



Volume 2 - Issue 5  
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Session 5: California

# EMERGING TIMES

*... growing toward the future*

## Leadership class broadens horizons through travel to California



ELDP Director Sonia Tighe, Tom Mitchell, Carleton Johns, Ian Bessell, Amber Kosinsky, Jonathan Allen, Jessica Kerstein, Nick Basore, Lee Ann Hinton Coleman, Thomas Dalton, Derek Orsenigo, Joby Sherrod and FFVA Director of Public Affairs Lisa Lochridge take a moment for a group photo with the California mountains as their backdrop.



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



**SUSTAINING SPONSOR**





## Uesugi Farms works to maintain adequate workforce



by Joby Sherrod  
A. Duda & Sons, Inc.

Uesugi Farms, originally founded in the 1950s by George Uesugi, was bought by Joe Aiello and his partners in 1979. They started out with 100 acres and today have expanded the company to become a year-round producer of bell and chili peppers, Napa cabbage, strawberries, sweet corn and pumpkins on 4,500 acres stretching from California to Mexico.

Headquartered in Gilroy, Uesugi Farms is now co-owned and managed by Joe and his son, Pete. Pete Aiello grew up working on the farm and has worked in all aspects of the operation. Currently managing the 1,000-plus employees who are needed to pick and pack their produce, one of Pete's biggest challenges is maintaining a consistent labor force.

With the current state of availability of domestic workers and looming immigration reform, Pete's efforts are focused on ensuring the labor force that he and all the growers in the area need to keep their businesses running. "We put on the gloves and fight every day for this farm," he told us.

Other challenges include water supply and increasing regulation and costs. Pete grows his crops using low-volume drip irrigation and relies on weather and soil moisture monitoring technologies to best determine irrigation scheduling. Water isn't the only resource the farm manages wisely. Last year, Uesugi Farms installed a commercial solar panel array on a part of the farm that was unproductive. It now converts sunlight into enough electricity to power the packinghouse facilities.

With these investments in sustainability and their commitment to growing quality produce, Uesugi Farms is poised for longevity in the produce business. Pete Aiello's vision for the future is to continue the legacy of growing quality produce started by his father, Joe, and to continue to expand the business.



## Tanimura & Antle: A true partnership



by Tom Mitchell  
Riverfront Packing Company, LLC

I'm not a marketing expert, but I've always heard that a company's story helps sell its products. If this is the case, Tanimura & Antle will have plenty of success for years to come. On our recent tour of their operations in Salinas, I was enthralled by the rich history of this unique partnership.

The Japanese-American Tanimura family began farming lettuce in the early 1900s. George Tanimura, current co-chairman of the board of T&A, took over the Tanimura lettuce operation at age 16 after his father died. The operation thrived until the family lost everything during World War II, when they were placed in internment camps for three years. After the war, Tanimura once again started building his operation. In the 1950s, he developed an exclusive partnership with Bud Antle. Antle had become a renowned harvester and marketer of lettuce. The Antle operation grew significantly during World War II when it shipped iceberg lettuce overseas to American soldiers. Although the post-war climate was not too friendly to Japanese American farmers, Antle recognized Tanimura's farming abilities, and a strong bond was formed. That strong bond was still very evident when we visited its operations.

The hosts for our tour were Helena Beckett and Caitlin Antle. After hearing a brief history of the company, we headed out to their picturesque lettuce fields to watch their proprietary Artisan® lettuce being harvested. Their planting technique allows them to easily harvest and pack multiple varieties into clamshells right in the field. The finished product is both visually appealing and great tasting. We concluded our tour with lunch at the T&A headquarters, which had some spectacular views of the Salinas Valley.



Class members observe the processing of garlic at Christopher Ranch.

## Garlic processing a first for most



by Jonathan Allen  
R.C. Hatton, Inc.

With such a vast number of commodities that California provides, we were fortunate enough to see a crop that we are unfamiliar with in Florida. In the garlic industry, Christopher Ranch leads the way with more than 4,000 acres and 50 years in operation.

