

# EMERGING TIMES

*... growing toward the future*

## Leaders broaden horizons on California trip



Class members pose at Tanimura & Antle headquarters with the California mountains in the background.

Class 4 of FFVA's Emerging Leader Development Program wrapped up its year with a three-day tour of farming and packing operations in California's Salinas Valley. The group visited a variety of large-scale operations of crops that many had not seen before, including artichokes, garlic and mushrooms.

The annual trip broadens the perspective of class members and allows them to hear from others – many of them CEOs of the companies they visited – about pressing issues. The California drought and water shortage were a big topic of conversation on many of the tour stops.

The packed agenda included tours of lettuce planting and harvesting at Tanimura & Antle in Spreckels, artichoke harvesting and vegetable cooling/packing/shipping at Ocean Mist Farms in Castroville, and tissue plant culture operations at Driscoll's in Watsonville. A visit to Ramsay Highlander in Gonzales highlighted the latest

in technology and precision machinery. Other stops included celery breeding at Duda in Salinas, lettuce production at Fresh Leaf Farms in Salinas, a discussion of ag issues at the Grower-Shipper Association of Central California, and fresh vegetable processing and packing at Taylor Farms in Gonzales. The group also toured apple orchards at Gizdich Ranch in Watsonville, pepper harvest at Uesugi Farms in Gilroy, lettuce harvest and packing at Bengard Ranch in Salinas, mushroom production Monterey Mushrooms in Watsonville, and garlic processing and packing at Christopher Ranch in Gilroy. They finished with a vineyard tour and wine tasting at Pessagno Winery in Salinas.

"The class had an incredible opportunity to see a very wide range of commodities grown, and to see the size and scope of California operations," said Sonia Tighe, ELDP program director. The western producers were extremely gracious with their time and information. The class felt that the trip was extremely educational."



## A straight-shooter at Uesugi Farms



by Shine Taylor  
DuPont Crop Protection

Our California production tour kicked off in Gilroy at Uesugi Farms. There we met with Pete Aiello, son of farm owner Joe Aiello, to see pepper production and tour his facilities. On the way to the field, we discussed current issues including labor, land and the theme of our production tour, water issues. He discussed in length the ways his farm has dealt with water-supply issues and offered thoughts on some solutions. If the powers that be listened to Aiello, I believe the water issues could be solved pretty quickly; he was a straight-shooter with a concrete agenda on how to fix "the mess."

We toured pepper fields, watched one of their first harvests of this crop, and discussed some production differences between California and Florida. We met Joe Aiello and the grower for the pepper field, and then we were back to their packing plant and state-of-the-art cooling facility. We learned a lot about what it takes to build a facility in California and the challenges they face there. We also got to see the sweet corn cooling system in action and were very impressed by the efficiency of the machinery to get fresh produce on the way to the consumer.

To finish off the tour, we got to see their solar farm, which could power at least 200 homes when running at full capacity. Visiting with Aiello and touring Uesugi Farms was a great way to start our California production tour, because many of his talking points would become themes as we traveled around and visited with others.



Workers at Uesugi Farms harvest one of their first pepper crops this season.

## Stewards of our land



by Paul Miller  
Pioneer Growers Co-Op

At the start of our program, our class had the privilege of touring a Taylor Farms facility in Central Florida. On the last day of our California trip, we had another opportunity to tour a Taylor Farms facility.

Jerrett Stoffel started out our tour with an overview of the facility we were visiting that day. Even though the walk-through tour and some of the topics discussed were similar to the Florida facility, one topic that really resonated with me was "clean energy" and how Taylor Farms is trying to reduce its carbon footprint in hopes of being off the grid in the future. Stoffel discussed wind and solar energy projects they've undertaken to help with that goal. He asked if we had seen the towering 319-foot wind turbine behind

the facility on the way in, and I thought, "How could anyone miss it?" It was one of the first wind turbines built in the Salinas Valley, and Stoffel said the turbine could generate a megawatt of power, which provides half of the power at the Gonzales cut-veg facility. They also are harnessing solar power to help them become energy self-sufficient.

