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Session 5: California*

# EMERGING TIMES

*... growing toward the future*

## **Class relishes opportunity to learn about California's agriculture**



The class at Tamagni & Sons, Inc. From left to right: Cleo Killian, Sonia Tighe, Heather Banky, Elizabeth Malek, Andy Madolora, Rachel Walters, Justin Roberson, Adam Trott, Jennifer Hodges, Andy Ballard, Rob Atchley, April Roe Porter, Lisa Lochridge.

**Thanks to the Farm Credit National Contributions program and support from the United Fresh Foundation, the FFVA Emerging Leader Development Program received a grant that helped defray the costs of the July class trip to California.**





## California: Another world of ag



by Adam Trott  
Rabo AgriFinance

With the help of Farm Credit, the United Fresh Foundation, the United Fresh Produce Association and all of the companies that gave us tours, the ELDP class had an exemplary trip to California.

The San Jose climate and landscape are starkly different from Florida. The July temperature was in the low 70s, and the fertile Salinas Valley lies between two mountain ranges known as Gabilan and Santa Lucia. The Salinas River is one of only a few rivers that flow north; it empties into Monterey Bay. The unique geography and cold Pacific currents create micro-climates that change every few miles as one travels inland. For this reason there is a plethora of fruit and vegetable varieties grown in the valley during the spring, summer and fall. Then almost all of the large vegetable growers and packers move to the desert from November through April to take advantage of the warm, rainy winters. This entails relocating everything from packing lines to refrigerators and farming equipment using trucks - an incredible feat to be accomplished twice a year.

While the valley itself was incredible, the agricultural operations were like nothing I had ever seen. There was activity on just about every field across the valley floor. From ground preparation, to planting, to irrigation and harvesting, this was the most active agricultural area I have seen.

My favorite part of the trip was the farm tours, which were led by executive management, company presidents, CEOs and board members of a variety of unique operations. One of those locations was Paraiso Vineyards, which produces 16 blocks of wine grapes for a number of ultra-premium wine producers and for their own Paraiso Vineyards label.

Founder Richard Smith and his son-in-

law, winemaker David Fleming, invited the class to their headquarters at the foot of the Santa Lucia Mountains, with a spectacular view of the Salinas Valley and Gabilan Mountains in the distance. Instead of focusing on growing and processing techniques, our conversation focused on the wines we were tasting and the wine industry. An engaging conversation took place about the screw caps Paraiso uses for its label. Smith and Fleming explained the negative effects corking can have on wines. We also discussed the company's difficult decision to switch to a screw cap because of the nostalgia over an old-fashioned wine cork. It was apparent that these gentlemen had a strong passion for farming and wine, which has greatly contributed to their success.

## Have you had an artichoke lately?



by Andy Ballard  
Hundley Farms

If you have eaten a fresh artichoke lately, I know where it most likely came from: Ocean Mist Farms in Castroville, Calif., the "Artichoke Capital of the World."

One of the first stops on our California trip was at Ocean Mist. The tour was directed by Kori Tuggle, director of marketing and business development. We spent time in the field with Dale Huss, vice president of artichoke production at Ocean Mist. Huss discussed artichoke production and cooking preparation. His description on how to cook them would make your mouth water, whether you're an artichoke lover or not.

Artichokes are grown in Oxnard, Coachella and Castroville. With their 70-degree temperatures and low humidity, these regions are conducive to artichoke production. There are two types of plants -- perennials and annuals, Huss explained. Perennials can last up to 10 years, but the annuals only produce artichokes for one year. The more expensive perennials can be harvested three times a year,

and the annuals fill in the gaps. This enables Ocean Mist to provide artichokes year-round.

Ocean Mist's biggest issues are water-related, Huss said. State and county regulations require that discharge water be comparable to drinking water. Ocean Mist uses recycled water for irrigation. Even though the water is safe, there still are many opponents. The farm regularly tests the water to ensure that all safety requirements are being met and Ocean Mist's food and safety standards are upheld.

With a market share of 75 to 99 percent of the artichoke business, Ocean Mist has proven it is in it for the long haul, and the excellent farm managing team shows it.