In the 1890s, Ole Christopher left Denmark in search of an opportunity to work and settle with his family. He heard about the rich soils in America's "salad bowl" in the Santa Clara Valley. Starting with a small tract, the Christophers began with a prune orchard. Over time, the family became one of the largest growers of prunes in the Santa Clara Valley.

Ole's grandson, Don, wanted to branch out and try something new in the mid-1950s. After purchasing land in Gilroy, he teamed up with his brother Art and they decided to try to grow garlic. The first varieties they experimented with were European varieties that produced larger and more flavorful bulbs which were established for the French and Italian markets. With very few farmers in the garlic industry at that time, the brothers had a niche in the market for Santa Clara Valley produce. Don is a co-founder of the annual Gilroy Garlic Festival, which has made Gilroy the garlic capital of the world.

Christopher Ranch provides a large value-added line of garlic products to meet their customers' needs. From chopped garlic in oil to fresh peeled garlic, they offer products that meet high food safety standards that are tailored to customers' convenience.

## Homey Gizdich Ranch is an agri-tourism success



by Carleton Johns  
Tater Farms

My first stop on our Salinas sojourn -- thanks to delays by American Airlines -- was lunch at the Gizdich Ranch. This family farm is a working definition of agri-tourism. The farm was started by Vince Gizdich's grandparents in 1937 as a 10-acre apple orchard grown for processing. The operation plodded along into the 1960s, never really prospering or expanding.

Vince's parents got involved in the business in the 60's and transitioned the farm into a more community-oriented operation, focusing on growing fruits and berries on a small scale and selling locally to families interested in processing their own juices, jams and jellies. They also opened a retail store where locals could purchase Gizdich's homemade jellies, pies and fresh-squeezed apple juice.

Fast-forward to today: The Gizdich Ranch has swollen to 100 acres and runs three trucks delivering homemade pies and fresh fruit to various outlets around town. Although the ranch has realized some success in processing and delivering their wares, the true charm of

the ranch can only be fully appreciated by visiting. Vince has developed a miniature village of farm buildings including an antique store, a gift shop, a restaurant, a produce stand and an outdoor picnic area surrounded by apple orchards, hay bales and rusty antique farm equipment for kids to climb on. While many, including our group, buy lunch made onsite, Vince said many families bring their own lunch and just enjoy the ambiance -- and hopefully buy a slice of pie or glass of fresh apple juice. We sampled both. The apple juice was hands-down the best I've ever tasted. The Olallie berry pie, a hybrid form of blackberry, flirted with sugar overload as any legit homemade baked good should.

Vince and his family are committed to providing that authentic family farm experience. He estimated that 70 percent of his customers keep returning because their experience reminds them of childhood memories of their farm experience. The Gizdiches clearly seem to be visionaries. They were decades ahead of the "eat local" movement, and they nailed the agri-tourism niche before it had a definition.





## Mann's "Better Burger" leaf lettuce makes a big impression



by Ian Bessell

One of our stops in "The Salad Bowl of the World" was Fresh Leaf Farms/Mann Packing, a family-owned company with multiple generations involved. Mann Packing is a leading provider of washed, ready-to-eat fresh vegetables, one of the world's largest suppliers of fresh broccoli, and distributor of more than 35 fresh vegetables. Mike Jarrard, president, was our tour guide through both the production fields and packing facility.

In the fields we saw equipment they have developed to assist in the harvest and processing of red and green leaf and romaine lettuce, which is now chopped right in the field. They used to cut and trim leaves at

the plant, but now they are able to do it mechanically in the field. This shift, along with newer drying technology at the plant, was a "game changer," Mike said. It has allowed them to reduce the number of employees required to run the plant and freed up 40 percent of their facility to develop new products. One of these products is Mann's new spring mix product called Arcadia, a better spring mix which uses 7-14 different leaf types resulting in a fluffier product with more plate cover and longer shelf life. Mike added that they are working on developing the "ultimate burger leaf" that has the crunchy texture of iceberg and the frilly appeal of green leaf.

