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Tours highlight college farm's sustainability

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

REDDING, Calif. — Third-year agriculture student Alex Anderson made it a point to highlight the Shasta College farm's push toward environmental stewardship while leading a tour for community members.

She noted that the farm uses discarded cooking oil from the cafeteria to make its hay more palatable to cows, and explained that local breweries also provide spent grain to be fed in the beef barn.

An organic plot at the farm features tomatoes and other produce grown by students as part of their projects, as students in the college's sustainable agriculture classes decide for themselves what to grow.

"We try to be as sustainable as possible," said Anderson, a Humboldt County, Calif., native who is in the farm dormitory at the Redding community college.

Consumer demand for food that's free of pesticides and other additives is growing, said Nate Anderson, a horticulture student leading one of the stops on the tour.

"The customer now wants organic food," he said. "So that's going to be a big push now, to learn how to grow organic."

The tour was a key part of the college agriculture program's annual Harvest Fest on Oct. 7, which also featured a dinner, live and silent auctions and entertainment.

Tim Hearden/Capital Press

Community members tour the farm facilities at Shasta College in Redding, Calif., on Oct. 7. The tours emphasized the agriculture program's focus on sustainability. **BELOW:** Third-year student Alex Anderson talks about the program.

Proceeds from the event fund laboratory projects, farm dormitories, logging sports and equipment and work with livestock, organizers said. This year, funds are being used to remodel the bathroom, showers and kitchen in the farm dorm, which was built in the 1950s, Anderson said.

After groups were taken by horse-drawn trailers through the farm grounds, the roughly 300 guests were treated to a dinner featuring foods from the farm and local producers.

The dinner was held at Ross Ranch, adjacent to the 90-acre college farm, providing a more agrarian setting than last year's program at a local senior citizens' hall. The ranch is owned by the McConnell Foundation, a local philanthropic organization.

Shasta College has offered courses in sustainable agriculture since 2010, highlighting methods to save water and other resources. The farm raises 80 percent of its own feed, uses compost on its fields and runs chickens through its organic vineyard to eat leafhoppers, a pest, said Trena Kimler-Richards, an agricultural instructor and program coordinator.

"Now we teach an actual sustainable ag class, where we're working on soil improvement through implied research," Kimler-Richards said. "We're working on strip-cropping and intercropping on one of our ag fields to improve our soil structure and nutrient balance."

Students can earn an associate of science degree and can transfer to a four-year university to study crop science or range and wildlife ecology, she said.

With community members, students and instructors emphasize that sustainable methods are used in both conventional and organic agriculture, Kimler-Richards said.

Brown signs bill allowing water users to save money

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — Gov. Jerry Brown signed a California Cattlemen's Association-sponsored bill to ease requirements for ranchers who must measure their water diversions from nearby streams.

The governor on Oct. 4 approved Assembly Bill 589 by Assemblyman Frank Bigelow, R-O'Neals, that changes a State Water Resources Control Board rule that those who divert more than 10 acre-feet of water per year hire a licensed engineer to install a water-measuring device.

Instead, diverters will be able to install their own devices or implement their own measurement method after taking a course from the University of California Cooperative Extension. The UC will work with the water board in the coming weeks to develop the course.

"There will certainly be an effort on our part to make that happen as quickly as possible," said Justin Oldfield, the CCA's vice president of government affairs.

"We're very appreciative that he signed the bill," Oldfield said. "We look forward to implementing it into law as soon as possible."

The bill passed unanimously in both houses of the Legislature. While the UC typically doesn't take positions on legislation, it supported this bill, said Larry Forero, a UCCE adviser based in Redding.

The legislation follows the water board's decision early last year to ramp up reporting requirements for the state's roughly 12,000 landowners and users who have water rights — even those with pre-1914 and riparian rights.

The right holders must now report their diversions annually rather than every three years, and those who divert more than 10 acre-feet of water per year must also measure how much they take.

The reporting rule was phased in, with the largest diverters having to comply by Jan. 1 of this year. Those with rights to 100 acre-feet or more a year had until July 1 to install devices, and those with rights to divert 10 acre-feet must comply by Jan. 1, 2018.

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