The class also toured the Ocean Mist distribution facility, led by plant manager Mark Reasons. This huge facility loads 250 to 300 trucks per day. All of Ocean Mist's premium vegetables are distributed here. The plant maintains a four-hour picked-to-cooler policy to ensure the freshest quality to the consumer. Most products received there will only be there for about 24 hours. If the product exceeds the required temperature, it is re-cooled.

Ocean Mist's number one goal is to provide the best quality for every consumer buying its vegetables. The company provides a website to respond to each problem. With excellent traceability, it can narrow down what happened and confirm that it won't happen again.





## People power ensures progress



by April Roe Porter  
Wm. G. Roe & Sons

Our leadership class was privileged to meet Jeff Oberman, vice president of membership for United Fresh Produce Association. It was a wonderful opportunity for us to learn more about the organization and its mission. United Fresh brings together individuals and companies in the produce industry who have similar needs and interests. Its goals are analogous to FFVA but on a national and global scale.

The power of a unified industry is valuable for interacting with Congress, government agencies such as the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, and special-interest groups pursuing agendas related to issues such as labor and water quality. United Fresh is the only large produce association to be based in Washington, D.C. The association coordinates its Washington Public Policy Conference each October, giving produce industry members the chance to come together and meet with lawmakers and interact with the administration.

United Fresh also has a leadership program that has graduated more than 15 classes and 160 members. Many of the company representatives we met during our trip participated in the program earlier in their careers. They shared memories from the program and how it propelled them into other rewarding roles and involvement in the industry. They encouraged us to keep in touch with our classmates and treasure the relationships we have formed during our program.

Our visit with Oberman and the exposure to United was special because the United Fresh Produce Foundation and Farm Credit National made significant contributions to offset the cost of our California trip. We are grateful that these organizations invested in our knowledge base and our future as leaders in the agriculture industry.

*“Being resourceful is one of the most important ways to maintain a business. Sustainability is no longer just a ‘green’ concept; it’s a viable part of maintaining profitability.”*

*- Justin Roberson*

## Onions turning green



by Justin Roberson  
Lipman Produce

While on our tour of the western growing and packing operations, we had the unique opportunity to spend time at Rio Farms (in partnership with Gill’s Onions). We toured the transplants, composting and lettuce harvesting. Gill’s Onions is an industry leader in pioneering sustainable, resourceful agriculture practices.

Although most of our class members are involved in farming at some level, many had not seen a transplant operation. Understanding how trays are seeded and cultivated within a controlled micro environment was fascinating. Transplants are grown at Rio Farms for internal and external customers. From onions to celery, multiple crops and varieties are grown each year.

Perhaps the most unique process was the composting. Throughout the year, Gill’s Onions salvages all organic waste and foliage. The organic matter is held and composted for the next season’s production. Each year, thousands of acres are “dusted” with this nutrient-rich compost fertilizer. The process maintains the integrity of the soil and enhances crop production. Composting is just one of the many sustainability initiatives that Gill’s Onions has pursued over the years, including their anaerobic digester (converting culls to energy) and vanadium flow battery.

We ended our Rio Farms tour with an education on leaf lettuce harvesting – specifically for a spring mix salad blend. Assorted rows of green and red leaf lettuce are mechanically harvested each day and are taken to a cooling facility, where they are mixed and sent to a processor. The lettuce is harvested at night. Each planting is normally cut two to three times in a season.

It’s exciting to see companies that are addressing their issues from a holistic standpoint. Being resourceful is one of the most important ways to maintain a business. Sustainability is no longer just a “green” concept; it’s a viable part of maintaining profitability. It was refreshing to see how Gill’s Onions and Rio Farms were doing just that.



Dale Huss, vice president of artichoke production for Ocean Mist Farms, shows the inside of a fresh artichoke.



## Fresh from the field



by Heather Banky  
U.S. Sugar Corporation

Sometimes the lessons you take away from a tour or the things that you are reminded of while on it have little or nothing to do with the day-to-day operation itself. I had a few of these moments on our California tour, and a couple at the California Giant Berry Farms operation really stuck out.

Our visit to California Giant Berry began in a strawberry field that reminded me of the ones that I visited as a child. The only difference was that these fields seemed to roll on forever, and the strawberries seemed to be the size of baseballs. We discussed the growing process and reviewed the field-packing process, which is actually quite efficient. However, the real treat was that we were allowed to sample the products. Those who left without red hands and stains on their shirt deserve a medal.