As I took this in, all I could think about is how farmers and big corporations are coming under fire daily for allegedly polluting our environment so badly in some cases that species are dying off. I challenge the people making those accusations to tour the farming and processing operations we visited in California to see the steps being taken to continue reducing their carbon footprints to virtually zero.

It was very apparent from the first day in California that processing facilities like Taylor Farms and the farmers who help supply them truly care about the land, and they all want to see it sustained for future generations to prosper from as well. I tip my hat to them, as they are all true stewards of the land.





## Honing in on the issues



by Dan Bott  
Premier Citrus Management

Jim Bogart was our host for an informative session at the Grower Shipper Association of Central California. It's California's oldest regional association, with more than 325 members that span the coastal region encompassing Monterey, Santa Cruz, San Benito and Santa Clara counties. Over lunch, Bogart talked about the economic impact of agricultural crops produced in Monterey County and some of the important issues the association is facing.

In 2014, Monterey County produced 744 million pounds of agricultural commodities totaling \$4.49 billion in harvested crop value. Leaf lettuce was the largest commodity produced in the region, followed by strawberries, head lettuce, broccoli and nursery crops. In 2014, agriculture in Monterey County generated \$8.1 billion for the local economy through the value of crop sales and agricultural company and employee spending. The

industry also provided 76,000 jobs –about one in four workers in the county.

Bogart said the association polled its members, who listed these as their top issues:

1. Farm labor/immigration reform
2. Wage and hour laws
3. Crop protection
4. Food safety and security
5. Compliance with labor and employment law
6. Water
7. Farmworker housing
8. Worker safety
9. Farm labor costs/health care/Affordable Care Act
10. Transportation and logistics, sustainability, and union organizing activities (tie)

The discussion highlighted the magnitude of crop production in the region. It is remarkable that if Monterey County was a state, it would rank 24th in agriculture gross domestic product. FFVA members face many of the same issues in their day-to-day operations, and it's important that dialogue occurs with other associations to present a unified message on issues that are vital to the livelihood of farm operations across the country now and for future generations.



Lettuce varieties at Tanimura & Antle (left) combine to create a beautiful display of color and texture while newly planted lettuce plants (right) at Fresh Leaf Farms give a glimpse into the beginning of the process.





## Monterey Mushrooms a 'must-see'



by Dustin Grooms  
Fancy Farms, Inc.

A "must-see" in California was Monterey Mushrooms in Watsonville. We were met at the gate by manager Matt Fuller and rode up the side of a mountain -- or "hill" as the locals call them -- to an observation point from which we could see the entire operation. From that vantage point, we learned the process of mushroom farming.

Mushrooms are grown in three phases:

composting, pasteurization and fruiting. For composting, they use wheat straw from farmers in California all the way to Oregon and keep a three-week supply on hand. They also use stable bedding, as well as a synthetic blend. The compost has to be fluffed and urea and food must be added. The compost farm is sloped, and runoff is captured in a pond and reapplied to the compost. The second phase is pasteurization, which must be done at 140 degrees for the spores in the air to work properly. That will be the first place a food safety auditor will check, Fuller said. A layer of peat moss is added at this point to hold the moisture in the compost. The controlled environment in the grow rooms causes the mushrooms, which are separated by whites and browns (portobellos) to grow. All mushrooms are grown in stacked wooden beds. They are harvested in three "breaks" -- a quota of mushrooms produced over a period of days.

Once all the food in the beds is exhausted it is steamed and dumped on a lot. Local farmers will come to pick it up for use on their own farms. Fuller also took us to the processing facility and showed us the many different aspects of cleaning and packaging the mushrooms. We also got to see how to harvest the mushrooms first-hand by standing on top of the beds. Fuller also let us sample some oyster mushrooms, which were amazing.

Monterey Mushrooms has farms all over North America that are strategically placed to deliver fresh mushrooms to your table at all times. I can't wait to eat some for dinner tonight!



Class members got up-close and personal as they checked out the mushroom beds at Monterey Mushrooms.





