

## **Building a Farm Trail Project workshop – November 10, 2014 in Woodland**

### **Notes from workshop panel discussions and presentations**

Notes by Penny Leff, taken from flip-chart sheets recorded during workshop

#### **Panel discussion with association leaders (Gary Hawthorne, Amber McDowell, Pamela Marvel):**

- What results were you hoping for from this project?
  - Revenue
  - Community awareness and outreach in greater area
  - Awareness of Delta farmers in the midst of water questions
  - Creating unification between farmers and wineries
- How did you decide who would be on the map? Answers varied:
  - Have to be open regular hours to get a dot on the map
  - Within physical boundaries decided by group
  - Paid association members only (Delta)
  - Farmers only; others listed as “Associate members” (Delta)
  - Proximity – included others connected to, but not members of agritourism association
  - Membership in association not necessary for this year (North Yuba, Capay Valley)
  - Payment of membership fee encouraged, but not required this year (Capay Valley)
  - Delta group engaged in questioning “Who belongs on the map?”
- What was the hardest part of writing and editing map brochure?
  - Capay: very much content, how/what to cull?
  - Delta: Getting content from the farms
    - Culling the “history” content was challenging
    - Adjusted membership deadline to get content earlier for next year
  - North Yuba: Defining “who are we?” – spotlighting wine and olive oil so that others would ultimately benefit from highlighting strongest visitor draw
- What’s next for your group?
  - Delta: Reach more members, educate others on how to be “open” to the public. Create the links for all growers
    - Develop a database to be able to direct potential visitors/tour leaders/buyers to appropriate members
  - Capay Valley: Distribution of map, website development
    - Organizing workshops open to the public specific to various crops/products/skills
  - North Yuba: Create tracking system to know where folks are visiting
    - Add those who weren’t included this year
    - Work with county on reducing agritourism regulations
    - Join or establish Community Food Council to help with regulation change
    - Try to deal with lack of overnight stay locations

#### **Marketing Advice from Debra Lucero:**

- People don’t think in terms of counties; they think about the corridors they travel, such as Highway 99, Interstate 5, Highway 20, etc.
- Regional collaboration is needed to promote all the groups and local organizations

- You need to anticipate visitors' questions and needs and give them a clear path to planning their trip.
  - For example – tell them where they can stay overnight, where they can eat
- Facebook is important now – Everyone needs to use Facebook to communicate their story
  - Use Facebook to communicate things quickly and currently
  - Budget time and money as needed for using Facebook
  - Use Facebook and other methods to collect email addresses
  - Build likes and fans
  - Use excellent photos, not drab and blurry ones, to encourage sharing and to look good!
  - Entertain on Facebook – post fun stuff and encourage sharing
    - Words to use: “Share with friends” NOT “share this post”
    - Post pics from events – everyone likes to see pics of themselves & friends/family
- Work with local radio stations
  - Especially public radio, because those listeners are closest to agritourism target audience
- Learn who your visitors are, where they're from, how old they are, etc. to target your outreach
  - Consider getting youth such as FFA to help with info gathering at events
  - Ask how visitors learned about the event or location
  - Use Facebook demographics reports
- Encourage visitors to review you on Yelp
- Gather emails, NOT NAMES, because many will give a name and phone # if given choice
  - So, ask for email and phone # only
- Set up a “bloggers tour” to generate publicity
  - Savoir Mag lists top bloggers
  - Target the bloggers you would like to invite
  - Give them a great time and they will write about you and your attractions!
- “Alexa” site will give you stats on your website visitors
- Potential target audiences for agritourism:
  - Baby boomers
    - They want comfort!!
    - They want good food, good wine
  - Chinese tourists
    - Possible tie-in with gambling
- Encourage use of Air B&B in your region to increase lodging options
- Offer workshops that merge Art and Agriculture
  - See Yolo Arts as an example
  - Work with Arts Councils
- Tag onto Chamber/CVB apps and websites if you can
- Use push notifications to encourage app downloads

**Map brochure distribution tips from Vivien Straus:**

- Always have them available, in your car, in your office, on your farm, etc.
- Get them to related non-profit organizations to share
- Every farm and business listed on the map brochure should have a good supply to hand out

- List the map/association/region/events on Visit California
- Get the maps to schools and teachers
- Talk to journalists to promote maps
- Post downloadable maps on Facebook
- Give maps to politicians

**Report from Robyn Delfino, Apple Hill Growers Association:**

The Association conducted a SWOT analysis, using brainstorming at a general membership meeting, then prioritized the analysis, with these results:

- Strengths
  - Name recognition
  - Website getting many visitors
  - Huge number of visitors every year
- Weaknesses
  - Only about 20% of members participating in association
  - Questions from visitors were not being answered
- Opportunities
  - Since most locations were full during apple season, season extension needed to encourage more visitors
  - Potential for community partners that make sense for the association
- Threats
  - Zoning
  - Heavy traffic during peak season
  - Potential for accidents
  - Water – so need to make friends with Water Board

As a result of the SWOT analysis, Apple Hill Growers Association took these actions:

- Recognizing the strength of the website, they looked closer at website and learned that about 30% of website users accessed it with their phones. Therefore the website had to be updated to be more easily useable with phones.
  - They had to let old website designer go and work with designer who could best modernize site
  - The website went from 6<sup>th</sup> busiest in the county to 3<sup>rd</sup> busiest after change
  - They now have an app, which has been downloaded 6800 times
  - They don't use push notifications for the app
- To better answer visitors' questions and needs:
  - They glean questions and answer them on the website and in the "Cider Press" brochure
  - They partner with lodgings
  - They partner with restaurants
  - They help visitors plan their trip
- To deal with the weakness of low member participation they:
  - Publish newsletter and postcards to members about meetings
  - Set up a "members only" log-in area on website to improve grower communication

- Get suppliers to sponsor newsletter for members
- Remind members to “keep the brand strong”

More from the discussion with Lynn Larsen and Robyn Delfino of Apple Hill Growers Association:

- Advice: Watch your finances!!!
- Apple Hill Growers Association does not use grant funding.
- The association is now trying to promote the full range of Apple Hill members – trying to encourage visitors to go beyond the larger “entry-way” growers and to visit other farms.
- Apple Hill membership fees:
  - Base membership is \$175
  - Members are assessed additional fees based on attractions offered, such as bakeshops and crafts fairs, and on number of acres farmed
- Annual Cider Press brochure publication
  - Now published in rack size rather than full-page size
  - 150,000 copies of Cider Press printed and distributed annually
  - Every farm/member is listed now the same size, in an attempt to promote all the farms, not just the larger ones who bought bigger ads in the past
  - Members are given the option to buy additional ads in the brochure
  - Cider Press makes money by selling sponsorships and ads to others
    - All advertisers must be visitor-serving businesses
      - No realtors, no direct competitors to Association members
  - Big partners now include Whole Foods, Waste Connections and SMUD
- A potential opportunity that Apple Hill Growers Association members are currently discussing is the possibility of including “Associate Members”, who would be neighbors who do not meet the requirements for membership such as Non-grower neighbor businesses
  - Arguments for: These neighboring businesses already benefit from Apple Hill
- 35 years ago, Apple Hill Growers partnered with a local school to produce the “Apple Hill Run”.
  - This is now a successful annual event managed by a professional race organizer
  - The proceeds go to the school
  - The community is now invested in Apple Hill Growers Association
  - The event generates business for everyone in the community.