



## FOOTHILL FARM AND ORCHARD NEWS

ISSUE #3

FEBRUARY, 2002

### PLAN TO ATTEND THE WALNUT PRODUCTION MEETING ON WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20<sup>TH</sup> AT THE HISTORIC SHENANDOAH COMMUNITY CENTER IN PLYMOUTH!

Please join me and several experienced UC walnut Farm Advisors from around the state on March 20<sup>th</sup> to discuss important walnut production issues for our area. Topics discussed will include Walnut Husk Fly, Walnut Blight Control, Sunburn Control using the product Surround, and Low-Input Walnut Production. This will also be a chance for you to give me feedback on issues you feel are important. Please plan on attending this FREE event to help make it a success. See inside for a map and more details. Please call our office at 530-621-5528 if you have questions or need physical assistance.

### MARKETING IDEAS

I attended the eighth annual PlacerGROWN conference held Saturday, February 2 at the Lincoln High School and was impressed by the conference agenda and speakers. This annual event is really geared towards the small farm and emphasizes marketing strategies as well as crop production techniques. I have summarized what I learned at this year's conference in this issue. If you missed the PlacerGROWN conference, do not despair! There is still time to register for the **CalaverasGROWN conference being held March 16**. Details inside!

Look for future notices for upcoming meetings:  
FOOTHILL OLIVE PRODUCTION MEETING COMING IN APRIL!

Lynn Wunderlich  
Farm Advisor, El Dorado and Amador Counties

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### NOTES FROM THE PLACERGROWN CONFERENCE



#### TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL FARMERS' MARKET FROM CHEF AND COOKBOOK AUTHOR DEBORAH MADISON

Keynote speaker Deborah Madison gave an inspiring opening address at this year's PlacerGROWN conference held Feb. 2 in Lincoln. Deborah is the founding chef of the popular Greens restaurant in San Francisco and has authored many cookbooks. Her new book, **Local Flavors: Cooking and Eating from America's Farmers' Markets**, will be out this June. Having traveled across the country visiting Farmers' Markets in preparation for her new book, Deborah spoke

on her observations of ways that markets can improve their business and illustrated her points with an eye-appealing slide show.



### **FIRST QUALITY**

Deborah noted that the author of America's first cookbook, published in 1796, used the term "First Quality" to describe the freshest (and therefore the best) cooking ingredients available. That same term can be applied to the produce available at our Farmers' Markets today. While shoppers may have had the expectation in the past that a Farmers' Market is the place to buy the cheapest food, they are gradually learning instead that Farmers' Markets are the place to find quality food, and that supermarket prices don't really reflect the cost of growing (quality) food. But, we have to help consumers learn!

Deborah noted that a major reason why people shop at Farmers' Markets is because they want the contact with the farmer, they want to know who grew their food. She said that as a noted cook and cookbook author, she is often asked what her favorite dinner meal is, and she replies "The one where I know the farmer who's grown everything on the table." Consumers who shop the Farmers' Market have a connection to the farmer and a sense of their community. She observed that farmers who do not engage shoppers in contact and conversation, but instead stand at the back of their stand, do not attract as much business as those who do. In addition, shoppers like the quality and choice of varieties a Farmers' Market offers. Often this quality is translated into organically grown, grass-fed, or "picked when ripe" produce that only a direct market can offer.

### **SIGNS**

Deborah's slide show illustrated the importance of good signage at Farmers' Markets. I believe these tips can work for direct on-farm marketing as well. Some markets have signs that are a bit unwelcoming, such as those that state regulations such as "No Pets". But a "WELCOME!" and "THANK-YOU FOR COMING, HAVE A DANDY DAY!" can make all the difference at the entrance and exit of the market. Farmers can elaborate on the quality of their produce with funny, colorful, and attractive signs as well. "WHEN YOU CARE ENOUGH TO EAT THE VERY BEST!" can entice shoppers to "CORNSIDER THE FACTS!" and buy sweet corn grown, as Deborah observed at a Wisconsin Farmers' Market. "GROWN IN REAL DIRT" and "PICKED BY NORWEGIANS" may make a shopper smile and buy your produce (especially if you are Norwegian!). Sometimes beautiful artwork or pictures of the farm where the produce is grown can attract customers to a stand. Or a farmer can use signs to communicate obvious blemishes that do not detract from the flavor: "LUSCIOUS, UGLY PEARS!", for example.