## Promising new technology at T&A



by Meghan Pasken  
Glades Crop Care

Helena Beckett, director of category management, and Mark Adamek, director of romaine and mixed leaf production at Tanimura and Antle led us on a very comprehensive tour of T&A's field production. T&A growers farm 40,000 acres a year of mostly leaf and broccoli varieties, but they also grow red onions, melons, blueberries and garlic.

Though the Tanimura and Antle families had been growers since the 1930s, the partnership of the two families began in 1982. The Tanimuras have continued to manage the growing side of the business, with the Antle family focusing more on the packing, marketing and shipping side of the organization.

T&A showcased their new planting technology called Plant Tape. We had the unique opportunity to witness this new transplant innovation firsthand. T&A has bought and adapted a more efficient planter technology that eliminates the need to thin direct-seeded lettuce while minimizing the amount of labor needed for transplanting. Plant Tape trays can hold more plants than conventional transplant trays (up to 810 plants per tray), so greenhouse space can be better used. T&A sees the potential for Plant Tape in leaf, tomato, onion, broccoli and tobacco production and hopes to make this promising new technology available to U.S. growers next year.

After our planting experience, our group visited fields where Artisan lettuce and miniature romaine varieties were being harvested and field-packed. Our very forthright hosts spoke about the same challenges that growers in Florida face.

The group appreciated the engaging conversations that started in the field and carried over to lunch. Opinions and ideas were exchanged on the topics of sustainability, food waste initiatives, organics vs.

conventional, labor concerns, land costs, water rights, and more. Eating lunch in the impressive board room and discussing the future of the industry with our hosts made us feel like we were part of the T&A family for just a moment.

## Better Burger lettuce impresses



by Nathan Decker  
Seedway

For Wednesday's second stop we visited with Mike Costa, harvest manager of Costa Farms/Fresh Leaf Farms based in Salinas. Costa has a unique operation because he mostly grows and markets his produce through Mann Packing. In fact, Mann Packing markets three-quarters of Fresh Leaf Farms' crop. Fresh Leaf Farms manages 5,800 acres, which translates into 13,000 crop acres on which they have production each year. The main crops are broccoli, lettuces, cabbage and sugar snap peas.

During peak harvest, Fresh Leaf Farms has over 700 workers in the field. They work six days a week, 52 weeks a year. Production starts in Arizona in November, and they finish the crop year in Salinas in September. Because of the water issues in California, they are starting earlier and finishing later in Arizona.

One of the products Costa is extremely proud of is the company's exclusive Better Burger lettuce. The unique concept behind this variety is that it provides the perfect single-leaf product for sandwiches. In the past 12 months, Costa Farms has seen 125 percent growth in the Better Burger variety. Once harvested and packed, this variety goes throughout the food chain. Sysco, U.S. Food Service, Markon and the buying co-op Pro Act are some of the buyers. Arby's, Denny's and Starbucks also are buyers. They like the quality and the fact that it holds up well on hot sandwiches. It does not seem to break down or wilt as other lettuces do when served on hot items.

This was a very informative visit when it comes to lettuce crops. Costa does a great job managing his complex vegetable business as well as finding time to develop unique products that can differentiate his company in such a competitive market.



Class members toured one of Tanimura & Antle's fields that makes up 40,000 acres of leaf and broccoli varieties.



Blackberries grown for Driscoll's in Watsonville passed the taste test conducted by class members.

## A berry impressive operation



by Teddy McAvoy

Driscoll's is a major strawberry, blueberry, blackberry and raspberry exclusive variety producer. Strawberry crowns are grown in the field. In contrast, blueberry, blackberry and raspberry plants are produced in the lab through tissue culture and grown in the greenhouse until they are ready for the field. These plants are then sent to cooperating growers around the world for commercial berry production. Our tour guide, Luis Rincon, showed us the state-of-the-art tissue culture and greenhouse transplant production facility in Watsonville. The lab churns out 10,000 transplants per hour. Media preparation, sterilization, transplant transfer techniques and the growth room were on display. Interestingly, the lab produces 10 cubic

meters of auger growth media monthly, which is recycled into plastic.