A unique aspect to production in the Salinas Valley is the annual six-month winter migration of the entire industry to the desert region of Yuma, Ariz. Twice a year companies such as Mann dismantle their entire operations, load the equipment onto dozens of trucks and move it hundreds of miles, only to reassemble everything -- all in the span of less than 72 hours. They do the same thing again six months later when they move back to Salinas. The concept still boggles my mind, and it must be quite a sight to see in person. Thanks again to Farm Credit National Contributions and United Fresh Produce Foundation for helping to make our trip possible.

## Specialized equipment dazzles group



by Derek Orsenigo  
Grower's Management, Inc.

To say that the folks at Ramsay Highlander are creative fabricators would be a gross understatement. It would also do little justice to say that they are just a good resource for the growers in the Salinas area.

As our class learned from our in-depth tour of their manufacturing facility and office, the team at Ramsay Highlander is a highly talented and forward-thinking group of people who specialize in custom-built harvesting equipment. They are the specialists when it comes to taking a grower's idea about a specialized piece of harvesting equipment and bringing that idea to fruition. Farms all over the country (and even a few operations within Class 2) are using these machines. The company also ships its products to other countries such as Australia, Mexico and several countries in South America.

When it comes to the designing and building of custom equipment, it is safe to say they have that down pat. Ramsay leads the pack in the technology department. Using innovative software, the company is testing new machinery that uses robotic systems to harvest lettuces and tomatoes. Applying laser-type vision, the machine is able to detect each head of lettuce, determine maturity, size, color and overall plant health, and then robotically harvest that head. Though some of their ideas are still in the research and development stage, they are confident in the potential of the final product.

3-D animation software is being used to determine more accurate details of these intricate machines. Computer generation serves as a big part of their design process. Each and every part and measurement on the machines is tracked and kept in close detail. Ramsay's mechanical engineers use all of these progressive operations to ensure more accurate detail and faster production. Through all of these great business practices, Ramsay Highlander continues to be a leading manufacturer for custom harvesting machinery.



Frank McConachy of Ramsay Highlander discusses his unique harvesting equipment, including the new "visioning technology."



## Grower-Shipper Association advocates for its members



by Nick Basore  
TKM Bengard Farms

Jim Bogart, president and general counsel of the Grower-Shipper Association of Central California, educated our class on the association's mission and its history. The association began in 1930 with 15 elected shippers with the intent to create a community of cooperation among its members, the majority of which are located in the central counties of California.

The original group of shippers was focused solely on iceberg lettuce. Today, this member-driven organization numbers around 400 and represents a wide variety of western-grown commodities. The association is led by a board of directors, which drafts an annual list of priority issues.

Jim Bogart has been with the Grower-Shipper Association since 1979. For the first 20 years, his work focused primarily on resolving labor issues. Since then, he has become the face of the association. It is not uncommon to see him issuing a statement to the press in the event of a labor strike or fighting a new regulation that would greatly impact the agriculture industry.

My impression of the Grower-Shipper Association is that it works wholeheartedly to advocate the best for its members. This intent is what has kept this long-lasting association growing in members year after year. From its humble beginnings, the Grower-Shipper Association has expanded to new areas including food safety as well as a foundation promoting agricultural education.



Gonzales Packing Company produces more than 2 million boxes of tomatoes annually.

## Third generation hosts tour of Gonzales Packing Co.



by Jessica Kerstein  
Lipman

The final trip of our Emerging Leader Development Program took us to California for a production tour. One of the stops along the way was Gonzales Packing Co. in Gonzales, which lies in the center of the Salinas Valley. This facility packs and distributes mature green fresh-market tomatoes throughout the United States, Canada and Mexico. It has the capacity to hold 30,000 boxes of tomatoes a day, and the facility produces more than 2 million boxes annually.

