

Growing Local Agritourism Networks

Curriculum Development and Long-term Results

Women in Agriculture Educators National Conference

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Agritourism is:

A business conducted by farmers or ranchers on their working agricultural, horticultural or agribusiness operations for the enjoyment and education of visitors



- Small-scale producers face significant financial and production risks which can be managed in part by careful diversification into new enterprises, including agritourism.
- However, agritourism enterprises also involve new financial, price, legal and social risks that must be understood and managed.



The Projects:

Three-session agritourism planning classes for farmers and ranchers considering or already engaged in agritourism enterprises, offered in eight different California counties over three years

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United States Department of Agriculture
National Institute of Food and Agriculture

First year classes:

Winter 2011 – 2012

Glenn & Fresno Counties

Second year classes:

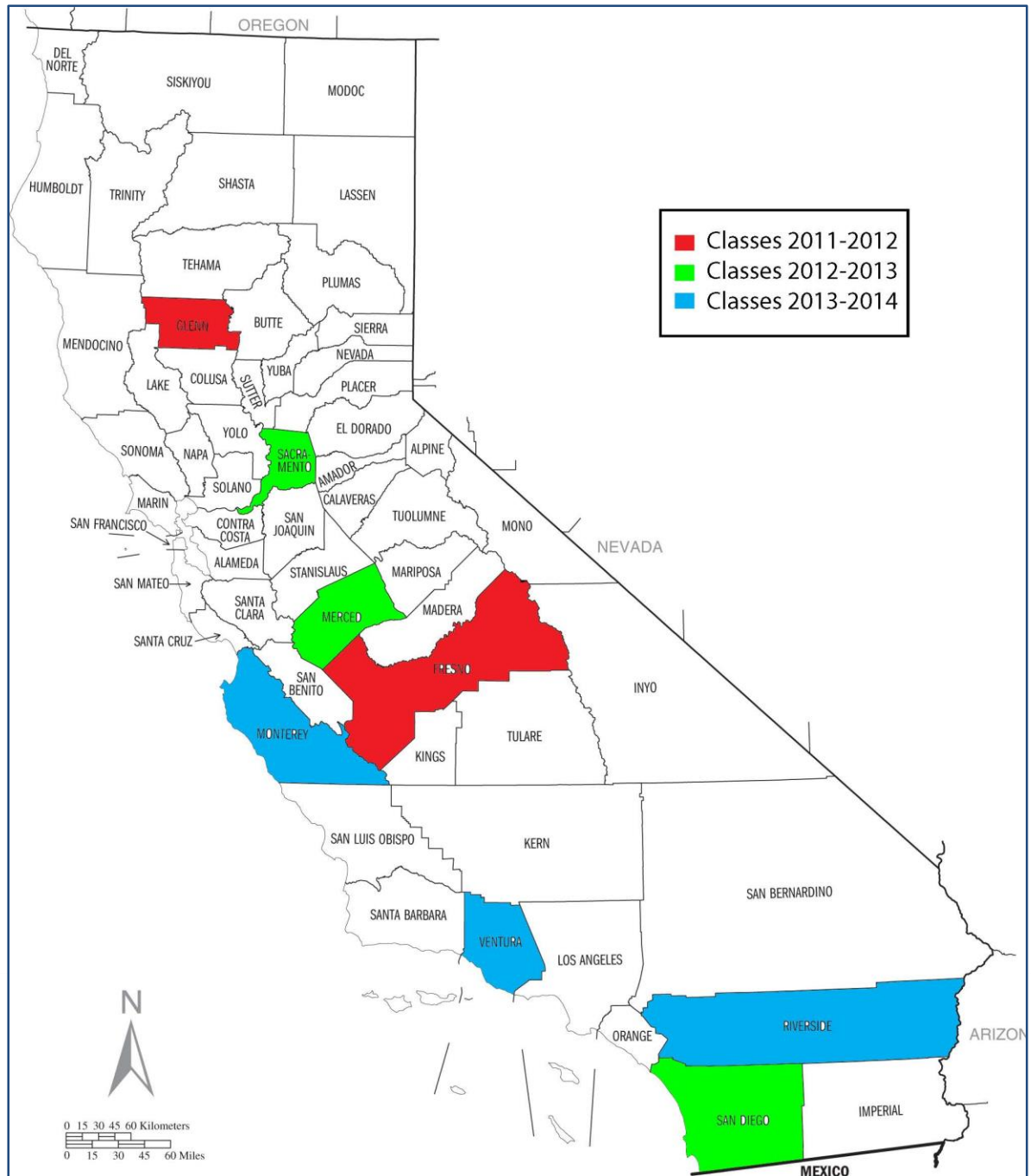
Winter 2012 – 2013

Sacramento, Merced &
San Diego Counties

Third year classes:

Winter 2013 - 2014

Monterey, Ventura &
Riverside Counties



Our project goals...

