

University of California Cooperative Extension Merced County



ANNUAL REPORT 2012



University of California, United States Department of Agriculture, and Merced County Cooperating

Look at the short summaries that follow, you will notice that we do work in a wide-ranging field. Raising capable children, helping people raise food for themselves and extending the latest technology to farmers is the core of our mission. Contact our office to be notified of coming events or to subscribe to a publication. We are here for you.

Dairy

Alejandro Castillo, Farm Advisor



During 2012, I was involved in various research projects with colleagues at the UC Cooperative Extension and at UC Davis (Animal Science). All my research activities are related to the future sustainability of our dairy farms. One important outcome is the extensive description of mineral balances in 40 dairy farms in Merced County. This can be considered as a link between dairy cow nutrition and soil nutrition. The results of this project were recently accepted by the Journal of Dairy Science, the top scientific dairy journal in the world.

I am glad to have done this work because the information and methods to estimate mineral excretion will help with Nutrient Management Plans (to comply with future environmental regulations) and to improve the future sustainability of Merced County dairies. These activities are also reflected in my publications: five scientific abstracts, one peer reviewed article, and three newsletters for dairy producers.



I have participated in various educational and scientific presentations: one in Mexico, four in Merced, and five at the annual American Dairy Science Association meeting. I participated with Radio "Lobo" Merced with two radio programs reaching the Latino dairy workers with news about our Dairy Industry; and I was interviewed by two newspapers, Merced Sun-Star and ABC News.

I hosted dairy farmers and colleagues from other countries visiting our Dairy Industry, some of them are clients of local companies with businesses overseas.

Pomology

David Doll, Farm Advisor



First Walnut Research Trial Established in Merced County

A walnut trial demonstrating a new way of pruning was established in a grower's field just north of Merced. This plot will test the feasibility of a non-headed, minimally pruned walnut tree in comparison to a traditionally pruned walnut



A small group discussing research findings at a recent field meeting.

orchard. The trial will be carried out for the next 10 years and will evaluate tree structure, yield, and other horticultural aspects. This plot is part of Merced UCCE's nut crop research program, which includes 14 research trials hosted within the county in almonds, pistachios, and walnuts.

Summer Almond Field Day held in Ballico

On June 1st, nearly 175 growers attended an almond field day discussing the topics of orchard replanting and redevelopment, and summer disease, pest, and weed management. Growers provided good feedback and are looking forward to future meetings.



Master Gardener Program

David Doll, Farm Advisor



In 2012, UCCE hosted the second training of Master Gardeners in Merced County. Fourteen volunteers from throughout Merced County completed their training and joined the growing ranks of the County's certified UC Master Gardeners. The training includes sixteen four hour classes held weekly at our UCCE Classroom in collaboration with Mariposa County. The new members increased the program's membership from 35 to 50 volunteers. This past year, the UC Master Gardener program has participated in over 60 events which included farmer's markets, our free help-line, and various garden projects. In total, just over 1,550 hours of volunteer hours were recorded, while making contact with an estimated 2,300 community members.

Volunteers: 50

Community Events Attended: 60

Direct Contacts Made: 2,300

Volunteer Hours: 1,550

Trees and Vines

Maxwell Norton, Farm Advisor



Maxwell Norton organized the first ever pomegranate seminar and pomegranate field day. This is an industry that grew rapidly the last few years and these programs addressed a big demand for more information about this specialty crop. The seminar was standing room only and the field day was heavily attended, also.

Farmers and local businesses that were interested in developing visitor-related business attended a three-session intensive class on ag tourism development. Speakers from around the state shared important information about how to start or grow such a business and make it thrive.





4-H Youth Development Program
Russell Hill, 4-H Youth Development Program Advisor
Darlene McIntyre, 4-H Representative



In 2012 Merced County 4-H based its focus on Club delivery and Camp. Sixteen clubs represent 992 youth and 255 adult volunteers. Our 4-H youth are learning leadership and goal-setting skills and how to become community-minded adults through youth / adult partnerships. Youth leaders, club officers, county. Junior high and high school youth participated in a career exploration project called Pathways to Your Future. The youth were provided with skills and resources to turn their passion and interests into potential careers. They met with high school and college career counselors, colleges students and alumni and went on several college tours to learn about college life and what they need to do to succeed in college.