The operation is still family-run and operated, and our tour was led by two family members, Ryan and Angie Horwath, who

represent the third generation and actively run different parts of the business. When the tomatoes are brought in from the field, they are washed and sanitized in the dump tank, where the water temperature is 10 degrees above the pulp temperature of the tomatoes. Then they are run across several packing lines to be sorted both by hand and an automated color sorter, and packed in 25-pound boxes sorted by quality and size. Quality ranges from a U.S. No. 1 and "Café" (No. 2), to a cull, which is discarded. U.S. No. 1 is the highest grade, with a perfectly round shape and little to no scarring.

The tomatoes are then sent to be repacked, which further sorts the tomatoes to customer specifications. They can separate by size and color, and package them in different quantities to suit a particular end-user.

The trip was a great success and as always, our group learned a lot. It is so exciting to be part of an industry that is supplying healthy food for us all to eat.





## Duda Farm Fresh Foods: Strategically planting for customers



by Amber Kosinsky  
Wish Farms

Duda Farm Fresh Foods, one of the world's largest celery producers and a global leader in celery innovation, is a Florida-based company with a large operation in the heart of the Salinas Valley. Our group was welcomed by Sammy Duda, vice president of western operations. During our tour of Duda's celery fields, we couldn't help but enjoy the scenic mountain views and cool breeze -- very different from what we are used to in Florida.

The 80-mile-wide valley provides a unique microclimate with rich organic soil, perfect for farming. Sammy caught everyone's attention when he explained the region's weather pattern as "the valley sucks and the ocean blows." With fog present every morning, wind every afternoon and little to no rain from May through October, the key advantage to Salinas Valley's climate is its consistency.

During our visit, we watched harvesting in action as a field crew cut, rinsed, bagged and boxed one of Duda's proprietary celery varieties in the field. Each crew harvests a little more than one acre per day, producing about 1,700 cartons of celery.

To the untrained eye, the rows and rows of celery look the same, but as Sammy explained, Duda strategically designs a planting plan to fit each of their customer's needs -- a concept called "modified density planning." Duda's focus on research and development of proprietary seed crop varieties is an advantage for implementing this program. Different varieties are planted close together in a specific format for a



Pete Aiello gives the class a tour of Uesugi Farms, an operation utilizing solar energy to power its packing facilities.

predictable run of sizes. This system has allowed Duda to expand their package offerings, which includes 128 different packs. The operation can "harvest to order" custom bags, sliced and diced, bulk, sleeved, snack packs and more.

With farming operations in Florida and California, Duda understands both the challenges and advantages of working in each state, operationally and politically. There is certainly less weather risk in California, allowing for consistent yields and high productivity. However, the political hurdles and steep operational costs tend to balance the playing field.

As Sammy explained, with California's high farming costs, the trend has been for companies to focus on innovation and value-added products. Duda agrees with this mindset. "We are always looking to try something new and make our current practice better," he said. "Understanding consumer needs and then translating this information into our products through innovation is what makes the difference."

## Western Growers: Strength in numbers for growers



by Thomas Dalton  
Farm Credit of Central Florida

Over lunch with industry representatives, Dave Puglia of Western Growers Association gave us an

overview of the Western Growers Association and some of the significant issues faced by the growers they represent. He is the senior vice president of government affairs/communications and has been with Western Growers for more than 24 years.

Western Growers was founded in 1926 in California's Imperial Valley. Originally, the mission of the association was to fight for fair transportation rates for the agricultural industry. Since then, WGA has represented regional family farmers in California and Arizona. These farm families have operations throughout the United States and internationally and account for half of the nation's fresh fruits and vegetables, including a third of America's fresh organic produce. In addition to representing agricultural interests in California, Arizona, and Washington, Western Growers is also the largest insurer of farm workers in the United States through its insurance arm Pinnacle. The proceeds from Pinnacle are the primary source of funding for Western Growers' operation and legislative efforts.

