

Agritourism in Placer County: Lessons & Challenges



Cindy Fake
Horticulture & Small Farms Advisor
UCCE Placer & Nevada Counties

Agritourism in Placer County: Overview

- Key characteristics
- Placer County events & regulations
- Challenges for local agritourism



Key Characteristics of Agritourism in Placer County

- Mostly small farms: <50 acres; majority <20 acres; but still commercial enterprises
- Collaboration is how we work: producers, ag agencies, grower & community organizations, etc.
- Long-term planning; minimum 5 years, we're now looking 30 years out.
- Sense of place and scale: agritourism is **not** Disneyland; experiencing a farm or ranch is the goal.



Agritourism Events in Placer County

- Placer Farm & Barn Tour
- Mountain Mandarin Festival, Auburn
- Placer Hills Winery Tours
- Auburn Wine Festival
- Mountain Mandarin Tours
- Eggplant Festival, Loomis
- Food & Farm events
- 16 certified farmers' markets
- Farm stands
- Local produce stores connected to farms
 - Newcastle Produce, Machado's, Blue Goose



Agritourism in Placer County: Placer Farm & Barn Tour

- A one-day self-guided tour of local farms and ranches
- Farming and ranching demos, tours, produce tastings, talks on agricultural practices and history
- Limited ticket sales to keep Tour small...genuine experience
- ~2,000 participants each year
- UCCE coordinates
- Collaborative effort of over 30 community groups and host producers
- <http://www.placerfarmandbarntour.com/>



*Local Farms
Local Food*



Placer Farm & Barn Tour

Sunday, October 10th, 10am - 4pm
Adults \$15, Family \$25

Tickets & Information
www.placerfarmandbarntour.com
530.887.2111

Come experience working farms & ranches!
Workshops • Demos • Food • Wine Tasting • Music

Presented By: Local Farm Hosts, High Sierra RC&D,
Placer County Department of Agriculture, Placer County Visitors Bureau,
and University of California Cooperative Extension.

Farm & Barn: Community Impacts

- Over half of participants had not visited a local farm before the Tour
- More & more repeat participants...but over half are still new to the Tour after 6 years
- Over 40% now buy local produce weekly, mostly at farmers' markets
- Over 70% stated that they are more likely to buy local produce after going on the Tour



Farm & Barn Tour: Regulatory Impacts

- Since 2007, operates with Temporary Outdoor Event (TOE) permit
- TOE not written for farms...
- Farm & Barn standards for sanitation, traffic control, emergency situations more stringent than county regs
- In 6 years, no incidents, accidents, nor complaints, but...
- Key issues each year:
 - Roads vs. Driveways
 - Access from county or private roads
 - Access for emergency vehicles
 - Environmental health: TFF permit for any food



Farm & Barn Tour: Regulatory Impacts

- Under consideration: Zoning Text Amendment (ZTA) for temporary outdoor events on farms as a result of Farm & Barn Tour
- Would streamline permit process for ag events
- Administrative review checklist
- After several years, renewal may just require simple notifications
- Issues with current proposals:
 - Number of people on farm
 - Wine tasting



Agritourism in Placer County: Mountain Mandarin Festival

- Weekend festival to mark the start of mandarin season in November
- Began in tiny town of Newcastle fifteen years ago
- Moved to Gold Country Fairgrounds when outgrew Newcastle
- 20-30,000 people at 3-day event
- Major fruit sales, but also restaurant and other local sales



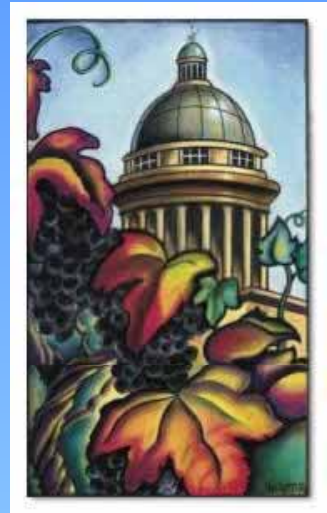
Mountain Mandarin Festival: Regulatory impacts

- Temporary Food Facility required permits for sampling
- Costs for Festival rising because of permit issues
- Held at Gold Country Fairgrounds: Budget cuts to State Fairs may impact
- Costs to grower may preclude participation for small growers
- Regulations are not scale neutral



Winery Tours & Auburn Wine Festival

- 16 very small wineries in the county (<5,000 cases)
- Most in farm zone, a few in residential/ag zones
- Tours bring 200-400 people to each winery over a weekend
- Wine festival brings 800-1000 visitors to Auburn
- Some in-town tasting rooms, but do not promote the vineyard experience and customer loyalty



Winery Ordinance

- 2008 Winery ordinance reduced restrictions. 2010 Review, updates pending with Winery Task Force input
- Previously tasting was not permitted without MUP or CUP, despite minor impacts because of very small size
- Ordinance was contentious because of one winery which was a bad neighbor
- Ordinance took 3 years to pass
- Pushed several wineries to the edge because they were unable to run tours, taste, or sell very much wine.