After eight to 12 weeks, the lab plants are transferred to the greenhouse to grow out in transplant flats. All environmental factors are electronically monitored and controlled to produce ideal conditions. Even the water goes through reverse osmosis to produce consistent water quality year-round. The transplant flats are grown on metal tables. These tables sit on rollers on which the plants can be moved from one greenhouse bay to another, which allows for changes in production needs as growth progresses.

We visited a grower in Watsonville that produces field and high-tunnel blackberries for Driscoll's. Row after row of shoulder-high vines were covered with berries. The grower discussed detailed production, fruit quality, food safety, water and labor issues. We were obviously most interested in fruit quality as evidenced by our purple fingers, smiling faces and full bellies. ELDP member and strawberry grower Dustin Grooms described the visit to the blackberry farm as the most impressive operation of the California trip and basked in the thought of producing blackberries on his farm in Florida.

## Adapt and overcome



by Paul Miller  
Pioneer Growers Co-Op

It was just before lunch on our first tour day in California, and Gizdich Ranch was the next stop. I felt as though the trees in the orchard were actually closing in on our bus as we made our way down the entrance of the property and arrived in the very back where the gift and bake shops were. There were trees everywhere, it seemed, and each one was spaced out so perfectly throughout the property as to make sure not one single inch of viable farm land was wasted.

We had heard from previous tour hosts that day that Gizdich Ranch was a popular place to visit and eat lunch, so we were excited to finally be there. We were greeted by Vince Gizdich, and while the lunch was being prepared he took us a few hundred yards away to a section of his orchard. I had only seen one other orchard before arriving at Gizdich, and that was three years ago in Michigan after they nearly lost their whole apple crop due to an extremely warm March followed by freezing temperatures in April.

Gizdich told us his trees had gone through a similar scenario of about six weeks of unusually warm weather that confused and stunted the fruiting process of the trees. He said it could take up to a year for the trees to correct themselves and start producing a crop again, but he couldn't say for sure because this was a first for him.

Gizdich Ranch clearly wasn't like the mega-grower/shippers we had toured earlier, but it was great to see how Gizdich and his family have adapted their business to accommodate people driving up to buy local produce or just enjoy a lovely meal outside in a picnic area built in the orchard. Gizdich Ranch has found its niche and seems to be thriving with the Watsonville community. One thing is for sure: The fresh pies we had that day were absolutely delicious!





## A window into celery research



by Matthew Griffin  
Lipman Produce

To say we were exposed to a wide array of diverse crops on our California trip would be an understatement. In the few days of our tour, we viewed production ranging from mushrooms to apple orchards and everything in between.

One of our stops was at Duda's research facility in Salinas. Duda, a Florida-based agribusiness, has been dedicated to providing fresh, reliable produce for some five generations. Naturally, Duda has attracted and retained talented individuals who have made and are still making considerable contributions to the company. They include Dr. Larry Pierce, manager of seed research.

In addition to a summary of Duda's history, Pierce gave us an in-depth behind-the-scenes tour of the research facility and a glimpse into the tedious two- to three-year process of testing various lines and genetics to develop new celery varieties. It was impressive to see the mix of machinery used: older, new, purchased and some good old in-house innovation. With more than 20 varieties being used in production, the program also looks back at older varieties to see what role they may play in future production.

After that tour, we visited a nearby field with Manny Alcala to see some of those same proprietary varieties growing. It was hard not to notice Pierce and Alcala's passion for their careers and the industry as they shared their experiences and expertise with us.

## Eye-opening technology at Ramsay Highlander



by Shine Taylor  
DuPont Crop Protection

We met Frank Maconachy, president and CEO of Ramsay Highlander Inc., on the first stop of the last day of our California production trip. We toured his world-class machine shop in Gonzales to learn a little about what it takes to engineer and build some of the harvesting and other specialized machines we had seen in the area.

We were quickly introduced to harvesting equipment, with many of the custom-built harvesters outside the fabrication shop either ready to go to the field or getting final touches. We watched the fabrication going on around us as Maconachy described how everything gets assembled and pieced together for some of the larger harvesters. We learned a little about what some of them are capable of doing in the field.

