

EMERGING TIMES

...growing toward the future

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CALIFORNIA



Members of Class 7 gather at Ocean Mist in Castroville during their California tour.

California trip spotlights similarities, differences

Class 7 of FFVA's Emerging Leader Development Program finished its year with a tour of farming and packing operations in California's Salinas Valley. The group visited large-scale operations of crops that many had not seen before, including artichokes and mushrooms.

The annual trip broadens the perspective of class members and allows them to hear from others about pressing issues. The packed agenda included tours of Uesugi Farms, George Chiala Farms, Gizdich Ranch, Monterey Mushrooms, Driscoll's, Taylor Farms, DUDA, the Grower-Shipper Association of Central California, Ocean Mist, D'Arrigo Brothers, Tanimura & Antle and Folktale Winery.

"The California trip is the highlight of the year," said Sonia Tighe, ELDP program director. "We are very fortunate to have strong partnerships with Western Growers Association, the Grower-Shipper Association of Central California and United Fresh Produce Association, all of whom help us in setting up such a strong tour. The growers are extremely gracious with their time, providing a wealth of forthright information on companies."

A special thank you to Everglades Seasoning for supplying our speaker gifts and to TKM Bengard Farms and Class 7 member Brent Johnson of FMC for providing hospitality.

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Uesugi Farms carries on a legacy



By **Justin Pettit**
Blue Hammock Farms

Pete Aiello of Uesugi Farms kicked off our California tour by giving us a history of his operation. Pete's father took over the farms from George Uesugi, who was born to Japanese parents but grew up in California. Uesugi founded the farm in the 1950s when he returned from service in World War II. In the 1970s, Uesugi took Pete's father under his wing, eventually giving Aiello the Uesugi operation in 1979 on a handshake until it could become profitable.

Since 1979, the Aiello family has grown Uesugi Farms to what it is today, producing peppers, squash, beans, cherries and pumpkins on 6,000 acres in California (3,000 acres of peppers alone). Uesugi Farms' main crop provides peppers for salsa and sriracha. Pete showed our class the bean line, the hydro cooler and processing of peppers for salsa.

He recounted the struggles and realities of farming in California, including hurdles he had to jump to secure permits to expand their facilities. He also cited rising wages and how they will continue to affect the operation in the near future. It was a very humbling experience to see and hear the hard work, effort and passion the Aiello family has put in over the decades.



Gizdich Ranch showcases apples and an array of fresh berries



By
Philip Grigsby
Premier Ag Finance

On our first day in California, we had the unique opportunity to have lunch at Gizdich Ranch and visit with the operation's owner/manager, Vince Gizdich. The ranch was started in 1937 when Croatian immigrant Vincent John Gizdich purchased the original parcel, which at the time was a 10-acre spread dedicated mostly to apples. Today, the ranch is nearly 50 acres in total and still family-run with the help of a fourth generation.

Through the years, the ranch has evolved from several different business models all focused around apple and berry production into the bustling U-pick farm tour operation of today. At the center of the operation are several beautifully maintained buildings including the Pie Shop and the Red Barn. The Red Barn is the main building where a variety of the ranch's products are sold: fresh berries, fresh-pressed apple juice, jams and old-fashioned pie-making tools.

During our visit, we tasted fresh navel oranges, apricots and blackberries as well as our choice of their famous homemade pies.



Throughout the year the ranch has a U-pick available for strawberries, olallie-berries, boysenberries and apples. Coming from South Florida in July to the perfect middle-of-the-day 70-degree weather with zero humidity, I can say from personal experience that Gizdich Ranch is a must-see if you are ever in the area.





A closer look at garlic and carrots at George Chiala Farms

On our visit to George Chiala Farms, we saw field production of garlic and carrots and got a behind-the-scenes look at what happens in their ready-to-eat facility. Melissa Guevara gave us a tour of the facility that processes vegetables in bulk for companies like Pace, DiGiorno, Green Giant and Campbell's. The vegetables leave ready-to-eat, meaning no additional cooking is required to consume any of their products. To ensure the safety of the vegetables leaving their facility, they have a strict policy focusing on both low-risk and high-risk areas to ensure every batch is safe for consumers. The food safety aspect of this operation was significant: One policy dictates that workers must leave their personal shoes outside the high-risk rooms and wear rubber boots that never leave that area to ensure no outside contamination is introduced from the bottom of footwear.