Ag Product Sales

- Even if visitors do not stop and stay, sales of produce can contribute significantly to economics and to the attractiveness of the county as an agritourism destination
- Placer County has:
 - 16 certified farmers' markets
 - Local produce stores connected to farms:
 - Newcastle Produce, Machado's, Blue Goose
 - On-farm sales/farm stands: any ag product grown in Placer County may be sold at a farm stand
- Recent update of CA Direct marketing regulations presents challenge to local farm stand rules



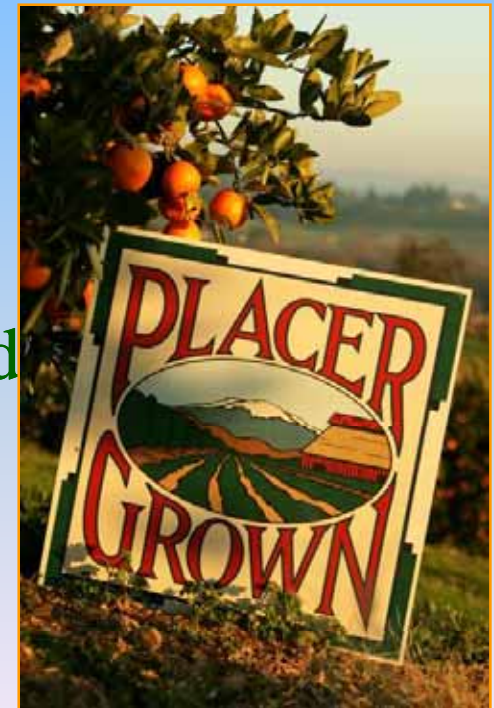
Challenges to Agritourism

- Long-term process of development and education
- NIMBY: educating entire community
- Small number of bad actors may affect entire community
- Developing and maintaining strong ag/consumer community to support agritourism efforts
- Conflict between planning documents such as ordinance and general plan language and regulators such as Environmental Health
- Regulations based on worst case scenario, not actual risk
- Food safety concerns may lead to overregulation
- Micromanagement through ordinance language



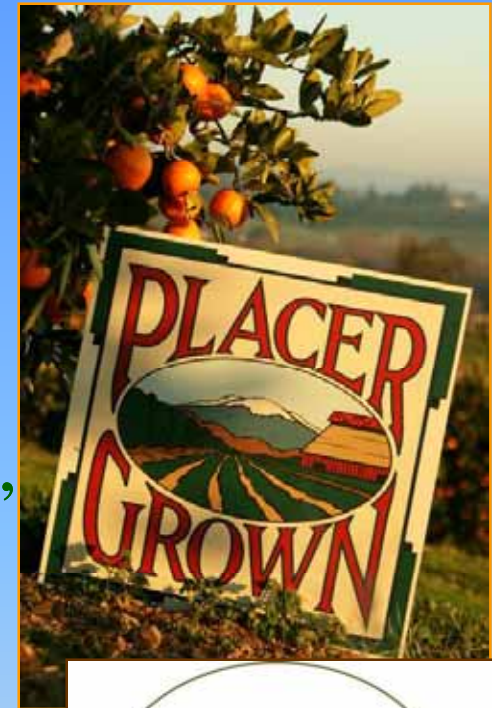
Signage

- Strict sign ordinances in county and cities in Placer County
- County ag signage program started 2008
- Producers request signage at intersections within 5 miles of farm
- Producer pays county for signs, then installed and maintained by county
- Currently all have PlacerGrown placard at top, but producer organizations also requesting their own



Suggestions

- Identify your unique place/quality/characteristic and market around that
- Work together - producers, community, & government
- Be nice to your neighbors!
- Make a commitment to agritourism
 - ordinance language and funding
 - it IS economic development
- Invest long-term in agritourism...
at least 5 years
- Develop a brand and/or image – farm, producer organization, county



Final Thoughts

- The reality is that unless farms and ranches succeed in agritourism and other diversified enterprises, they will no longer exist.
- Beautiful landscapes are not free, they must be able to support themselves economically.
- Agritourism is good for farms and ranches, small businesses in the community, and for the county/city in terms of tax revenues.



Questions?



Thank you!