Some of the finished products, such as a recently built spinach harvester, were very interesting pieces of equipment designed in-house by their own team of engineers. Upstairs, we met a few of those engineers who were drawing up plans for current and future builds and discussed their roles in the process.

Maconachy showed us some videos of some of the harvest and thinning equipment in the field. The video of Ramsay's patented Water Jet cutting method on one of his harvesters opened my eyes to what could help with some of agriculture's labor issues. We also watched videos of his lettuce-thinning machine, which was similar but distinctly different from a machine we had seen on a previous stop. It gave me a greater appreciation of the level of experience and technology that Ramsay Highlander builds into its products. Maconachy provided access to all levels of the fabrication process, which gave us a very good overview of his business and his impact on California agriculture.

## A leafy green leader



by John Alderman  
Duda Farm Fresh Foods

One of our last stops of the day on Wednesday was Bengard Ranch in Salinas. Bridget Bengard provided us with a brief history of the company and overview of their business. Bridget is the daughter of company President and CEO Bardin Bengard. The Bengard family began farming in the Salinas Valley in the mid-1800s. Several family members are involved in day-to-day operations. Bengard Ranches has a strong presence in the Salinas Valley as well as Arizona and Mexico. The company also partners with TKM Bengard Farms in Belle Glade. The farm grows iceberg, romaine, romaine hearts, broccoli, green leaf, red leaf, celery, cauliflower and other various leafy items. Overall, the family farms more than 10,000 acres.

Bridget then took us on a 15-minute drive to one of their Salinas ranches. It was late in the day, but the crews still had two machines running, packing three-count romaine hearts. It was very windy and the crews were doing an excellent job of keeping the romaine heart bags from flying into the Pacific Ocean. The wind was another example of how many micro-climates we saw in our trip. The romaine quality was excellent, and it was a great-looking pack. It was an impressive operation, and Bengard Ranch was another example of an operation identifying an item it does well and being a top producer of that item.



## Oh, that smell!



by Meghan Pasken  
Glades Crop Care

The second stop of Day 1 was a visit to the packing and processing facilities at Christopher Ranch. As we stepped off the bus, the intense smell of garlic wafted over us, and there was no denying which commodity Christopher Ranch is famous for.

Don Christopher established his first garlic ranch in the Santa Clara Valley in 1956 around a hand-selected variety brought from Italy. The now-thriving Christopher Ranch cultivated its Monviso heirloom seed line for over half a century to preserve its exceptional flavor. No other grower has maintained such an intensive garlic seed program, and Christopher Ranch has never sold its cherished seed to any other farmer. Christopher co-founded the Gilroy Garlic Festival, an annual event that has transformed Gilroy into the "Garlic Capital of the World." The 4,000 acres of garlic farmed in and around Gilroy are responsible for about a third of U.S. garlic production.

Marketing Director Patsy Ross explained the nine-month process of growing garlic. Having no previous exposure to this unique crop, we were wide-eyed and giddy as we suited up in our orange safety vests and hairnets and got ready to see where garlic comes from. The mouth- and eye-watering aroma grew stronger as we moved down the production line from where the fresh whole bulbs were sorted and into the building where the cracker, puller, and peeler machines processed individual cloves.

Christopher Ranch certainly has garlic down to a science. High-tech optical sorters and air-blast peelers went to work and yielded perfectly peeled garlic pearls ready for shipping to Costco, Winn Dixie and many other familiar grocery chains. Our stomachs growled as we left the ranch craving our favorite garlic dishes. This unique glimpse into garlic production was certainly an experience that will permeate our memories of California.



Class members got an up-close look at garlic being packed and processed at Christopher Ranch.



These grapes are used for Pessagno Winery's chardonnay wines.

## Wine tasting in the California mountains



by Teddy McAvoy

Pessagno Winery produces wine from grapes grown in the Santa Lucia Highlands region of California. The winery is beautifully located on the terraces of the Santa Lucia mountain range, which overlooks the Salinas River Valley. Cool weather-loving chardonnay and pinot noir grapes flourish in the region.

