We produce a wide variety of horticultural crops, including fruits, vegetables, nuts, and nursery crops on small family farms in Placer and Nevada Counties. These small farms feed the growing demand for local produce, but often do not produce enough to meet that demand. More new farmers are needed, and as the farming community ages, the need for a new generation of farmers becomes more critical.

The small scale of most Placer/Nevada farms creates challenges to economic viability and the overall stability of local agriculture. Connecting consumers to local farms and ranches is critical to that economic viability. Specific issues include: recruiting and training new farmers; marketing and small farm economics; and using sustainable, environmentally sound practices to manage soil, water, and pests. The third year of drought has exacerbated the challenges faced by local farmers, and UCCE is trying to meet those challenges through education and technical assistance.

The mission of the UC Cooperative Extension Horticulture and Small Farms Program is to:

- Provide information, education, and technical assistance to help farmers develop and maintain economically viable farming enterprises.
- Provide opportunities that encourage growers to work together to address local problems and needs.
- Help connect growers with area residents and educate consumers about the importance of local agriculture and encourage them to support it by buying local produce.

Program Highlights

In 2013-14, Horticulture & Small Farms Programs provided **146 hours of training** to 630 producers.

In the last decade, we have trained **almost 4,000 farmers and ranchers** in business, marketing, and sustainable production practices.

Our Eat Local Placer and Nevada has handed out over **14,000 samples of local produce** and distributed **17,000 seasonal recipe cards**.

57% of consumer survey respondents purchased new fruits or vegetables and 40% percent purchased more local produce after attending an Eat Local event.
ISSUE
In the third year of the California drought, water supply for agriculture is getting tighter and farmers are adjusting their cropping plans. Although water deliveries may be normal for 2014, producers need to start implementing conservation measures and developing drought strategies for their operations.

WHAT WAS DONE
Serious concerns about irrigation water deliveries began to arise in January 2014 after historically low rainfall. UCCE became involved in informing and educating local producers about the drought and strategies for coping with its impacts.

UCCE helped organize and publicize three farmer-rancher drought forums. We also delivered five hands-on workshops to train growers in techniques to reduce their irrigation water use. These include soil moisture monitoring, mulching, and learning plant signs that indicate water stress. We developed information sheets on reducing water use in citrus, vegetable, winegrape, and deciduous fruit production for the workshops and our Foothill Farming website. With the help of a Risk Management Agency grant, we purchased soil moisture monitoring tools which are available for loan to farmers to learn to use.

IMPACT
- 44 growers participated in drought workshops and gained skills in estimating soil moisture and using soil monitoring tools.
- We installed soil moisture monitoring equipment at 9 farms to help farmers become more efficient in their irrigation water use. Farmers borrow equipment for 1-2 months, then decide what type of equipment they will purchase for their own use.
Increasing consumer demand for locally grown food has heightened interest in starting small farms. However, most new farmers and ranchers have little agricultural experience and need extensive information and support to start their farms. They need to understand not only the production environment but also the business management and marketing involved in creating a successful agricultural business.

WHAT WAS DONE
In 2013-14, UCCE held two intensive 20-hour Beginning Farming Academy sessions. Farm Advisors and producer-trainers provide training which includes visits to local farms and farmers’ markets. The Academy is partially funded by USDA Risk Management Agency and a CDFA Specialty Crops Block Grant; leveraging funds to increase services for farmers.

UCCE also provides on-farm production workshops as well as individual consultations and advice to aspiring farmers and ranchers. We have a mentoring program which matches beginners with experienced producers and provides mentoring for a year. Regular e-mails to 157 beginning farmers provide information, learning opportunities, and regulatory updates.

IMPACT
- 44% of the participants in the two Beginning Farming Academies in 2013-14 have started their operations and several are already selling their produce to area consumers.
- Most Academy participants state their intention to change their planning to a more business-oriented approach as a result of what they learned in the training, increasing the likelihood of success.
- Over 600 aspiring farmers and ranchers participated in workshops targeted to new farmers.
ISSUE
Managing a successful small-scale farming or ranching operation takes a wide range of skills. Producers need not just production skills, but business, marketing, and risk management skills. In the foothill area, UCCE is the primary provider of hands-on training for farmers and ranchers.

WHAT WAS DONE
In order to meet the training needs of farmers and ranchers, UCCE offers an array of workshops throughout the year. In 2013-14, we provided over 146 hours of training. This included Farm Business Planning, On-Farm Food Safety, the Direct Farm Marketing course at Sierra College, and a range of practical production workshops. On-farm workshops allow experienced farmers to share practical knowledge and skills with other farmers. Our Farmer-to-Farmer breakfasts and mentoring program also encourage sharing and build support networks among producers.

IMPACT
- On-farm workshops effectively communicate best practices to growers. Participants in these workshops adopt best management practices more quickly than other farmers, in part because of peer-to-peer sharing.
- 22 producers attended the on-farm food safety workshop in August 2013, and 68% have developed their own farm food safety plan.
- The Direct Farm Marketing class provided experience with market research, marketing strategies, and regulations to 20 current and potential farmers and ranchers.
- Transfer of skills from farmer to farmer is a critical part of building a strong agricultural community, and training the next generation of producers.
ISSUE
Our mobile population and global economy mean increasing threats from new pests moving in from other areas, and affecting local agriculture. This reality requires growers to constantly update their pest management knowledge and practices.

WHAT WAS DONE
In an average year, 40 to 50% of grower inquiries are pest-related; whether insect, disease, or vertebrate pests. Drought and unusual weather patterns have exacerbated pest issues in some crops. The Farm Advisor identifies and provides recommendations on managing a wide range of pests. UCCE also provides updates on critical invasive pests such as Asian Citrus Psyllid and Spotted-wing Drosophila flies in stone fruit. We coordinate releases of parasitic Aphytis wasps which help citrus growers manage California red scale without pesticides. Through e-mail updates, individual consultations, and regular on-farm meetings, we help growers prevent and manage new and existing pests.