Consumers typically only see products at the grocery store and never have the good fortune of seeing them grown and packed. Our tour drove home the fact that these farms grow quality, safe products (the same can be said for the operations we toured in Florida). We all felt quite comfortable sampling -- or in my case gorging on -- the product right from the field.

At the packing facility, we got a demonstration of the quality-control check of field-packed cartons. We walked through the process as berries come in from the field and move to their final destination, including how product is tracked. The "wow" factor was a giant shrink-wrap system that pulls out air and seals in freshness of the entire pallet. Giant clearly leads in innovation and attention to the details that are important to their customers.

A last significant observation: Anthony Gallino, vice president of sales, had intended to become a football coach and teacher. But once he was exposed to the dynamic agriculture business, he was hooked. Consequently, he has become a leader in his industry. He participated in the United Fresh leadership program. He also oversees the Giant Berry-sponsored cycling team, allowing him to fulfill his original dream of being involved with an athletic team. The lesson? For those who believe that a job in the agriculture industry may be beneath you, the opportunities and the rewards are endless.

## My salad will taste better



by Rob Atchley  
A. Duda & Sons

What's not to love about California? The weather is beautiful. The crops grow in fields with excellent uniformity, comparatively low pest pressure, and mountain range or waterfront views. Sounds like paradise.

Now throw in water quantity issues, the ever-present labor shortage, moving your entire packing operation to Yuma, Ariz., for the winter in a matter of days, and a public that thinks the drainage water from your fields should be fit for human consumption. All this on top of the reality that although your packing plant operates under sanitary standards that would make most surgeons proud, you are always one minute away from a phone call over a food safety issue.

These situations were the backdrop for a wonderful couple of days for our class in the Salinas Valley. We toured many operations and spent time with some of the most open and talented operators that I have had the pleasure of meeting. Visits to places such as Mann Packing allowed us to see proprietary machinery and processes that the general

public, and competitors, will never see. While visiting with Mann, we also got a taste of their new Better Burger lettuce. It has great fresh taste as well as a sturdy enough structure to stand up to those pesky condiments.

We learned about microclimates and how they allow the crop diversity and long growing seasons that California is famous for. We also learned from the John Tamagni & Sons operation that the wonderful lack of temperature variation offers challenges to crops such as blueberries. Several operations fascinated the group with the stories of the logistical challenges of moving packing operations almost overnight to new locations with the clock ticking to prevent supply chain interruption. And of course, a highlight was eating fresh produce straight from the field. Who can forget that?

Our California production tour was wonderful. The next time I pick up a bagged salad from California, I will be able to put faces with my food much the way I can do at home. My salad will taste all the better when I think of the field workers carefully handling individual leaves, the packing house workers monitoring production and food safety, the farmer tirelessly lobbying for common sense from a public that believes the produce fairy makes veggies magically appear on the store shelf, and the truck driver hauling machinery and product across the desert through the night. Chew slowly and savor it like a fine wine. Farmers everywhere deserve it.



Anthony Gallino, vice president of sales for California Giant Berry Farms, speaks to the class in one of their many strawberry fields. Class members were able to sample some berries right from the plants.





## The D'Arrigo way of life



by Heather Banky  
U.S. Sugar Corporation

On our last day of crisscrossing the Salinas Valley, we toured the facility of D'Arrigo Brothers of California. With our first step into the mission-style office building, we were welcomed by both style and energy. The lobby featured a ceiling that seemed miles away, marble and iron tables, and a beautifully framed history of the family flanking each side of the room. Add to that the bustle of activity of smiling employees down the hallway and there was no doubt the facility was alive.

The lobby served as the backdrop of a D'Arrigo family history provided by our host. We were welcomed by the third-generation leader of the prestigious California operation, John D'Arrigo. He recounted the story of two brothers who came to America from Italy and started the family business that eventually branched out to the West Coast. We were shown the famous Andy Boy label that has a picture of John D'Arrigo's father at its center.

D'Arrigo spoke openly about the challenges and the rewards of working in a family business. The storytelling and conversation continued throughout lunch in a beautiful courtyard that separated the main building from the rest of the facility. We appreciated our host's openness, his willingness to share with such great humor, and the time he gave to our group.

