

Capay Valley Vision

P.O. Box 799
Esparto, CA 95627

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For More Information

Contact: Thomas Nelson
(530) 796-4160
thomas@capayvalleyvision.org

CAPAY VALLEY GROUPS TACKLE FARM PROFITABILITY

GUINDA – Lured by the hope of adding more value to product of their farms and ranches, over 50 Capay Valley residents turned out on the cold night of January 16 to hear a panel of farmers and ranchers describe their marketing devices. Jointly sponsored by Capay Valley Vision and Western Yolo Grange, the workshop tackled the difficult subject of how to make your farm profitable in the depressed agricultural economy.

Tim Mueller, who with his wife operate River Dog Farm, a 110 acre organic vegetable farm, described his operation while emphasizing the importance of developing niche markets for farm products. River Dog Farm sells a third of their produce to individual subscribers who receive a box a week of seasonal vegetables. A similar amount is sold at Bay Area farmers' markets, while the remaining third is marketed through local wholesalers. River Dog is able to command premium prices by virtue of freshness, unique varieties, and organic production methods.

Tom Frederick, who with his wife operates Capay Valley Vineyards, also emphasized the importance of developing niche markets. Tom is seeking the American Viticultural Appellation for the Capay Valley as an area of origin. Capay Valley Vineyards will soon break ground for a winery that will serve not only its own vineyard but also other vineyards developing in the Valley. Tom emphasized that an AVA designation for the Capay Valley will greatly enhance marketing locally produced wines to consumers who seek quality and value knowing the wine's source.

Scott Stone, who with his father and brother, operate Yolo Land & Cattle described the blend of activities that has made their ranch sustainable. In conjunction with a local winery and farm machinery museum, the Stones have developed an agri-tourism enterprise with the catchy title of "Combines, Wines, & Bovines." Originally targeted at the Japanese tourist, a tour of the ranch and a live cattle handling demonstration culminates the day-long excursion. The Stones also market their all-natural cattle in a variety of jerky and beef stick flavors. Rounding out their diverse operation, bay leaf harvested on the ranch is marketed through a joint venture with a Bay Area concern. One of the difficulties that Scott listed as limiting their ability to seek niche markets was the absence of a local beef processing facility.

Larry Heitman, a local resident and owner of a crop insurance service, addressed the subject of managing risk. Larry described the depressed state of the agricultural economy in California and the importance of developing a successful marketing strategy.

A lively discussion followed the panel presentation. The audience stimulated by the panelists generated a large and diverse array of ideas for stimulating the agricultural economy of the Capay Valley. Chief among these was the idea of branding not just wines as products of the Capay Valley but all locally grown farm commodities, developing a brand identification.

Other ideas discussed were a community kitchen where local growers could add value to their produce through distinctive recipes. Rural e-commerce (websites). Local meat processing facility. Direct marketing. Agri-tourism-education-youth groups-identification w. farming.

The workshop is the first in a series of workshop designed to pursue the subject of stimulating and sustaining the agricultural economy of the Capay Valley.

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