Several 4-H youth were involved in service-learning projects to help the community. The Ballico -Cressey 4-H Club redid the town sign going into Ballico; St. Anthony's 4-H Club sewed 100 soft, colorful pillowcases to donate to children's hospitals, and helped restore a vintage airplane at Castle Air Museum; Dos Palos 4-H Club cleaned up and did repairs at the local SPCA in Dos Palos; and Lancers 4-H Club helped put on a Christmas Lunch for local youth with cancer and their families. Los Banos Community, Merced River, Lancers and Lander 4-H Clubs and the UCCE office staff donated 240 toys plus school supplies to the Merced County Sheriff's Christmas toy drive. Our clubs and staff also donated food to the Merced Rescue Mission.



The 2012 Science and Adventure Camp focused on Solar Power where 17 high school staff, 16 Adult chaperones, and 104 campers in 4th-8th grades worked together for five days and four nights at Camp Sylvester in Pinecrest. Participants learned about solar power in agriculture, how to make hot air balloons, and cook in Dutch ovens outdoors.

We ended the year with our annual Leaders Appreciation Night at Playhouse Merced. In addition to enjoying the show, the Clover Awards for each five years of leadership are presented to the volunteers by 4-H, city, county, state, and national representatives. An outstanding award this year was the Ruby Clover award for both Frank and Helen Gallichio who have faithfully and generously served as 4-H volunteers for 50 years.

Nutrition, Family, and Consumer Science

Terri Spezzano, Nutrition Food Consumer Science Advisor
Liliana Agundis, EFNP Representative
Houa Lee, EFNP Representative



This year we focused our efforts in Merced County on "Dirt Fresh News" which is a Farm to School program encouraging children and their families to increase consumption of fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables by introducing them to the farmers and where their commodities can be purchased. "Dirt Fresh News" is the bilingual newsletter that goes home to educate families. Students take the newsletter home and introduce recipes and the new food to their families. In 2012 we increased participation from 4500 to 7000 students. New to the program this year were Merced Union High School District, Livingston Union School District, and Atwater Elementary School District. From UC CalFresh surveys we found that 91% of students are now willing to try new vegetables and fruits after participating in our nutrition programs. The teachers have stated they believe much of the change in attitude is due to the exposure they received through this program and connection to local farmers.



This year we expanded our Farm to School programs to include School Nutrition Services. I held our first annual Northern San Joaquin Farm to School Workshop. This workshop was highly successful with a participation rate of over 50 School Nutrition Directors and farmers. The focus of this workshop was to bring farmers and school nutrition directors together to develop mutually beneficial partnerships.



Our program also extended nutrition education to adults in our county through classes, events, and workshops. We presented information and hands-on experience in selecting and purchasing healthy economical foods and using them to prepare healthy meals for their families.

Vegetable Crops

Scott Stoddard, Farm Advisor



According to the latest Merced County Report on Agriculture (2011), the estimated combined value of vegetable crops in this county is almost \$300 million. Sweetpotatoes and tomatoes (both fresh market and processing) represent about 80% of this value. As a result, my research and education program has an emphasis on these two crops. Projects are designed to assist and improve production for vegetable growers by providing research-based information on such things as efficacy of pesticides, irrigation and fertilizer management, and variety development. Trials were conducted on-farm, at Merced College, and at UC research stations located in Fresno County.

Examples include:

Tomatoes: statewide processing tomato variety evaluation, bindweed management, and
Sweet potatoes: National Collaborators variety trial, irrigation trial, and field fumigation.

Like the other farm advisors in our office, extension and outreach is an important part of what I do. I worked with Master Gardeners, conducted field days, presented at various grower and professional meetings, and made numerous farm calls to assist growers and consultants with diagnostic help in tomatoes, melons, and sweetpotatoes. I made over 1000 contacts in 2012. Guest lectures were also done at Merced College and UC Merced.

In January 2012, the Sweetpotato Council of California was host for the 50th annual sweetpotato conference, which was held in Dana Point in southern California. Over 300 growers and allied industry from throughout the U.S. attended. I worked closely with the Council to develop the two-day program for this important event.



Scott Stoddard (right, in hat) and LSU Horticulture Professor Don LaBonte (left) evaluate new sweetpotato varieties in a field trial south of Livingston in October 2012.

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