharth of [Steamboat Acres](#) (pictured here) have organized as Sacramento River Delta-Grown Farm Trail. They are designing signs and a logo and are planning their first event for this June 26, "[Farm Trail Sampler](#)", with local chefs and artists, live music, wineries and farm tours. For more information, contact [Tim Neuharth](#) at 916-417-1706.



Merced Country Ventures: Ag, Art, Nature Tourism Group, sponsored by local non-profit Valley Land Alliance, is working with an illustrator/map designer to create a county farm trails map which will be ready for distribution by May. Farmers and ranchers will pay about \$50 to be included on the map, and advertising space will be for sale on the back side. The group is planning a kickoff event at a farm when the map is ready. For more information, contact [Jean Okuye](#), 209-394-2421

Tehama Farm Trails: Tehama County Farm Bureau, with sponsors Rolling Hills Casino and the Red Bluff Chamber of Commerce, has created a new Tehama Farm Trails map and is planning a Passport Weekend event in June this year. The map is in the second year of a three-year trial period. It highlights

downtown Red Bluff, as well as olives, olive oil producers, wineries, orchards and farm stands. A one-time buy-in to be included on the map is \$150. Farm Bureau Executive Director Kari Dodd reports that the map is very popular with visitors. It is distributed in printed form and available at www.tehamatrail.com. For more information, contact [Kari Dodd](#), 530-527-7882

Find out about [other farm trails groups](#).

Tag-team tour tip

Paul Muller and Amigo Bob show how it's done



Full Belly Farm owner Paul Muller led a walking tour of his organic farm at the [Hoes Down Harvest Festival](#) last October. A crowd of 50 eager city dwellers listened as he mentioned cover crops as part of the soil nutrition strategy.

Organic farming consultant and educator Amigo Bob Cantisano, listening with the crowd, stopped Muller to ask, "What is a cover crop?"

and "Why do you need a soil nutrition strategy?"

Muller and Cantisano use this team teaching approach because farmers often are so close to their work that they forget how little most of the rest of us know about farming basics. Having someone along on the tour to ask questions and make sure that the tour leader doesn't get too technical or assume more knowledge than the audience has can go a long way toward helping everyone understand what you're trying to convey.

"Growing Agritourism" Workshop updates Inspiring gatherings - more to come!



Thanks again to all the wonderful speakers, workshop planning teams, sponsors and participants in the recent workshops. It was great to meet so many of you this winter and to learn about your innovative enterprises and activities.

More than 300 participants gathered for the first four agritourism professional development workshops held in Merced, Rio Vista, Ukiah and Red Bluff this January and February to make useful contacts and discuss new approaches to shared challenges. Here's a great [article](#) about the Ukiah workshop and [another article](#) about the Red Bluff workshop. Participants included agritourism operators, farmers and ranchers, agricultural and tourism professionals, county planners and regulators, elected officials and community leaders. If you were not able to attend, we hope to meet you soon.

Central Coast workshop: May 18 in Salinas

The Central Coast region workshop, originally scheduled for March 3 in Salinas, has been rescheduled for May 18. [Registration](#) is open and you are invited! More information about the



workshops is available [here](#).



Many presentations posted online

The workshops, organized by the UC Small Farm Program in cooperation with UC Cooperative Extension and several local sponsors, were funded by Western SARE. Many of the presentations from these four workshops are available on the [Small Farm Program website](#).

Follow-up gatherings

We are now planning follow-up get-togethers in each of the workshop regions. All participants will be invited to meet again to update each other on collaborations, activities and plans, to hear a presentation on a requested topic, and to tour a working agritourism operation. These will be afternoon gatherings to be scheduled in May or June.

For more information, please contact [Penny](#) at 530-752-7779

"The corn maze financed the farm"

Bonnie Swank talks about Swank Farms, Hollister

[Swank Farms](#) in Hollister is a busy 300-acre farm with a farm store, a health department-certified kitchen producing salsa, and crops in the ground all year-round for sale at 16 weekly farmers markets. However, according to Bonnie Swank, it was the business plan for the 20-acre corn maze that convinced the USDA to loan Bonnie and her husband Dick Swank the money they needed to pay off looming ag production loans and to save the farm.



The corn maze, pumpkin patch, haunted house, tractor-pulled kiddie train, and other attractions don't open until late September, but the Swanks work all year to prepare. Bonnie talked with us this week about that work while she waited for the fields to dry out.

Preparing for October

The Swanks used to rotate the corn maze with the parking lot, but realized that business is better when the parking lot is always out front by the road. Right now the corn maze is planted in peas, which will be harvested before the corn gets planted in June or July, and pumpkins will be planted soon in what will later be a parking lot. Customers don't always understand the plan. When it rained the week before Halloween last year and the parking lot was a mud-patch, a customer asked Bonnie why they didn't just pave the parking lot with cement.