After lunch we were taken on a tour of the facility. As we viewed massive, highly specialized equipment used to ensure the quality of the products, class comments included "impressive!" and

"that is incredible!" The 50-acre facility was set up to systematically accommodate a high volume of product. The systems and equipment are state-of-the-art but are built with common sense and the input of the people who make the place run day to day.

D'Arrigo Brothers produces products such as broccoli, fennel, cauliflower, lettuces and cactus. You can see the quality that goes into their products and the value they place on the employees. The company website makes a powerful statement that I found to be true on our tour: "Andy Boy – Not just a brand but a way of life."

## Leading the way



by Rachel Walters  
Bayer CropScience

The Emerging Leader Development Program participants enjoyed an evening dinner conversation with Alicia Calhoun at Montrie's in downtown Monterey after a full day of field visits. Calhoun is the director of foundation programs for the Produce Marketing Association.

Calhoun is responsible for the PMA Foundation for Industry Talent. The purpose of the foundation is growing the produce industry's future by attracting, developing, and retaining talent for the global produce industry. The foundation has the following programs:

- Career Pathways, which is geared toward attracting university students
- Young Professionals, which allows young professionals to grow their networks and gain insight
- Emerging Leaders Program, designed to prepare leaders to embrace increasing responsibilities
- Women's Fresh Perspectives, which cultivates women's potential through development and networking
- Leadership Symposium, a program for

senior executives that prepares them to focus on the coming year and to face challenges

Most of the dinner discussion centered on the Career Pathways program. There was much debate about who this program should be geared toward. Calhoun has been asked by several PMA members to seek business students outside of agriculture. All of the members of the ELDP class shared their opinions. The consensus was that no matter what college degree an individual earned, the candidate should be willing to work hard and have an interest in agriculture. This industry requires people who have a passion for agriculture.

## This sounds familiar



by Jennifer Hodges  
The Andersons  
Plant Nutrient Group

During our California production trip, we had the opportunity to meet with leaders of the Grower-Shipper Association of Central California, United Fresh Produce Association and the Western Growers Association. We were fortunate to sit down over lunch and discuss key issues these groups are dealing with in California.

Kicking off our session were Abby Taylor-Silva and Jim Bogart of GSA. The association is a group of more than 300 members who represent California's coastal counties: Monterey, Santa Cruz, San Benito and Santa Clara. Bogart talked about the association's annual member survey to determine the top issues they are facing. Taylor explained that water quality is always one of the key issues, along with water quantity, food safety and labor. GSA is working on



several exciting programs, including a new initiative called More Produce in Schools. The program was created to identify solutions to the national obesity problem and to bring more produce into schools. New regulations are being implemented that will control how much produce is being served in schools.

Western Growers Association is an 87-year-old full-service trade organization that provides services and programs to its members in the fresh produce industry. Its membership more than half of the U.S. consumption of fresh produce. WGA's new foundation focuses on putting a garden in every school – a creative initiative that will provide children with a greater understanding of our industry. WGA also has a two-year Young Leaders Program that is similar to FFVA's ELDP. Both organizations select emerging leaders from their membership's companies and/or families. The 10-member class attends all board meetings, participates in production trips and takes part in legislative days in California, Arizona and Washington, D.C. WGA's class will travel to Florida next year to learn about our crops and issues. It will be a great experience for their group; our trip to California had a very positive impact on me.

The United Fresh Produce Association, a 108-year old organization, is the largest national trade association representing the produce industry. The Washington-based association has 21 staff members and a main goal of increasing produce consumption. United Fresh has separate boards for different segments of the industry. It offers many education and training programs, including the Produce Industry Leadership Program. This impressive program consists of 12 candidates chosen from throughout the produce industry. The two-year program covers leadership development, business relationships, governmental and public affairs, and media and public communication.

I would like to thank Farm Credit and United Fresh for giving us this amazing learning opportunity that I will never forget!

*“Many of California’s issues are similar to Florida’s, such as water quality and quantity, labor, e-verify and food safety.”*

*- Elizabeth Malek*



One of the most noticeable differences between Florida's farms and California's farms was the scenery.

## Lessons learned from leaders



by Elizabeth Malek  
Glades Crop Care, Inc.