IMPACT
- Growers depend on UCCE for timely information and advice on the best management options for their crops.
- Citrus growers annually release two to three million tiny parasitic wasps to control scale insects without pesticides.
- More and more growers use techniques such as trapping, natural enemy releases, and pruning to manage pests; helping to keep our environment cleaner.
ISSUE

Mandarins are an important and well-known crop in the foothills. Growers need to stay up to date on a variety of information and practices. These include pest management, food safety, drought and a changing climate, new regulations, as well as finding markets for their fruit.

WHAT WAS DONE

Mandarin grower association and field meetings help growers keep informed about effective practices, new technologies, and other issues affecting citrus production. 2013-14 field meetings addressed issues such seasonal irrigation and moisture monitoring, food safety at harvest, and pest management. We also provide an 8-hour class at Sierra College for beginning citrus growers. Mandarin variety trials have been expanded with the help of the California Citrus Nursery Society to help growers evaluate new varieties, both early and late, and their potential for production in the foothills.

IMPACT

- Citrus field meetings promote farmer-to-farmer information exchange. This has resulted in rapid adoption of best management practices such as pruning, mulching, insectary hedgerows, and natural enemy releases among area citrus growers.
- Informal field workshops also contribute to community building, which helps growers work together on marketing, pest problems, and other issues affecting their industry.
- Many new citrus growers started out in the Sierra College citrus class, and have been able to establish their orchards and manage them more effectively as a result.
ISSUE
Local farmers and ranchers depend on UCCE to provide relevant information on production, marketing, and business management. The internet provides a wealth of information, but it is often not appropriate for foothill conditions nor does it address critical issues for foothill agriculture.

WHAT WAS DONE
The Foothill Farming website, http://ucanr.org/foothillfarming, was built to fill this information gap. We continue to develop and expand the website to meet producer needs, such as the drought page we developed this year. The site is a go-to resource for farmers and ranchers in the foothills and beyond. It is a key contact point for beginning farmers and ranchers to discover the resources and training available to them in this area.

IMPACT
- The Foothill Farming website has logged a monthly average of 2,437 page views and 597 visitors over the last year.
- More than 64% of the visitors to the website are new visitors, showing that it continues to be a good outreach tool for our programs. Visitors spend an average of 3 minutes per visit on the site, which is a long time on the internet, so clearly they are finding useful information.
- More and more farmers and ranchers find their way to UCCE information and training through the website. It has become a key referral route for new clientele.
**ISSUE**

Despite a vibrant local foods movement, only 2 percent of Placer and Nevada County residents regularly purchase locally grown fruits and vegetables. Increased consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables can contribute to a healthier population and reduce diet-related diseases such as obesity and diabetes. At the same time, increased produce sales will improve the economic viability of local farms and ranches.

**WHAT WAS DONE**

UCCE received a Specialty Crop Block Grant from the California Department of Food and Agriculture to create the *Eat Local Placer and Nevada Counties* project with the dual objectives of increasing consumption of local produce to improve the health of residents and increasing sales of local produce to support local farms. The project is currently in its second year.

**IMPACT**

- Since the project started in December 2012, we have contacted more than 70,000 local consumers through tasting events, newspaper articles, online resources, cooking demonstrations, and other activities.
- The project has developed 18 recipe cards featuring seasonal local produce. More than 17,000 cards have been distributed to local consumers.
- Consumers have purchased $8,600 of produce at farmers’ markets using vouchers provided by the project.
- More than $16,000 has been injected into the local farming economy through produce purchases and vouchers.
ISSUE
Placer and Nevada County residents are increasingly aware of the benefits of consuming fresh local produce. However, low-income and senior residents face significant barriers when it comes to accessing locally grown fruits and vegetables. These include lack of transportation, lack of awareness, and the perceived higher cost.

WHAT WAS DONE
UCCE improved access and awareness of locally available produce by providing fresh fruits and vegetables, produce vouchers, tasting events, and cooking classes to low-income and senior residents. With grant funding from the California Department of Food and Agriculture, we purchased locally grown produce directly from local growers for distribution by local food banks. UCCE also participated in family-oriented events at local schools and provided cooking and nutritional classes for senior audiences.

IMPACT
- Eat Local purchased $3,200 of produce from local farmers for distribution at food banks.
- We distributed fresh, locally grown produce and recipe cards to more than 1,200 low income residents.
- We worked with over 200 senior residents to improve nutrition and increase consumption of locally grown fruits and vegetables through cooking demonstrations and tastings.
ISSUE
Tastings, samplings, and other consumer outreach efforts seem to increase awareness of the quality and nutritional value of locally grown fruits and vegetables. To improve community health and farmer profitability over the long term, however, consumer attitudes and buying habits must shift toward greater consumption of locally grown specialty crops.

WHAT WAS DONE
The Eat Local Placer and Nevada Counties project conducted point-of-purchase surveys to assess consumer attitudes towards locally grown fruits and vegetables. We also conducted e-mail surveys to track changes in consumer buying habits. We also surveyed farmers’ market vendors to assess changes in sales volume due to promotion of locally grown specialty crops.

IMPACT
- 63% of those who tasted produce at an Eat Local event purchased the fruit or vegetable featured in the recipe they sampled.
- 40% percent report purchasing more local produce since attending an Eat Local event.
- 57% purchased new fruits or vegetables after attending an event.
- 80% of those attending Eat Local events state that recipe cards make it easier to cook and eat local fruits and vegetables.