As we discussed a variety of issues with Dave, it didn't take long to realize that farmers from across the country face similar issues to the challenges we face in Florida. Immigration, food safety, water, invasive pests, and environmental issues are closely associated with agriculture, whether you are in Florida or California. The advocacy of associations like Western Growers and the Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association give farmers strength in numbers through their memberships. It is the strength provided by these associations that will deliver the long-term viability to the agricultural producers they represent.



## Massive scale of Taylor Farms makes big impression



by Tom Mitchell  
Riverfront Packing Company, LLC

It's hard to believe what has been accomplished in 18 years at Taylor Farms. That's what I kept telling myself after leaving its state-of-the-art facility in Salinas. Founded in 1995, Taylor Farms has grown to be one of the world's largest distributors of fresh salads, fresh vegetables, and other fresh foods. The company has mastered the art of controlled environment packaging to maximize the shelf life of its wide array of perishable products. The company's rapid growth can be attributed to the experience that company founder Bruce Taylor gained while working with Fresh Express for 13 years before launching Taylor Farms. Today, Taylor Farms has 10 facilities across North America and 7,500 employees. They partner with more than 200 vegetable growers.

Accompanying Class 2 on our tour were Luis Amaral and Kelley Lopez with Taylor Farms. Although we could only spend a fraction of the time we needed to tour this massive operation, they provided a large amount of information in a short amount of time.

Personally, I was blown away by the sheer scale of the operation. Whether it's the 12-bin forklift being used to unload fresh vegetables or the 4,500 food safety field tests being done each day, this operation was unlike anything I had ever seen.

The best example of their size and scale is the once-a-year plant move to Yuma, Ariz. Taylor Farms actually breaks down all of the equipment in the Salinas plant and moves it by truck to Yuma. It requires 152 trucks for the move; yet within 48 hours the equipment is removed, transported, reassembled, and up and running in Arizona.

## United Fresh: Full supply-chain representation



by Jonathan Allen  
R.C. Hatton, Inc.

Even though we spent most of our time seeing the production and processing of fruits and vegetables, we also had the opportunity to hear from Jeff Obermann about the United Fresh Produce Association. The vice president of trade relations for United Fresh explained thoroughly the operations and activities that the association is involved with.

United Fresh is committed to improving the growth and success of produce companies and their partners. In operation for more than a century, the association represents the interests of member

companies throughout the global fresh produce supply chain, including family-owned, private and publicly traded businesses as well as regional, national, and international companies. United Fresh is dedicated to providing a high level of expertise and management support for their members as more and more value-added techniques are implemented in the agriculture industry.

Some major focal points for the association are food safety, government relations, local and global services to meet customer needs, and efficiency and innovation to increase produce sales and profitability. United Fresh is the only broad produce association based in Washington D.C., which allows them to have a strong voice in shaping legislative, political, and legal solutions to challenges that threaten the industry's growth and profitability.



Twice every year Taylor Farms breaks down, moves and sets up its equipment more than 500 miles between Salinas, Calif., and Yuma, Ariz., all in 48 hours.





## Similarities, differences in states' strawberry industries



by Lee Ann Hinton Coleman  
Hinton Farms Produce, Inc.

Class 2's recent national trip showcased the many similarities and differences in agricultural practices between Florida and California. We visited a diverse group of farms and packing facilities. Because strawberries are one of our farms' main crops, our visit to Wish Farms was particularly interesting to me.

Darwin Reich met us in one of their beautiful fields in the valley. It was interesting to note that some of the strawberry farmers in California often rely heavily on labor contractors to run their farms, rather than being involved in the production themselves. We were privileged to meet the guys in charge of Wish Farms' labor contracting from Ramco. Joe and Hank described their operation and noted that they grow more than 1,100 acres of strawberries in four districts. Strawberry farming is year-round in California, and their 6,000 to 8,500 flats per acre make Florida's production look small.