Outside the facility, Ian Teresi gave us a look at the carrot harvest operation. I found it fascinating that they had figured out a way to use the entire carrot and leave zero waste. The carrots are used for juices, cut into baby carrots, and the excess parts are made into dog food. The operation was quite efficient; it focused not only on the quality and safety of the product but also how best to utilize every part.



By
Daniel Rifa
U.S. Sugar
Corporation

Class 7 watches innovation in automated lettuce harvesting

ELDP Class 7 had the pleasure of visiting with Martin Ramirez with Automated Harvesting Inc. to see the company's automated lettuce harvester in action. First, the water knives cut the lettuce at the soil surface. The harvester washes it with water and moves it on a conveyor, where it is then placed in crates and sent to the cooler. The machine's wash water goes through reverse osmosis, which ensures it is of the highest quality possible.



By
Brent Johnson
FMC
Corporation

Ramirez noted that two years ago all lettuce was hand-harvested, but today the automated harvester is used on 100 percent of the crop. Lettuce is not the only crop of focus for the company; it also machine-harvests five other crops. That number will continue to grow as mechanization continues to evolve. Automation helps growers deal with labor shortages by allowing them to harvest with a crew of 12 to 14 workers versus 24 to 36 workers. Having less human contact with the product also reduces the opportunity for contamination and improves worker safety by requiring less bending and handling of sharp harvesting knives. Ramirez noted that hand harvest requires twice as many people to pick the same amount of lettuce per day.

Increased waste was an initial concern with mechanization, but Ramirez said typical waste from hand harvesting is 2 percent to 2.5 percent, and with the automated harvester it is around 3 percent. It was truly an amazing experience to witness this machine in action. As labor issues continue to plague growers, innovation such as this will be imperative to ensure the future of this industry.





A close look into the step-by-step of growing mushrooms



By **Catherine Cellon**
Duda Farm Fresh Foods

Driving up the hill to Monterey Mushrooms, we were all excited to see the much-anticipated mushroom facility. We met Maritza Acevedo, who works in Quality Assurance and whose wealth of mushroom knowledge made her an excellent tour guide.

Acevedo described the three growing phases of a mushroom: composting, pasteurization and fruiting. The composting phase starts by gathering straw from horse stable bedding or unused straw and adding urea, protein and water. One aspect the company focuses on is recycling, so all the water that leaches from the straw structures is collected and put back into the compost. This cycle takes about 21 days to complete.

The compost is then put in beds and placed in a room that is 160 to 200 degrees for two days to kill pathogens like E.coli and listeria. The compost is flipped and the mushroom spores are added to the mix.

One fun fact we learned was that darkness doesn't cause a mushroom to fruit; the lack of oxygen does. Because of this, oxygen is cut off from the room for two days to allow the spores to fruit. The mushrooms are harvested for four to five days and then the oxygen is cut off again. After 15 days of this cycle, the compost is put back into a room for eight hours at 180 degrees to further kill any bacteria. Afterward, Salinas farmers are given free access to the compost to use in their fields.





Grower-Shipper Association tackles issues of top concern for growers



By **Adam Roe**
Wm. G. Roe and Sons

Jim Bogart, president of the Grower-Shipper Association of Central California, leads an organization that serves the largest growers and shippers in the Salinas Valley: Taylor Farms, Monterey Mushrooms, Tanimura & Antle and D'Arrigo Brothers, to name a few. With a background as a labor attorney, one of his many roles is assisting in contract negotiations between some of Salinas' largest farms and labor groups.

A graduate of the University of Southern California, Bogart was called in to help represent growers and shippers in collective bargaining agreements. That role has evolved to encompass not just labor but all issues facing Central California grower-shippers. Bogart fights hard as the representative voice of the organization to address issues deemed important by membership.

An annual issues survey shows the association which issues are of top priority for the members. This helps the organization narrow its focus and



resources from year to year. This year at the top of the list are several labor issues, a major concern of all farmers in California. Luckily, this is Bogart's area of expertise and he can use his knowledge and expertise to help navigate the rough waters.

