

Project Description: Growing California Agritourism Communities

Funded by the WSARE Professional Development Program

Project Managed by UC SAREP

Needs: Small-scale agricultural producers in California, due to lack of economies of scale, usually need to add value to their production activities to maintain the economic viability of their farms and ranches. As public interest in local food and sustainable farming practices increases demand for on-farm activities, a growing number of producers are considering diversifying with agritourism operations. Entering the agritourism industry requires that producers learn new skills and develop new partnerships. Agritourism operations have a higher chance of success when they are part of a supportive community that includes tourism professionals, county regulators, agricultural educators and a network of other agritourism operators. In many communities, these professionals are not familiar with the potential for agritourism or the challenges faced by producers as they attempt to develop agritourism operations and market their offerings. This project will provide training, resources and peer support to committed agricultural educators, tourism professionals, city and county staff and agritourism association leaders as they train producers in agritourism and develop supportive agritourism communities.

Goals & Objectives: The long-term goal of this project is to develop clusters of profitable agritourism operations that sustain producers and educate visitors about sustainable agriculture, are supported by the local agricultural and tourism communities, and contribute to the economic development of their communities. Specific project objectives are:

1. Increased confidence among 50 project participants in their ability to train and support producers regarding developing and promoting profitable agritourism operations by the end of the workshops.
2. At least 10 project participants will begin organizing agritourism planning workshops for producers in their communities by the end of the project.
3. At least 30 project participants will participate in organizing agritourism development, support or promotional activities in their communities by the end of the project.

Methods and activities:

1. In 2 different California regions (San Diego and Yolo Counties) that already have robust agritourism associations and community support, we will offer a 2-day workshop to 25 invited participants at each workshop.
 - a. Interested agricultural educators, tourism professionals, agritourism organization leaders and municipal and county staff will be selected to participate through an application system. Applicants will be asked about their plans for implementing the training received, and will be selected based on the seriousness of their intentions.
 - b. Travel expenses will be paid through this project for participating agricultural educators.
 - c. Day 1 will be a tour of agritourism operations with talks on various aspects & challenges of agritourism planning and operations by the agritourism operators
 - d. Day 2 will be onsite, with presentations, panels and break-out group discussions on the topic of agritourism support & training, including discussion and evaluation of the tour.
2. Establishment and management of a private on-line group for sharing of educational materials and discussions about workshop planning and agritourism operator support issues.
3. Individual follow-up consultation by project manager with participants as they plan their agritourism workshops and support agritourism operators in their regions.

The project timeline will be from July 2017 through June 2018. UC SAREP and the project team will offer the two workshops by February 2018, and will provide individual consultation to participants through June 2018 as they organize training and support activities for producers.