



United States Department of Agriculture  
Natural Resources Conservation Service

helping people help the land

## Cherta Farms

“Many Hmong farmers look to Mr. Lee for direction on growing Asian vegetables, and he is a good source to help spread information on NRCS’s programs and technical assistance.”

- **Sam Vang**

**Fresno Service Center**

While Tzexa Lee, owner of Cherta Farms, did not initially set out to become a model conservationist, after years of practical experience, he is proud to embody this title. Lee began farming in the early 1980s with his brother, together growing Asian-style vegetables for a consumer base still in its infancy.



*Bok choy is planted between long beans, growing on trellises, to maximize space.*

Lee is one of the original Hmong farmers in the Fresno area, now boasting a farming population of nearly 1,500. He predominately grows long beans, okra, gourds and wine grapes in a three-crop rotation per year. In addition, Lee grows other traditional Asian-style vegetables between his trellises to increase his production potential.

When his crop production levels reached a plateau, and even slightly decreased after 10 years, Lee knew he needed a solution to better manage his water and fertilizer inputs to once again increase his production quantities. He searched for an expert in the field of natural resource conservation and in the process met Sam Vang from the NRCS Fresno Service Center.

Lee and Vang immediately had a common bond in that they are both of Hmong descent. The Hmong people are a culturally-rich ethnic group originating from China and Southeast Asia. Nearly one third of the Hmong population in the United States live in California, with Fresno having the second largest population of Hmong residents.

Vang reviewed Lee’s water and soil management practices, and advised Lee to apply for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). EQIP provided cost-share assistance to implement the conservation practices to keep soil nutrients intact. Furthermore, Lee needed to comply with local air quality standards and Vang helped Lee transfer away from wood trellises, which need to be burned at the end of the growing season, to steel trellises.



### Lee’s Soil Nutrient Management Plan Included:

- Installed drip irrigation lines to better manage water inputs
- Incorporated a new multi-task implement to minimize the number of disk passes
- Installed semi-permanent steel trellises to comply with the San Joaquin Valley’s air quality standards

“Many Hmong farmers look to Mr. Lee for direction on growing Asian vegetables, and he is a good source to help spread information on NRCS’s programs and technical assistance,” said Vang.

Better managing water inputs and the amount of times Lee disks his fields helped increase his production levels, with Lee now producing nearly three times as much as he did when he first began farming. As an additional benefit, his water and land-use expenses were nearly cut in half, allowing his business to be more profitable.

“I knew I had to evolve

to meet the new age,” said Lee. “My next goal is to use all drip irrigation systems to reduce weeding costs and I am interested in NRCS’s Conservation Stewardship Program.”

Lee is also interested in expanding education about and marketing opportunities for Asian-style vegetables in traditional consumer marketplaces.

Lee knows how healthy these vegetables are and would like to help educate traditional consumers on how to incorporate Asian-style vegetables into American-style soups and entrees.



*Above: Vang (left), Ken Grimes, a soil conservationist from the NRCS Fresno Service Center (center), and Lee discuss the semi-permanent trellis system.*



*Left: Lee’s multi-task implement, attached to his tractor, allows him to disk his field less, thus minimizing ground disturbance. This helps improve water and soil-nutrient retention. The implement was funded through an NRCS outreach grant, in cooperation with the San Joaquin Valley Resource Conservation & Development Council.*