Although signs can sometimes have too much information (no one is going to stand and read a poster long description of your produce), signs should be used to tell the price, variety, and why your produce is special. Think of all the terms winemakers use to describe their wine! Why not describe your special fruit with something like "SWEET AND REFRESHING!" My personal favorite was one sign that read "FARMS ARE ABOUT FAMILIES!" And I would add "VISIT OURS" and put that one up along Highway 50 and Highway 49.

### **BAG IT!**

Deborah also presented advice to growers on their produce presentation at the market. Opulence, that is, heaps of produce instead of just one or two pieces, helps attract shoppers to your booth. It may also be beneficial to offer shoppers the choice of already bagged and weighed produce such as net bags filled with a choice of red, white and yellow onions. Some shoppers prefer the convenience of ready

bagged produce, it is easy to pick up and the shopper knows the price. Other shoppers prefer to pick through and choose their own, so it is nice to offer both choices.

Farmers can also offer a mix of produce, pre-bagged, with a recipe idea. For example, offering all of the ingredients for salsa (tomatoes, peppers, onion, cilantro, garlic, etc.) in a net bag with a recipe may be a way to add value to your produce.



## **BLUEBERRY PRODUCTION**

I also attended two sessions on blueberry production taught by Dick Mombell of Oregon's Fall Creek Farm & Nursery. Dick began his session by describing the three basic types of blueberry plants: Billberry, a wild huckleberry type grown mostly in Europe, Lowbush, wild and grown in the Northeastern U.S., and Highbush, the preferred blueberry for production here. As the name suggests, Highbush blueberries can grow up to 7-8 feet in height and are kept within picking reach by pruning. Recent crossings of 'Rabbiteye' x 'Northern Highbush' have produced plants referred to as 'Southern Highbush' which require fewer chilling hours (less than 1000 chilling hours required/year) and can be grown south of Stockton, creating more blueberry production competition. These 'Southern Highbush' varieties can still grow in colder areas (such as the foothills) but it seems most varieties grown here are of the Northern Highbush type, such as Duke, Earliblue, Toro, Bluecrop and Olympia, to name a few.

Unlike fruit trees, blueberry plants are not propagated by grafting. Rather, nurseries such as Fall Creek propagate from pencil-sized "whip" cuttings or using tissue culture. Dick refers to his plants as "bed grown" rather than container or bare root since the very fragile roots of new plants are protected by the growing medium they are lifted out of.

### **ACIDIFICATION IS ESSENTIAL!**

It is extremely important to consider soil preparation prior to planting blueberries. The soil should be tested prior to planting to measure soil pH and soil properties. **Blueberries need an acid soil of about pH 5.0!** If your soil does not lend itself to acidification, by having a high "buffering" capacity, you should not grow blueberries. Sulfur can be added to soil to acidify, either as elemental sulfur or granular products such as Tiger Sulfur and Dispersul. The amount of sulfur you need to add will depend on your initial soil pH and soil texture. Usually about 4,000 lb of sulfur per acre is needed for heavy soils. Also, there are companies that will inject sulfuric acid to acidify soils. In addition, irrigation water should also be acidified to pH 5 with a product such as N phuric or US-9.

Mulch and organic matter are also important factors in soil conditioning for blueberry production. Since blueberries have shallow root systems, they are not efficient users of water and are susceptible to drought stress. Organic matter, such as good, weed-free compost, can improve the moisture holding capacity of the soil. Sawdust can rob a soil of Nitrogen and should not be used in the soil, rather wood chips can be used on the soil surface as a top mulch.

### **PRUNING AND POLLINATION**

As with tree fruit production, pruning is an important component of maintaining fruit quality and balancing that quality with quantity. Blueberries, like tree fruits, bear two types of buds: vegetative (leaf) buds which are narrow and flat and fruit buds which are fatter. The fruit are always borne on the terminal end of the branches and laterals. Bees are critical for successful pollination, which can be tricky since it is often too cold for bees when blueberries are in bloom. Also, the blueberry plant may be less attractive than others for the bees so hives, at a rate of 1-2/acre, should be placed in the crop

early, just before bloom. The native Bumblebee works at a much lower temperature and has a longer “tongue” than the honeybee which makes it a more effective pollinator for blueberries.