Duda works hard to find the perfect celery varieties for consumers



At the Duda Research Center, Michael Safina gave the ELDP Class the research tour, which was informative and impressive. Duda has 40 celery varieties and the largest celery-breeding program, with 33 patented cultivars.

Safina said Duda produces 35 percent of the celery in the United States. During our tour, we saw every aspect of the process. That brought into perspective the amount of work and dedication Duda puts into finding the perfect celery varieties for consumers. Duda has five breeders on staff who replace the commercial seed varieties every three to four years — a huge undertaking by dedicated staff who have great attention to detail. Safina's knowledge was extensive and made a big impression.

We also toured Duda's field operations with Martin Jefferson, who took us to a celery field where we got the opportunity to see the celery harvest in action in Salinas. A sixth-generation Salinas farmer, Jefferson said that agriculture is an \$8 billion industry there.



By **Justin Pettit**
Blue Hammock Farms

Driscoll's innovations help tackle labor challenges



By **Maria Cavazos**
R.C. Hatton

Our Driscoll's tour took off with one of the company's on-site agronomists, Jean Pierre. We toured their applied research blocks, where we learned about all the benefits of substrate for their berries. With water usage significantly less, it is mind-blowing how a plant can be irrigated up to 20 times a day and the plants use 80 percent of that. Mobility is another benefit because it helps growers control chill hours using the same soil year after year. That reduces fumigant usage, water recirculation (which is big in this state) and pest pressure by using hoops. Even with all those pros, one of the most significant benefits is labor, as this can be up to 70 percent of the cost of inputs. This method allows the grower to be able to stagger the harvest, reduce the size of the crew and offer longer employment. What Driscoll's and its growers are doing is a very innovative method that is a perfect training ground for the grower and the agronomist to find out what works for that individual grower.

The second part of the tour was led by Parker Weiss, applied research manager. He took us through some of the latest innovations, such as tabletop strawberries, which Driscoll's is working on to deal with current challenges. These waist-high tables can facilitate labor by making the job more attractive to a harvester and extending the years they can work at the job. Weiss explained the savings on water and nutrients from the previous year can be as high as 40 percent, which is phenomenal for this region. However, there is still a lot of work to be done as everything must be reinvented — from variety breeding to mechanical harvesting.



Taylor Farms is a business on the move

Our tour of Taylor Farms began with lunch at Portobello's Restaurant in a beautiful courtyard just downstairs from Taylor Farms' corporate office. Leonard Batti, vice president, joined us. The courtyard, located in downtown Salinas, has a historical feel from its New Orleans-style architecture.



By
Brent Johnson
FMC
Corporation

After lunch, Batti shared with us the history of the company. Founder Bruce Taylor followed in the footsteps of his grandfather, who was known as the pioneer of iceberg lettuce in the 1930s. Taylor launched the company Fresh Express in the 1980s, and it was bought out in 1995. Taylor and other investors purchased South Bay Growers in Belle Glade, and that was the start of Taylor Farms.

Today, Taylor Farms consists of 14 different operating plants in the United States and Mexico with nearly 20,000 employees. The operation is immensely impressive — especially its Salinas facility, which packs up its entire operation each year to follow the lettuce growing season from California to Yuma, AZ. It takes 120 trucks to move the plant nearly 600 miles at a cost of more than \$450,000. Perhaps even more impressive is that after arriving in Yuma, the plant is up and running in less than 72 hours.

Batti said Taylor Farms has experienced double-digit growth in each of its 23 years of business. In any business this would be quite impressive, but in the agricultural industry, this to me is incredible. After spending time with Batti at Taylor Farms, the company's success comes as no surprise.



Millions of pounds of veggies pass through Taylor Farms' plant

Taylor Farms' food service facility processes 2.5 million to 3 million pounds of vegetables per day. After the lettuce arrives, it is cut, mixed, washed, dried, and then packaged into a specifically designed bag for each product to maximize its shelf life.



By
Daniel Rifa
U.S. Sugar
Corporation

Quality and food safety are Taylor Farms' top priorities. To maintain the facility, it is shut down nightly for an 80-person sanitation crew to break down and clean equipment. The facility already has some automation. Plans are to continue improving efficiencies through automation.