Swank Farms does all the corn maze work, from creating the map to cutting the maze, themselves. Bonnie went to the library the first year for a book of mazes to choose a pattern. That maze was square, but now she prefers to work in circles. She designs the maze on graph paper. When the corn is planted, there are no furrows; they plant, and then cross plant. This way the tractor wheels create a grid on the field which helps with laying out the maze just as the corn starts to grow. The first few years they hand-cut the corn with hoes, but now they use a small tractor. Actually there are two mazes, an easy kiddie maze as well as the larger "maniac maze".

New website and other promotion

A big part of Bonnie's year-round work is advertising and writing. Right now she is getting ready to launch a new website. The [old website](#) doesn't work on a phone, which is a big problem these days as many people use their smart phones to search the Internet. Last year Swank Farms started a Facebook page, but Bonnie heard from some customers that they didn't want to have to go there; they were more comfortable with the website. So, this year, the new website will not only be easily accessible on a phone, it will also have Facebook embedded on the the homepage. Anything posted on the Facebook page will also be on the website home page and people will be able to post and comment right on the website, making it all very user-friendly!

To help with promotion, Bonnie writes a story every year for a wine and travel magazine where she also buys an ad. She writes a monthly article in the free *Out and About* publication as their "farmer in the field," sharing recipes and tips for cooking what's in season on the farm, and enjoys other opportunities to write about the farm for regional publications.

A hard work month

The preparations reach a climax in late September as the workforce at Swank Farms more than doubles to handle October activities. Bonnie Swank says that it is hard work and it makes for a very long month. But she also says, "Before the corn maze, a new vehicle had not come onto the property since 1976. Now there are a small fleet of market vans, a flatbed and a new box truck. The corn maze is what financed our farming."

Innovative zoning solutions in Butte County

Unique overlay allows flexibility for agritourism clusters

In its latest general plan, Butte County is implementing a "Unique Agricultural Overlay" designation in order to protect and promote small-scale agriculture.

This designation allows agricultural support and specialty-agriculture uses either "by right" or under a discretionary permit, regardless of whether they are allowed in the underlying zoning designation. Allowed uses include wineries, roadside stands, farm-based tourism, bed-and-breakfast inns and ancillary restaurants and stores.

Some of the first to use this new designation will be small-scale producers in the East Oroville Foothills, the historic center of the Butte County citrus industry from 1900 to 1940. This area includes small-scale citrus, organic gardens, wineries and olive oil producers, many of whom are members of the [Sierra Oro Farm Trails](#) Association. Read more about the [Butte County general plan](#) or contact Butte County principal planner [Dan Breedon](#), 530-538-7629.

For more agritourism planning and regulating information and examples, see the Small Farm Program [website](#).

Butte County Economic Development Element

- ▶ "By promoting certain aspects of farming as a tourist attraction, agriculturalists educate the public about agricultural land and farming practices, while marketing a variety of retail products"



Indiana passes agritourism limited liability law Indiana Farm Bureau supports bill

Farmers in Indiana, supported by the Indiana Farm Bureau, can take advantage of a new state law that protects people engaged in agritourism ventures from some legal action. This bill, which goes into effect July 1, significantly reduces the liability for an injury or death that would occur because of the "inherent risk" of the activity.

The law is expected to reduce insurance costs and boost agritourism and requires agritourism operators to post warning signs and place warning notices in any contracts signed by their visitors.

To see the language of House Bill 1133, go to the [website](#) of the Indiana General Assembly. Click on "Current Session Bills & Resolutions," and enter "1133" in the search box. [Read more](#) about this bill.

Indiana joins 22 states that have enacted statutes addressing agritourism, which are compiled at the National Agricultural Law Center [website](#). Currently, California has no such statewide statutes, although several members of the state assembly have expressed interest in discussing the needs for such bills in California. If any of you are aware of groups working on statewide legislation to benefit agritourism in California or are working on this issue yourselves, please tell us!

Farm stays get new help Farmstay U.S. lists, promotes & supports farm stays

Farmers and ranchers offering overnight accommodations to visitors now have an exciting new resource.

Scottie Jones, who owns Leaping Lamb Farm in Alsea, Oregon with her husband, has started a website, www.farmstayus.com, promoting farm stays all across the country. The site is less than a year old and already 53 California farm stays and guest ranches are listed on the site, making California second in the nation for number of listings.



The site includes a [blog](#), some suggestions for [starting a farm stay](#), links to [news articles](#) about farm stays, as well as other general [information for visitors](#) about farm stays. The basic listing is free, and can be managed and changed directly by the listing farmer; more features are available for a small fee. Scottie hopes to develop the new site soon with more resources to help other prospective farm stay operators get started. Contact [Scottie Jones](#) at (541) 487-4966.

CalAgTour.org directory & free event listings Add your agritourism operation and public events today

The UC Small Farm Program hosts a searchable online directory of California's

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 or organizing agritourism events, we invite you to complete the [directory application](#) or the [event listing application](#) online so we can include your business and events in the directory. The listings and event postings are free. If you're already listed, please [check your listing](#) and update it if needed. You can use the [directory application](#) form for updates. We'll contact you if we have any questions.



Please take a look and tell us what else you'd like to see as part of the new CalAgTour.org. Let's fill up that [events calendar](#)!

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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