

Cultivating the NEXT generation - providing support for our farming future through quality learning opportunities



Beginning Farmers were center stage and plentiful at this year's **California Small Farm Conference** held earlier this month in Valencia (Los Angeles County). The theme, ***Cultivating the Next Generation***, reflected the ideas and people who will be our farming future. In direct response to U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Vilsack's and others' concerns about an aging farming community (average age of California farmer: 58.4 years and increasing) and to especially support new and beginning farmers, conference activities and outreach efforts were directed at the needs of beginning farmers. The popular scholarship program was expanded to include farming students participating in vocational and on-farm internships, such as those provided by Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA).

Conservation planners can help their clients increase their knowledge of conservation benefits by encouraging them to attend the California Small Farm Conference. Its wealth of learning opportunities helps them become more skillful with making solid resource management decisions. Their knowledge is brought back to their farming operations and helps build capacity within their communities.

"Participants at this year's conference were decidedly younger than in previous years", concluded conference planners, indicating a successful campaign to interest new farmers to attend. It also likely reflects the needs and interests of younger and new farmers to gain knowledge about their chosen career. With past generations, farmers and ranchers grew up in the business

working and learning alongside their parents, grandparents, siblings, and neighbors. This traditional scenario isn't playing out as in the past as many new farmers don't have relatives to learn from. Rather, they need to find other sources to gain their skills and knowledge. The Small Farm Conference is one of those ways in which these new farmers can find the help they need to enhance their farming skills and confidence.

Inclusion and diversity continue as mainstays of conference

The California Small Farm Conference and its partners (NRCS has been a key planner and supporter for many years) are proud to represent a broad cross-section of California agriculture producers, including many who may not have previously participated in some farming activities and events due to cultural, language, knowledge or other barriers. Some farmers have never attended a conference of any kind making this a new and exciting experience where they have opportunities to meet NRCS staff, farm advisors, and others who can help them locally—one important step to getting connected with resources available and important issues in their own communities. This year farmers represented all corners of California including Hoopa, Yreka, San Diego, Oakland, Nevada City, Spreckels, Tehachapi, Diamond Bar, and Gustine.



Accompanied by Sutter County RCD District Manager Larry Lloyd (2nd from left), farmers Bee Vue, Bunny Grisso, Chuck Vue and Kayeng Vue attend their first Small Farm Conference. Their participation ties in to the targeted outreach and planning initiative agreement NRCS has with the Sutter RCD to enhance conservation planning assistance to Southeast Asian farmers in Yuba and Sutter Counties.



A group of young farmers from the South Central Farmers Cooperative in Buttonwillow enjoy camaraderie after a keynote presentation.



Guest presenter and NRCS client Rob Lambert gives his first formal presentation while describing how he uses good management practices including irrigation water management, cover crops, and mulching on his organic cherry operation with free range laying hens in Leona Valley. Rob participates with the Lancaster NRCS Field Office as a Beginning Farmer.



Field Course site host Robert Delara discovered he's a pretty good presenter while conducting his first-ever group presentation at his organic citrus ranch in Fillmore. The Small Farm Conference helps build skills and knowledge capacities of its participants.

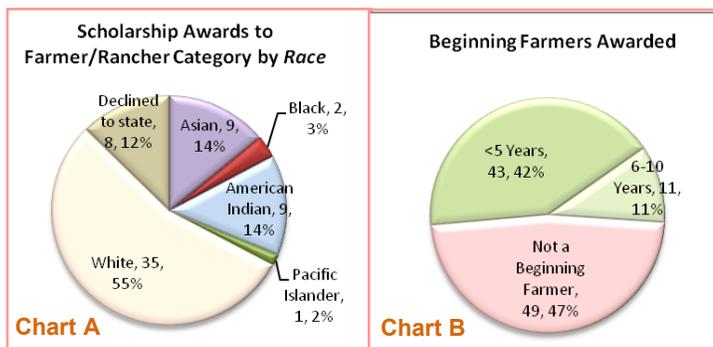


Chart A shows the number and percentage of scholarships awarded by Race. Compare this to the most recent NASS Census data that indicates that 8% of California farmers are of a minority race. **Chart B** shows that more than 50% of scholarships were awarded to Beginning Farmers or Ranchers, the majority of which have less than five years experience. In addition, 56% of scholarship recipients were female, at least 16% were Hispanic, and 87% self-identified themselves as meeting the criteria for Limited Resource Producer.

NEXT YEAR'S CONFERENCE WILL BE IN FRESNO!