The first thing that comes to mind regarding our visit to the food service facility is the massive amount of work and talent that goes into moving the entire facility from Salinas to Yuma, AZ, and then back to Salinas every year. Marcus Shebl, vice president of operations, relayed the magnitude of work and effort that goes into making this move twice a year. You can't help but be in awe at the herculean effort such a daunting task would require.

To top it off, Taylor Farms has an impressive 95 percent retention rate of its domestic workers in the plant. Taylor Farms really does an amazing job at this facility and it shows both in its quality of product and the satisfaction of its employees.



From field to loading dock, artichoke giant Ocean Mist impresses

Ocean Mist farms is the largest artichoke grower in the United States, producing in three different locations year-round. One of our favorite parts of the tour was Glen Alameda taking us to one



By
Myles Basore
TKM Bengard

of the artichoke fields where crews were harvesting and packing. Using a small blade, workers started from one end of the field throwing the artichokes into their backpacks.

Once crew members reach the end of the row with backpacks weighing 70 pounds, the artichokes are ready to be loaded on a trailer and taken to the packing machine. Alameda said that having farms that are “in the backyard of our cooler” ensures that they meet the four-hour cut-to-cool time limit required.

Mark Reasons gave our class a first-class tour of the state-of-the-art cooler. First, Reasons explained the information that was on every package throughout the 100,000-plus-square-foot cooler. This showed the customer if any issues come up they can track the product’s history to the time of harvest, location in the field and the person who harvested and packed the product. Each person had his own machine (for example, forklifts) to operate. “They take pride in what is theirs,” Reason said.

This tour confirmed our knowledge of California playing a huge part in U.S. food production.



Folktale Winery produces craft wines in a beautiful setting

The beautiful Folktale Winery located in Carmel lived up to its name, a unique and spectacular property that left us breathless. Folktale Winery is a relatively small winery focusing on producing small-batch craft wines and serving as a venue for special events. The winery sits on 15 acres, five of which served as production land for their organic wine grapes. Folktale opens its doors for the public to see everything from the barrel storage room, which can house more than 2,000 barrels of wine, to the fermenting vats used in the wine-making process. This was a great look into a truly unique small-batch winery led by a team of fun-loving people with a passion for wine.



By
Adam Roe
Wm. G. Roe
and Sons



D'Arrigo Brothers brings a long, rich history to your family's table



By **Shane Rogers**
J&J Family of Farms

In 1907, Andrea D'Arrigo left Sicily for New York. He made his way to relatives in Boston and began working in the produce industry. His younger brother Stefano joined him in 1911. Fast

forward to today and D'Arrigo Brothers manages robust and innovative farming operations in several key California areas and Mexico. You can find their well-known Andy Boy fresh vegetables in grocery stores across North America.

Claudia Villalobos, director of marketing and culinary, elaborated on how Stefano made his way to San Jose and started growing one of D'Arrigo's key crops, broccoli. "Their father sent them broccoli seed which they planted here, and they were one of the first to ship broccoli transcontinentally."

That first railcar that Stefano sent to his brother in Boston was the beginning of their success. However, others were quick to follow in their footsteps. They knew they had to do something unique to set themselves apart from the competition. So they built a brand – Andy Boy.

Stefano's youngest son Andrea, nicknamed Andy, was 3 at the time and



became the name and the face of the D'Arrigo brand – the first branded fresh vegetables in the United States.

Today D'Arrigo remains an industry leader, farming more than 30,000 acres of fresh vegetables packed under the Andy Boy brand. Yet they are still a family company. "It's all family run," Villalobos said. "We have fourth- and fifth-generation working here, so it's really exciting."



Tanimura & Antle's Plant Tape is a most impressive innovation

The final stop for our California production tour was at Tanimura & Antle's headquarters in the Spreckels area near Salinas. We learned about the history of this large leaf farm (or "ranch," as they call farms in California), which grows 10,000 acres of artisan head lettuce, romaine, cabbage and other vegetables. We also learned about their internal automated transplanting process. The transplant operation has become an entirely new business called Plant Tape. Tanimura & Antle also has a lettuce seed company called 3 Star Lettuce, which grows conventional lettuce seed.



By
**Frankie
Montalvo
Glades**
Formulating
Corp.