Most of the production methods that we observed are similar to those we use in Florida. We plant the same way, use the same types of chemicals and fertilizers, and harvest much the same way. The California strawberry industry faces many of the same challenges as the Florida industry: water, labor and regulation. California seems to struggle with higher land rental prices than do most Florida growers.

Although both states have their fair share of labor problems, California seems to have more of a problem keeping the same workers and less control over their workers. Workers are often paid by the hour, Joe and Hank said, and if they are questioned about the quality of their work, they may leave the field to work elsewhere rather than improving the quality of

their finished product.

It was wonderful to finally visit California strawberry production after hearing about it all of my life. When all is said and done, both states have their fair share of challenges, and I don't think one state handles it better than the other. Environmental and political challenges will always be the biggest hurdles for any agricultural enterprise, strawberries or otherwise. Our tours of California agriculture were informative and interesting, and thanks to the graciousness of our hosts, we were able to see a huge slice of California agriculture in a short time.

## Dole's automated packinghouse efficiently manages inventory



by Derek Orsenigo  
Grower's Management, Inc.

Our visit to the Dole cooling and shipping facility in Salinas provided a great insight as to how advanced the fresh produce industry has become.

Dan Doyle, director of western supply chain operations, and facility manager Angel Baez provided the class with an in-depth tour of the nearly fully automated packinghouse. At this vegetable-only cooling facility, the array of vegetables was impressive: lettuces, celery, asparagus, cauliflower, broccoli, peppers and much more. Considering the tremendous assortment of diverse vegetables that move through this facility on a weekly basis, it makes this automated system that much more impressive.

After the arrival and subsequent vacuum cooling of the freshly harvested produce, the real technology comes into play once



Ian Bessell and Jessica Kerstein enjoy fresh strawberries from the field.

the product enters the highly advanced facility. Moving through the packinghouse on a conveyer belt, each pallet goes through a series of squeeze-type presses that align each box on the pallet. This process makes for more organized and precise handling later in the shipping chain. From there, it is off to the five-story, 34-degree warehouse, where each pallet is organized and stored until shipment. Using a series of computers and automated forklifts, each pallet is systematically moved and stored based on storage needs and shipping time. When each pallet is assigned its designated shipping time, the automation continues and the pallets are moved from the storage area to a staging zone, where they are loaded onto a refrigerated truck.

As one of only three automated storage systems in the country, Dole takes full advantage of the many positives that come with this efficient inventory management method. It allows Dole to store up to 3,000 pallets of vegetables. Using this state-of-the-art technology and progressive thinking helps keep Dole a leader of the fresh produce industry.





## Monterey Mushrooms: The fungus among us



by Ian Bessell

One of our many stops was the Watsonville, Calif., Monterey Mushrooms facility, where Clark Smith provided us with a step-by-step tour through the production process. Monterey Mushrooms was established in 1971 as a family-owned and operated farm. Today, Monterey is vertically integrated and able to control all aspects of mushroom production from seed to consumer. They have four farms in California that produce 1.5 million pounds each week as well as another five farms around the United States (one in Zellwood) and one in Mexico. Like everything else we saw in California, Monterey's production is on a larger-than-life scale.

The facility we visited sits on 275 acres where the company grows white, brown and portobello varieties, as well as delicious oyster mushrooms, which we sampled. Once the product is picked, it is transferred to the onsite packinghouse/processing plant. Monterey Mushrooms ships 135 SKUs from this one farm, including a large number of private-label products. Some products are exposed to UV light to stimulate the synthesis of natural vitamin D. We also learned that 600 people work on this one farm, and Monterey Mushrooms is the largest United Farm Workers employer in California, with around 300 union workers.

Growing mushrooms starts with producing compost, and at the end of the entire process the final product is also compost. It is then shipped to growers in the Salinas Valley, where it is spread in fields that produce vegetables. In fact, compost is both the first and last step in the entire process of producing mushrooms and Clark joked that one could argue that Monterey Mushrooms is more in the composting business than the mushroom business.



