



Connections

November 2008

Placer Ag Tour Nov. 13

SACOG will lead the fourth tour of agricultural and open space lands on Thursday, **November 13** in Placer County.

Looking at the challenges and opportunities in our rural communities, the tour will visit local farms, orchards and fruit stands, guided by farmers, elected officials and staff.

The tour will begin at the Placer County Transportation Planning Agency, following a 9 a.m. Board of Directors meeting. The tour will end at 4 p.m. in Roseville.

A tour of Sacramento County will take place in the spring.



El Dorado County Tour Highlights

The hills of El Dorado County were the backdrop for a tour of agriculture, forestry and rural communities on **October 24**.

Over 50 elected officials, staff and community members from across the six-county region were led by El Dorado County Supervisor Rusty Dupray and Placerville Councilman Pierre Rivas.

The first stop on the tour was Apple Hill, the best-known agritourism site in the region. Started by 16 farmers in the 1960s after pear orchards suddenly started to die, Apple Hill has grown to over 50 ranches including Christmas tree growers, wineries and of course many, many apples.

The next stop, the Institute of Forest Genetics, run by the U.S. Forest Service, has been looking at the urban-rural

interface for many decades, working with resource managers and policymakers to identify solutions to real-world problems.

El Dorado County stands out from other parts of the region because it doesn't export commodities, but instead relies on bringing in consumers to buy products direct from farms, wineries and others.



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Local Markets

As part of a local markets study, SACOG and Valley Vision are interviewing farmers that are diversifying their operations via direct marketing to the public or on-site agritourism. Just south of Yuba City is Stephens' Farmhouse, an old-time produce stand best known for its homemade fruit pies. Owner Sheri Stephens estimates that about 65-70 percent of her customers are local, repeat visitors.

The farm stand primarily sells local produce grown by their family or bought from other local growers. They also purchase some specialty products from backyard gardens, such as pomegranates or quince. The Stephens' business has grown during the eight years they have owned it, but sales volume is highly cyclical with the seasons. After the holiday rush, business is slow until the warm days

of spring. In order to deal with these down times, Stephens has created other projects like using her kitchen to produce cookie dough for local fundraisers. This effort began three years ago with a few student groups, and has grown to 10-12 fundraising groups a year.

The Stephens are an example of a single family managing a diverse agricultural operation that taps into both local and international markets. While Sheri oversees the farm stand, her husband Jeff farms about 600 acres of walnuts, prunes and peaches. They also operate a walnut processing plant in Nevada, Pioneer Nut Company, which purchased and processed nearly 3,000 tons of walnuts last year from growers across California. The nuts were transported in bulk form to their final market destination—Australia—through the Port of Oakland.

El Dorado (continued)

David Girard Vineyards produces a few thousand cases of wine annually. Like most other wineries in the county, over 85 percent of wine sales are direct to consumers.

At lunch, Dale van Dam explained Folsom Lake College's El Dorado Center, one of 10 mini-campuses in the Los Rios Community College District that brings job training closer to where people live. Nate Rangel, a whitewater outfitter, talked about the popularity of outdoor recreation and the challenges of regulations on his industry.

Gold Hill Olive Oil Co., like many other producers in the county, only uses a portion of its land. The average farm in the county sits on 27 acres, but only farms 8 of those acres. Gold Hill also faces a common problem of having to haul its product out of the county for processing due to the high cost of building a facility.

Downtown Placerville was the last stop on the tour. Founded during the Gold Rush, the community continues to rely on visitors and tourism. Highway 50 is critical to the county and city of Placerville, and several projects are underway to improve safety, goods movement, and bicycle and pedestrian connections along the corridor.

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Stay current on rural-urban issues
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Regulatory Update

On **September 23**, Chip Smith, Assistant to the Secretary of the Army for Environmental, Tribal and Regulatory Affairs, visited the SACOG region to learn about important initiatives for both Blueprint and RUCS implementation.

Earlier this year, Assistant Secretary of the Army John P. Woodley, Jr. recommended funding SACOG to establish a precedent-setting study to better appreciate the watershed of the region with the end objective being permit streamlining. The funding, if secured, will greatly support the Habitat Conservation Plans currently underway or in the planning stages. SACOG has taken great care to ensure that the effort would be constructed with

trusted oversight, and with local government and key stakeholder involvement.

During his visit, Smith met with proponents of the Placer County Conservation Plan, the Placer Parkway, and the South Sacramento Habitat Conservation Plan; addressed a meeting of city and county managers; and received a briefing on the RUCS project.

A final funding decision is anticipated shortly. An initial meeting with the Army Corps of Engineers is set for **October 31** to discuss the potential scope of work and to identify key stakeholders.

Transportation Issues: Road Safety

*The first RUCS transportation working group meeting is set for **December 11**. This will be the first brief in a series on transportation issues.*

The federal surface transportation act calls for an increased emphasis on the safety and security for motorized and non-motorized users. While much focus has been given to these matters in the past, most has revolved around urban issues. Many safety and security concerns, like roadway safety, pedestrian and bicyclist safety, and flood evacuation are present in both urban and rural areas; however, rural areas present many unique challenges for addressing safety and security.



Safety concerns for local roads largely center on high-speed crashes and run-off-the-road accidents. Although drivers may often be at fault, unforgiving roadway conditions can turn a simple crash into a fatality. Rural collisions account for a disproportionate number of roadway fatalities. In California, 37 percent of all

Upcoming Workshops

Local Markets Working Group (Current Conditions)—December 2, 9 a.m.
Land Use Working Group (Innovations)—December 11, 2 p.m.
Transportation Working Group (Current Conditions)—December 11, 10 a.m.

Learn more at www.sacog.org/rucs

fatal crashes are in rural areas, a fatality rate of 16 deaths per 100,000 persons, compared to 9.3 deaths per 100,000 persons in urban areas.

One factor contributing to a higher fatality rate in rural areas is longer emergency medical response times, but other high-risk behaviors like speeding and alcohol use also contribute.

Because of the high fatality rate, short-term solutions are underway. One solution, intelligent transportation systems projects, can be implemented quickly and provide many of the same safety benefits as construction projects. In El Dorado County, warning signs are proposed for an uncontrolled, non-signalized intersection to warn motorists of cross-traffic.

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Sacramento Area Council of Governments