

**Notes from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Agritourism Gathering
May 25, 2011 at Brookside Farm in Brentwood**

Notes compiled Penny Leff

About 20 people gathered under big tents, sheltered from the late rain at Anne Tom's Brookside Farm. After introductions, we heard from our featured speakers, Alex Greenwood and Hazel Wetherford from the City of Brentwood Agricultural Enterprise Program.

Presentation

We learned from Economic Development Director Greenwood that Brentwood has grown fast, and now includes 53,000 people. The city is trying to attract high-paying jobs. One of the selling points of Brentwood is the city's commitment to maintaining and preserving agriculture within the city limits and nearby. Big changes are coming soon to the city of Brentwood – downtown is about to change due to rerouting and new construction.

Ms. Wetherford's presentation included these main points:

- Much of Brentwood agricultural land is Class 1 soils. The cultivated land grows apples, cherries, walnuts, tomatoes, corn, and more
- The region has seen a large-scale conversion to a bed-room community over the last decade.
- The city is committed to promoting agritourism
 - City secured trademark for "Brentwood Grown"
 - City launched a website for "Brentwood Grown"
 - City funds the "Harvest Time in Brentwood" map and signs
 - Agricultural Enterprise Grant program and loan program are available to producers
 - City funds an agricultural education program
 - Brentwood hosts a Certified Farmers' Market, an annual corn program, and a jazz festival

Discussion following the presentation included the need for regional coordination to make it easier for visitors to come out and find the farm stands and U-Pick operations, to keep the roads safe and accessible for everyone, and to protect agriculture from threats including eminent domain claims of land by community agencies.

Group discussion

The group decided to stay together for general discussion, rather than breaking into smaller groups, since such a small group was present anyway. These are the notes from that discussion:

- Challenges to agritourism include getting farmers on board and dealing with tricky locations
- Tim Neuharth and the Sacramento River Delta Grown Agritourism Association plans include:
 - Education
 - Pumpkin patch, corn maze
 - Re-opening a commercial food service facility
 - Creating pear value-added products
 - USDA Value-added business grants were suggested
- Winter's Chamber of Commerce representatives talked about Winters
 - West of Davis, looking for the development of a hotel along Hwy 505

- Has a historic downtown
 - Nearby McNamara Farms (Center for Land-based Learning) offers ag education program
 - Chamber has organized one agricultural tour for later this summer
 - Challenges – lack of personnel, getting farmers interested
- Farmers are often not interested in changing; agritourism is another business to learn
 - Communities often try to preserve open space, but do not consider the needs of farmers when designing open-space preservation policies – agricultural preservation may have different needs.
 - Mary Ann Rhow, of Oakley Comfort Suites, talked about organizing a farm tour package. She encouraged farmers to think about what draws visitors to farms, to think about if they want to take on a tour bus-load of visitors. She mentioned the international tourism “PowWow” in San Francisco as an example of an opportunity to market to tour groups and tourism professionals.
 - Contra Costa County has an Ag Advisory Committee (Task Force?) which is trying to develop reasonable zoning regulations. Tom Powers is the chair of this committee.
 - The Bay Area Green Tours, based in Berkeley, will visit Brentwood in June. There was discussion in the group about the fact that hosting farmers do not receive direct shares of the tour fees paid by tour-goers to BAGT. The assumption by Bay Area Green Tours is that the farmer is only spending 2 hours for the tour and has the opportunity to sell products to the 50 or so tour-goers. Farmers pointed out that it’s not just two hours; it takes much longer than that to prepare and clean up for the tour, and there was also concern about liability. A farmer suggested that he would rather be assured a per-person fee and would give away a small item to each visitor, rather than waiting for them to buy something in addition to the price of the tour. The suggestion was raised to discuss this issue with Monique of Bay Area Green Tours.
 - Cities and counties both can put restrictions on growers. Many counties are going through their 20-year general plan process and evaluating agritourism regulations
 - Some places don’t want visitors
 - Butte County has designed a “Unique Agricultural Overlay” that can be requested by small regions of the county and which allows many agritourism activities “By Right” or with minimal permitting requirements.
 - We need to encourage restaurants to use local produce
 - We must educate students about pursuing and understanding farming
 - Agriculture and tourism don’t necessarily mesh when it comes to regulations and political issues
 - You have to be very careful about volunteers – you can’t have volunteer workers legally unless you follow regulations for workers’ comp and other labor laws

Following the discussion, many of us caravanned to visit and tour Ken Hagan’s Bacchini Fruit Tree farm stand and U-Pick operation and Darrell Hartey’s Farm Stand and farm in Knightsen. Pictures from the tour are on our facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/agtourconnections>