Monterey Mushrooms grows and processes several varieties of mushrooms amounting to 1.5 million pounds of mushrooms each week.

## Bengard Ranch: Coast to coast



by Thomas Dalton  
Farm Credit of Central Florida

One of the stops on our last day of farm tours was Bengard Ranch in the Salinas Valley. Established in the 1960s by Tom and Terry Bengard, this stop was of special interest because of its association with TKM Bengard Farms, which we visited in Belle Glade.

Bengard Ranch is one of the largest vertically integrated grower-shippers of vegetables in the United States. Bengard Ranch farms throughout California and has operations in Mexico, Arizona and Florida. Bengard Ranch farms more than 8,000 crop acres and has multiple cooling and packing

locations, allowing the operation to provide fresh fruit and vegetables year-round. They produce multiple varieties of lettuce as well as cauliflower, broccoli, celery, green onions and fruits such as strawberries.

During our time on the ranch, Bridget Bengard introduced us to Mark Villanueva, the manager in charge of broccoli and cauliflower production. Although no harvesting was going on, we were still able to learn about the process, average yields, sizing and varieties. We were, however, able to view the strawberry harvest in progress. Because we're from Central Florida, it was a little unusual to see strawberries being harvested in June; nevertheless, the focus on the ranch was being able to obtain as many flats per acre in lieu of hitting the market for premium pricing.

As with many of the stops on our tour, Bengard Ranch placed a special emphasis on its employees. Specifically, we heard time and again the pride the employees take in their work, from field workers to management, and how it directly affects the organization's success.





## Winemaker's advice: "Drink, don't think"



by Carleton Johns  
Tater Farms

The grand finale on our truly amazing trip brought us to Paraiso Vineyards in Soledad. Finally! After three marathon days on and off of buses, introductions and "tokens of our appreciation"...Let's drink some wine!

First came a tour of the grounds. Paraiso Vineyards encompasses more than 3,500 acres on 21 vineyards across the valley. Not bad for a farm that began in 1973 with a modest 20-acre vineyard. Paraiso has some of the oldest vines, planted in the early 1970s on a gluttonous 12-foot row spacing with

overhead irrigation. However, they also have some brand new vineyards on 6-foot row spacing on drip irrigation. This upgrade in efficiency is netting Paraiso double the volume per acre. Which, with development costs at \$27,000 an acre and land costs pushing \$30,000, is critical to survival.

The main vineyard was full of scenic vistas overlooking the entire valley, which was predominantly covered in one crop or another. The vineyard was also very breezy and cool, which was typical for the region. That allows them to grow some chardonnay and pinot noir grapes where other vineyards cannot. After perusing their mechanical harvesters and sprayer machines, it was time to meet back up with winemaker David Fleming to do a little tasting.

Fleming graduated from the University of California Davis with a psychology degree and was on his way to becoming an ordained minister when he met his wife, whose father owned a vineyard. One thing led to another,

and today David is producing the wine for communion, not serving it. He led us onto the back deck of the main retail area for a couple of wine servings and began to impart some of his nuggets of knowledge to take with us to share with the East Coast. He urged us to "drink, don't think" -- which I think most of us already learned in college. He also said, "Good wine should begin and end with a smile," which parlayed into his point that we should "own what we like" -- meaning that if you liked Boones Farm then drink it, enjoy it, and don't worry about what self-proclaimed wine snobs think of you. Because, as he said, good wine should make you smile, not wrench your face from a bitter aftertaste that didn't please your palate. With that, we were back on the bus, exhausted yet amused in a way that you just had to be there to appreciate.



Paraiso Vineyards encompasses more than 3,500 acres across the valley. The climate where they are located allows them to grow some chardonnay and pinot noir grapes where other California vineyards cannot.



# ELDP ALUMNI

*... updates from Class 1*



## April Roe Porter

Kyle and I recently bought a new house and our first tangerine grove (pictured left)!