- **Understanding:** Introduce farmers and ranchers to agritourism diversity, benefits & risks
- **Evaluation:** Engage them in assessing their own farms, ranches, families, communities and resources for agritourism potential
- **Development:** Encourage and strengthen local agritourism networks among workshop participants, experienced agritourism operators and supportive professionals
- **Implementation:** Provide training and resources for successful agritourism planning and development

Our process:

Providing resources and building connections for ongoing support

1. Local planning teams of trusted collaborators:

- University of California Cooperative Extension Farm Advisors
- County Farm Bureau
- County RCD staff
- Local Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Experienced agritourism operators



Our process: Providing resources and building connections for ongoing support

2. Local experts as speakers:

- Local experienced agritourism operators
- Local tourism and marketing professionals
- Local Small Business Development Center staff
- County Planning and Environmental Health Departments
- Local insurance agents



Our process: Providing resources and building connections for ongoing support

3. Small group interaction in class



Our process: Providing resources and building connections for ongoing support

4. Field trips to local agritourism operations

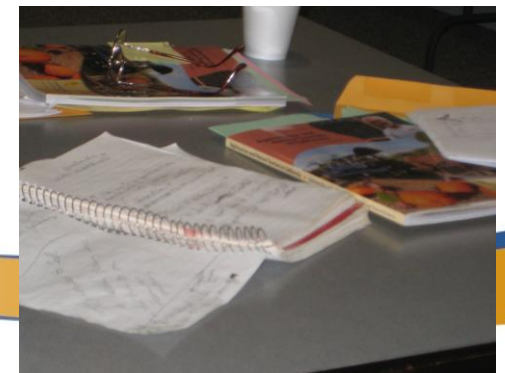


Our process:

Providing resources and building connections for ongoing support

5. Homework involving community interaction

- family involved in assessment
- visiting local agritourism operations
- consulting with planning department, insurance agent
- consulting with experienced agritourism operators
- consulting with other class participants



Measuring success & making changes:

- **Evaluation form at each class session**
 - Pre-post knowledge assessment
 - Comments & suggestions
 - First year sessions felt rushed
 - Speakers not speaking to topic
 - More depth requested on some topics
 - Landowner liability
 - Compliance with ADA regulations
 - Small group discussions not always best
 - Field trips requested



Results of curriculum changes?

Participants completing class	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Number attending first class session	72	97	59
Number attending third class session	35	69	52
Percent attending final session	49%	71%	88%

Measuring success & making changes:

Six Month Action Plan at final session

- Steps taken so far
- Intentions for next six months
 - Consultation with professionals
 - Collaboration with class participants
 - Completion of business plan
 - Enterprise implementation
 - Marketing plan implementation

Project manager contacts each after three months to discuss progress on action plan

Results of curriculum changes?

(Completed steps as reported at third session)

Participants report completing action steps	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Completed “Assessing your Resources” worksheet w/family	20 of 25 80%	23 of 43 53%	20 of 33 61%
Drafted initial parts of business plan	20 of 25 80%	25 of 43 58%	27 of 33 82%
Completed risk assessment worksheets and/or consulted with insurance agent	19 of 25 76%	21 of 43 49%	22 of 33 67%

Results from Action Plan follow-up three months later

Number of participants reporting ...	2011 – 12	2012 -13
Complete a business plan	7 of 18 39%	3 of 21 14%
Take at least 2 steps listed on business or action plan	17 of 18 94%	13 of 21 62%
Consult at least twice with experienced agritourism operator or fellow class participant	11 of 18 61%	11 of 21 52%

Stories three months later...

- I used the risk management worksheet we received in class to do an assessment of our tour operation. It was well received by the farm owners. Our staff has now been educated to look for and report problems that might impact safety. We have added a new hand-washing station and posted safety signs.
- After the class, I got busy on my website; I hired a designer & got it up by May 1. People who I met in the class told us about a wine contest - we entered and won 2 bronze prizes. We visited other tasting rooms, and decided not to open one at our winery as we are too far out and don't have a road that can handle a lot of people, but we may do small group events.

Long term results?

- Did class participants establish or expand agritourism enterprises?
 - ... or use risk management tools to decide against agritourism?
- Was network building useful to class participants?

Long term follow-up

- Conducted February & March 2014 by email & telephone
- Contacted: 43 2011 – 2012 class participants from Fresno and Glenn Counties (2 years later)
 - 17 responses (40%)
- Contacted: 30 2012 – 2013 class participants from Sacramento County (1 year later)
 - 12 responses (40%)

Long term follow-up results

	2011 – 12 class	2012 – 13 class
Are you a farmer or rancher?	14 of 17 82%	8 of 12 66%
Started or expanded agritourism activities since class ended?	7 of 14 50%	6 of 8 75%
Completed Business Plan (at least 5 pages)?	7 of 17 41%	2 of 12 17%
Worked with, visited, collaborated with or consulted with at least one person participating or presenting in class?	14 of 17 82%	10 of 12 83%

Network is continuing

- I have pretty steady contact with some of the people from the class. People call a lot and ask questions about our trail-riding operation.
- The presenter from the Convention & Visitors Bureau has been a great resource to us, bringing some tour group leaders to us and referring other tour groups.
- I visited one of the class presenters and fellow participants to see and learn about his fishing pond operation.
- I purchased 2 mares for my summer camp from someone I met in the class

Many still moving forward...

- We are developing our lavender field and shop in preparation for opening to the public later this spring
- We really enjoy having people on our farm. We have hosted tours, for fees, including 2 bus tours with more than 40 people. We also remodeled our 100 year old farm house, added a bathroom upstairs to make it ready for a farm stay. Our kids are very involved in these activities. Agritourism is definitely part of our farm plan now.
- We got our roadside stand up. It's doing OK so far. We were investigating this possibility when we took the class
- Our blueberry U-Pick is still going. We were in the process of opening when I took the class. We have been open for a few years and would like to expand.

Some decided against agritourism...

- Concerns about liability squelched our initial plans to hold weddings on the site.
- Although we are thinking of offering ranch stays, after a family conference we held off. We decided that family privacy and family time would be diminished if we had guests. The kids did not feel that they would be as comfortable coming home.
- Biosecurity has changed our plans for agritourism since we raise chickens.

Final Words

- Agritourism businesses can take time to grow, especially when farmers are busy farming
- “Action” plans are easier for many than “business” plans
- Local networks are important and durable resources

Thank you!

Questions?

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