We were greeted by Chris Vivit, who was a true wealth of knowledge and a great entertainer. We started off with a serving of chardonnay. While savoring our glass of wine after a long day and an even longer week, we were given a tour of the pinot noir vines located on site. These are the very grapes used for their award winning pinot noir wines. The most well-known wine produced by Pessagno Winery is its Four Boys Vineyard Pinot Noir. The wine is a dedication to the four sons of winery founder Steve Pessagno. The Four Boys Vineyard truly exceeded expectations.

Like the taste of wine, our last stop of the California production tour was bittersweet. Our journey that started a little less than a year ago at the FFVA convention had finally ended. I suppose all good things must come to an end. But with every ending comes a new beginning. I began reminiscing on our time together and am looking forward to our continued friendships throughout life. This was a grand finale to a great year in FFVA's Emerging Leader Development Program.





## All things artichoke



by John Beuttenmuller  
Florida Foundation  
Seed Producers, Inc.

Our visit to Ocean Mist Farms in Castroville began with host Francisco Castaneda, Ocean Mist's artichoke production manager. Castaneda provided us with a very detailed account of Ocean Mist Farms' history along with a field tour of artichoke production and harvesting.

Ocean Mist Farms was founded in 1924 by five families and is still a family-run company today. Artichokes were brought to the United States toward the end of the 19th century and were grown in the San Francisco area. As San Francisco grew as a city, artichoke production moved primarily to Castroville. Castroville has a very unique micro-climate, as it is typically five to 10 degrees cooler than Salinas. This temperate, slightly humid climate is ideal for artichoke production. Castroville is known as the "Artichoke Capital of the World," with nearly 90 percent of fresh market artichokes produced in the area. Ocean Mist Farms is the largest grower of fresh artichokes in the United States.

Our second stop at Ocean Mist was with Mark Reasons, Ocean Mist's facility manager and a third-generation member of the founding Pieri family. Reasons gave us a detailed behind-the-scenes tour of the company's state-of-the-art, 100,000-square-foot refrigeration and distribution facility. It is at this facility that all of Ocean Mist's products such as artichokes, lettuce, celery, rapini, corn and spinach are cooled and distributed. Reasons emphasized the importance of food safety and discussed in detail the intricate systems they have to help preserve and maintain the cold chain throughout their processes.

After this visit, we came away with a new appreciation for artichokes, and we were very impressed by Ocean Mist Farm's operations.



Castroville is known as the "Artichoke Capital of the World," with nearly 90 percent of fresh market artichokes produced in the area.

*Class 4 will graduate  
at FFVA 2015 in Palm  
Beach next month.*

*Look for a special  
Reflections edition of  
their newsletter soon!*

# ELDP NEWS



**1:** Congratulations to **April Roe Porter and Jennifer Lytch** (Class 1) for graduating from the Wedgworth Leadership Institute as part of Class IX in August.

**2:** Congratulations to **Amber Maloney** (Class 2) who married Matt Maloney on July 3.

**3: Daniel Cavazos** (Class 3) and his wife, Maria, both graduated with a bachelor's degree in Business Administration and participated in commencement ceremonies at Florida Atlantic University.

**4: Matt Stacey** (Class 3) and his wife, Julie, welcomed Austin Thomas Stacey on May 6. He weighed 8 pounds and measured 21 inches.





**5: Dan Bott** and **Shine Taylor** (Class 4) enjoyed a round of golf at the famed Pebble Beach Golf Course after wrapping up the ELDP California trip.

**6:** Congratulations to **Lee Ann Cassell** (Class 2) and Michael Cassell who were married on March 14.

**7:** Congratulations to **Carleton Johns** (Class 2) on his engagement to Kristin Auman.

**8: Derek Orsenigo** (Class 2) and his wife, Lauren, attended the American Sugar Alliance annual meeting in Albuquerque, N.M.

**Elton Baldy** (Class 3) was selected as part of the top three Agriculture Achievement Award winners by the Georgia Farm Bureau Young Farmer & Rancher program.

**Nathan Decker** (Class 4) recently joined Seedway as the sales manager for the Southeast region.

**Jessica Kerstein** (Class 2) was selected for the United Fresh Produce Industry Leadership Program, Class 21. She was also featured in the "Women in Produce 2015" section of The Packer.