## Michael Hill

We celebrated Trace's first birthday in June (pictured left) and he has now graduated from speech therapy because he is doing so well. Brooke and I are also expecting our second child in December! We have so many blessings in our life to be thankful for. We are staying very busy at the farm and are looking forward to seeing everyone at FFVA's convention in September.



## Heather Banky

During Class 2's production trip, the Belle Glade RCMA expressed an interest in having people come in to read to the kids. In response my valuable U.S. Sugar teammates have stepped up and volunteered to donate their time to the cause.

Currently we have a volunteer team led by Eric Myer that includes Marion Sparks, Michael Cameron, Rick Cassano and Heather Banky that will take turns reading every two weeks. Pictured left is Marion "Sparky" Sparks.

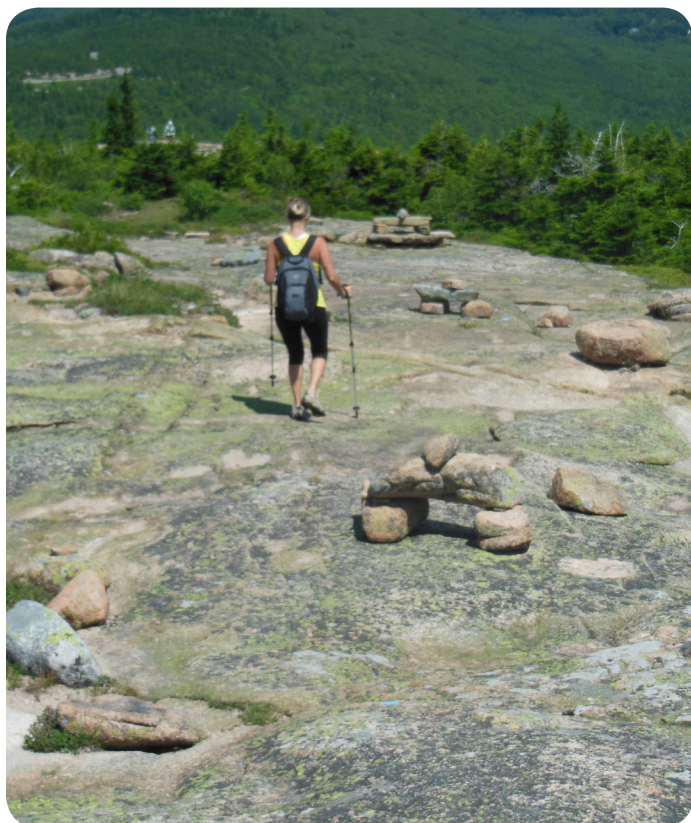


## Justin Roberson

This month I will begin transitioning my work at Lipman from packing to farming. I have also assumed responsibility over our sustainability program and resource management initiatives. I'm looking forward to these new opportunities and getting more involved in the growing side of our business.

## Jennifer Hodges

I traveled to the NCAA College World Series in Omaha, Neb. for the first time. It was an incredible experience! I also travelled to Maine to go hiking and do a little sightseeing. (Pictured below)



## Adam Trott

I have been busy with Rabobank's line of credit renewal season as well as potty-training Payton. We have also hired a number of new employees here in Sarasota including Bryan Byrd as a Relationship Manager/ Team Leader, Sage Bevis in our Crop Insurance Department, Heather Waters in our Analyst Department and Erika Rachal as a Senior Field Marketing Manager. Needless to say we have grown a lot over the last few months.

## Elizabeth Malek

I just started my new job with Lipman as their crop information supervisor at the beginning of June. Everyone has been very nice and welcoming, and they have made my transition easy. Since I began, I have been collecting soil and leaf samples from our citrus groves and vegetable fields. Now we are getting ready for transplant production. I am very excited to be a part of Lipman and to see what the future holds!

*The class' next stop will be FFVA 2013, where members will complete the program and graduate. Look for a special edition of the newsletter included in your registration packet.*