Hank Giclas from the Western Growers' Association spoke to our leadership class about the association, issues facing growers and the industry in California, and how WGA helps its members. The WGA was established 87 years ago and has grown to a full-service trade organization. Its members contribute half of the total U.S. produce and comprise the majority of the U.S. organic market. WGA has several divisions, such as science and technology, and an insurance company. They seek grant money for projects and are working to reduce burdens on the agricultural industry.

Many of California's issues are similar to Florida's, such as water quality and quantity, labor, e-verify, and food safety. What is different in California is the agricultural waiver. Each production area in the state has its own issues and concerns, so different sets of rules apply to each area.

Because of saltwater intrusion and increased competition for water resources with developers, communities, and environmental groups, WGA is working on projects such as recycled water for irrigation, reducing nitrate concentrations in agricultural water, and allocating funding for increasing water supply. Saltwater intrusion is not a major issue for Florida at this time, but in the future we will be able to look at other states like California for strategies and ideas.

WGA also is writing food safety guidelines, researching mechanization to help reduce labor needs and promoting BMPs – actions that agricultural advocacy groups in Florida are working on as well.

The WGA is a strong organization that works hard for its members and the good of the agriculture industry. It also has a leadership program similar to FFVA's. Investing in and developing young leaders in agriculture is critical for the industry. The future of agriculture will depend on intelligent and capable young leaders who will help to promote agriculture and influence legislation.



## Available at a Wal-Mart near you



by Rachel Walters  
Bayer CropScience

The Emerging Leader Development group's last visit of the California production trip in "America's Salad Bowl" was Taylor Farms' salad plant. Michelle Story, who manages the Wal-Mart business for Taylor Farms, was our tour guide.

Before entering the salad plant, we had to suit up. This required lab coats, hard hats, hairnets, earplugs, and gloves. I never got used to how cold it was in these production plants! We watched workers unload, wash, dry, mix, bag, and pack several different salad mixes. Several lines were running at the same time, including an organic one. We also saw the warehouse where the product was stored while awaiting pickup.

Story says she is thankful to be a part of Taylor Farms. She shared some of the many ways the company gives back to the Salinas community. For example, Taylor Farms partnered with Golden State Foods Foundation to provide every first-grader in three Salinas area schools with backpacks and school supplies. More than 500 backpacks were filled with needed supplies through this project.

Taylor Farms also values being a supporter of the industry. It is involved in the Produce Marketing Association, the Center for Produce Safety, the Leafy Green Marketing Agreement, Western Growers Association and United Fresh Produce Association.

It was evident that Story loves agriculture, enjoys working for Taylor Farms and thrives off of the challenge of managing the Wal-Mart business. It was a pleasure to spend the afternoon with her.



Michael Hill was unable to make it on the trip but joined class members in spirit everywhere they went.

**The class' next stop will be FFVA 2012, where members will complete the program and graduate. Look for a special edition of the newsletter included in convention registration packets that will highlight the impact the program had on the group.**

## The circus of farming



by Andy Ballard  
Hundley Farms

The ELDP was privileged to visit food-service giant Church Brothers, one of the most integrated companies providing customers with top-quality produce. Its 230,000-square-foot facility demonstrates how Church Brothers can load 300 trucks daily.

The massive processing equipment mows through leafy green products, sorting and mixing them. The product is then bagged and shipped to customers throughout the country. Most of Church Brothers' products end up in the food services industry, with customers such as Olive Garden.

There is no question that food freshness is one of the company's top priorities, with its three-hour field-to-cooler window. The product is normally shipped out within 24 hours of delivery from the field.

After the season ends in California, Church Brothers moves its processing equipment to Yuma, Ariz., for the winter season to allow continual supply for customers. The company uses about 200 tractor-trailers, and it takes a day and a half to complete the process. A massive amount of personnel -- from mechanics to IT workers -- is required.

The company also has a strict food safety policy in place. Before admission to the plant, all visitors must don gloves, coat, mask and hard hat. Jewelry and gum are prohibited, and all personnel must dip their hands in sanitizer. The Church Brothers are on top of the food safety issues and have nearly perfect food inspection scores to prove it.

The tour we took, provided by marketing and product development director Ernst Van Eeghen, was very educational and just plain fun. It was an enlightening experience not soon forgotten.