## MARKETING TO RESTAURANTS: A CHEF'S PERSPECTIVE

The last session I attended at PlacerGROWN was a very interesting discussion on how farmers can market to restaurants. Chef Mark Berger of Susanne Restaurant located in Rocklin and Chef David Mann of Piatti Roseville restaurant led the discussion of what they look for in locally grown produce. Both of these Chefs were surprisingly easy for farmers to work with: all they require is **the best quality produce a grower has to offer**. When asked what specific varieties David looks for, he replied that he prefers to ask the grower what the best quality variety he currently has available, from there it is relatively easy for him, as a Chef, to create menu items from that produce. The Chef would rather have the best tasting variety (which the farmer himself is best to judge) than ask for a specific variety that is of less quality. One grower asked the Chefs if blemished produce (such as pears with scab) bothered them. The Chefs replied that often the cosmetic appearance doesn't matter, such as using the fruit for a sorbet or sauce. Another farmer asked the Chefs if they prefer certain lettuces in salad mix, or other “ready-made” produce items. Mark replied that he prefers buying whole heads of lettuce, since he feels that most of his customers are tired of fancy salad greens and also that he believes in training the Chefs working under him the value of creating a salad from scratch, rather than just taking it ready-made from a box.

### THE VALUE OF LOCALLY GROWN

Both Chefs said they believed it was valuable for them to use local produce: they believed in supporting their community (since their community supported them) and they believed their customers appreciated seeing locally grown items highlighted on their menus. The Chefs said they would state the variety of produce, the farm from which it came, and the PlacerGROWN logo on the menu. They also spent time training their wait staff to learn how to describe special dishes created with locally grown produce. The Chefs also felt that getting locally grown, fresh produce in most cases meant “First Quality”, which is key to customer satisfaction. They believed this type of quality contributed to their success in a competitive business, and they also identified with the long-hours, (often weekends) of their farmer counterparts.



CHILLING UNITS ACCUMULATED IN CAMINO AS OF FEB.12:



BELOW 45°F: 1,293 CHILLING HOURS

BETWEEN 32-45°F: 1,147 CHILLING HOURS

“UTAH MODEL”: 1,478 CHILLING HOURS

Most fruit trees need enough chill hours for flowers and leaf buds to develop normally. If the buds don't receive enough chilling during winter to completely release dormancy, trees may develop physiological symptoms such as delayed bloom, reduced fruit set and reduced fruit quality. The number of hours needed varies with variety and species. Usually 1,000 hours is a benchmark for most species.

For more information on chilling hours, and other good growing info., check out:

<http://fruitsandnuts.ucdavis.edu/>



PLEASE JOIN US!  
**FOOTHILL WALNUT PRODUCTION MEETING**  
SPONSORED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

**WEDNESDAY MARCH 20, 8:30 A.M.- NOON**  
**AT THE HISTORIC SHENANDOAH COMMUNITY CLUB**  
LOCATED AT 21601 SHENANDOAH SCHOOL RD., OFF E16 OUT OF PLYMOUTH  
(JUST PAST THE AMADOR FLOWER FARM!)

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**8:30 A.M. WELCOME :COFFEE & DOUGHNUTS, REGISTRATION & SURVEY**

**9:00 A.M. WALNUT HUSK FLY: MONITORING AND CONTROL**  
LYNN WUNDERLICH, UCCE FARM ADVISOR, EL DORADO & AMADOR COUNTIES

**9:30 A.M. UPDATE FROM DIAMOND WALNUT GROWERS**  
TOM BURLANDO, DIAMOND WALNUT GROWERS

**9:45 A.M. SURROUND™ (KAOLINIC CLAY) FOR SUNBURN CONTROL**  
KATHY KELLEY, UCCE FARM ADVISOR, STANISLAUS COUNTY

**10:15 A.M. WALNUT BLIGHT CONTROL**  
BILL OLSON, UCCE FARM ADVISOR, BUTTE COUNTY

**10:45 A.M. LOW-INPUT WALNUT PRODUCTION**  
RACHAEL ELKINS, UCCE FARM ADVISOR, LAKE & MENDOCINO COUNTIES

CONTINUING EDUCATION CREDITS APPLIED FOR

*Call 530-621-5528  
to reserve a seat!*



*Should you need assistance,  
or, require accommodations  
for any physical challenge,  
please let us know.*



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