Helena Beckett, senior director of retail, VMI, and delivered sales, was our host. She gave us a history of the company, which in 35 years has grown to become one of the largest in the valley.

The Plant Tape operation was an amazing sight to see. John Louie travels around the country showing growers this new technology. Plant Tape is a dramatic advancement in the realm of transplanting. This technology grows transplants on trays, but in an innovative way on long pieces of tape. This tape, made of a biodegradable material, allows for automated transplanting using proprietary technology.

California's labor issues are well-known, with a nearly 60 percent increase in labor costs anticipated in the next five years because of minimum wage hikes and the repeal of agricultural overtime exemptions. Plant Tape helps solve this issue for Tanimura & Antle and other growers.



Having transplants on tape means the machine can cut and transplant with the simple insertion of each tray's tape into the loader. Another efficiency this technology offers is a transplant count of over 800 transplants per tray, nearly tripling the traditional tray size offered by many transplant companies.

Our class was impressed with much of the automation we saw being trialed in California, but Plant Tape may have been the most impressive. With the labor issues we face, growers in our class asked Louie for more details about their technology.

We returned to the Tanimura & Antle headquarters for lunch and were fortunate enough to see trials by both 3 Star Lettuce and Plant Tape. Our hosts were excellent; we are excited to see what their organization and others can bring to agriculture as we all face the same labor issues.





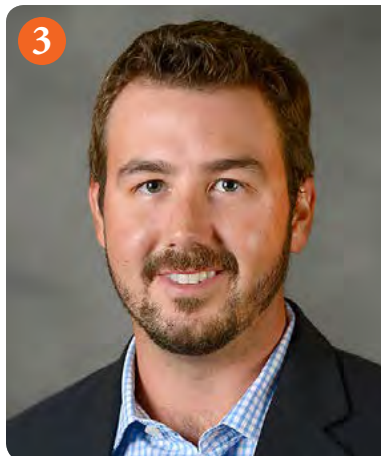
ELDP News

1 Jennifer Lytch (Class 1) started a new job at Tessenderlo Kerley Inc. as a crop vitality specialist covering Florida and Georgia. She and her husband, Adam, are expecting another girl in late September.



2 Clayton Norman (Class 3) and his wife, Candace, are expecting their second child, another boy, in January 2019.

3 Derek Orsenigo (Class 2) and **Frankie Montalvo (Class 7)** were featured on the American Sugar Alliance's Faces of Sugar Policy campaign, designed to illustrate the importance of the sugar policy to local economies and growers.



4 Zach Sweat (Class 6) and his wife, Alli, welcomed Charlotte Lee Sweat to the world on May 11. She weighed 6 pounds, 15 ounces and was 19 inches long.

5 Matt Griffin (Class 4) is now working with United Genetics Seed Company as the East Coast Sales & Product Development Manager.

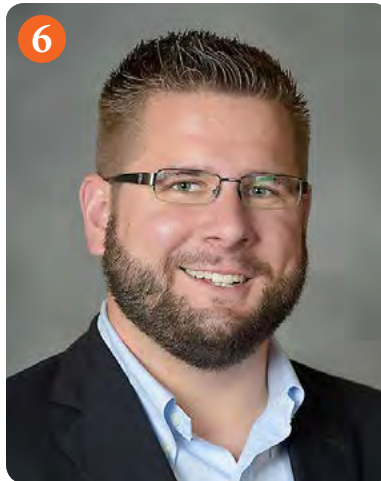


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6 John Beuttenmuller (Class 4), executive director of Florida Foundation Seed Producers, was recently appointed to the USDA's Plant Variety Protection Board.



7 Amber Maloney (Class 2) of Wish Farms and her husband, Matt, welcomed Declan Floyd Maloney on May 31. He weighed 8 pounds, 4 ounces and was 21.5 inches long.



8 Meghan Pasken (Class 4) and her husband, Nick, had their second child, Everett Andrew, on May 14. He weighed in at 8 pounds, 9 ounces. Big sister Annabelle is thrilled to have a little brother.

9 Ian Bessell (Class 2) (below left) was honored with the 2018 Laboratorian of the Year award by the Florida Association for Food Protection at its annual educational conference.

