

Central Valley Fiber, Forage and Nut Digest



San Joaquin Sustainable Farming Project
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San Joaquin Sustainable Farming Project Promotes Innovative Practices

Central Valley almond, alfalfa and cotton growers are joining an innovative program that connects them with some of the state's leading extension advisors and researchers.

The San Joaquin Sustainable Farming Project (SJSFP) is providing growers in Madera, Merced and Fresno counties with valuable strategies to become better environmental stewards in today's challenging economic and regulatory climate.

Under the three-year project farmers are working with top agricultural experts to design a customized University of California-based integrated pest management program that incorporates the use of best management practices and less toxic pesticides in their operations. Project field scout also work with the growers' pest control advisors to augment field scouting, providing a "second set of eyes."

By becoming more aware of water quality issues, growers will reduce agricultural run off of chlorpyrifos and diazinon to the Lower San Joaquin River Watershed. These two chemicals are specifically targeted for reduction by the state.

SJSFP is a state and federally funded program under the direction of the Sustainable Cotton Project (www.sustainablecotton.org), a nonprofit which has worked with San Joaquin Valley growers in the past decade to bring eco-friendly Cleaner Cotton® to the multi-billion-dollar green consumer market.

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SJSFP Recruitment 2011

By Gilbert Mohtes-Chan

It's time again for alfalfa, almond and cotton growers to sign up for a unique program to promote sustainable farming in the Lower San Joaquin River Watershed.

Coming off a successful inaugural season, the San Joaquin Sustainable Farming Project enters its second year helping growers in Merced, Madera and Fresno counties learn valuable strategies to become better environmental stewards in today's tough economic and regulatory climate. Sponsored by the Sustainable Cotton Project (SCP), the program connects growers with some of the state's leading farm advisors and researchers.

Last year, 20 growers participated in the program. During the season, they worked with agricultural experts to complete whole farm self-assessments and strategies for implementing University of California Integrated Pest Management Year Round plans and best management practices on their enrolled acreage.

SCP field scouts will work with your existing PCA to augment field scouting. There also will be targeted field days featuring leading experts who will address current issues, BMP implementation planning and annual hedgerow seeds and beneficial insects, when needed.

By participating, you not only will supply benefits back to your community and watershed, but also demonstrate the positive aspects of agriculture:

- Keeping land in farming and providing open space.
- Maintaining production of local food and fiber products provides jobs and needed income for local economies.
- Farmers are environmental stewards that play an active role in improving water and air quality in local and regional communities.
- Alfalfa production reduces erosion, increases water penetration and improves soil quality while encouraging biological control of insect pests such as lygus in cotton.
- Growing annual and perennial crops brings more carbon into the soil and retains it.

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2010 SCP Cotton Tour Raises Awareness

By Gilbert Mohtes-Chan

Standing in a damp cotton field on a cool November morning, more than 80 people attending the Sustainable Cotton Project's annual farm tour, crowded around a pair of University of California farm experts, listening intently while surveying the acres of fiber ready for harvest.

"The Sustainable Cotton Project has been able to work with a highly motivated group of growers," says Dr. Pete Goodell, an entomologist with the UC Statewide Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program, and "IPM is one of the pillars of sustainability."

A few hundred yards away, a cotton harvester stood idle, parked at the edge of the field of white, puffy cotton bolls.

"The pickers aren't running early in the morning," explained Daniel Munk, a UC Cooperative Extension farm advisor and cotton agronomist for Fresno County.

"Why?" asked the group. Munk replied, "They're waiting for the sun to dry things out."

For the next six hours, fashion designers, university students, educators, television journalists and others received an in-the-field crash course in cotton production in the northern San Joaquin Valley. They learned about the planting season, irrigation, IPM history and practices, plant development, beneficial and harmful insects, farming practices and post-harvest activities.

They waded through cotton fields, picked cotton and snapped photos. They visited the Dos Palos Cooperative cotton gin, watched harvesting in action and learned about market economics during the tour organized by the Sustainable Cotton Project. Gap Inc., Global Action Through Fashion and the California State Water Resources Control Board co-sponsored this year's event. The tour took visitors to cotton fields cultivated by growers in SCP's Cleaner Cotton™ program and included a stop at a drip-irrigated field, grown by Dos Palos farmer, Chad Crivelli.

"There's nothing like going to the farms," said Kyra, a business student at Mills College in Oakland.

"I've driven by the fields. I've never seen a harvest," said Steven Soundara, a student at the California College of the Arts.

For Domenica Peterson, chief visionary and co-founder of Global Action Through Fashion, the tour offered valuable insights about California cotton production. "Nothing has taught me as much as today, seeing it, touching it and being able to hear from the farmers. I'm very impressed."

During an outdoor luncheon in Firebaugh, City Councilwoman and local physician Dr. Marcia Sablan, and area farmers Mark Fickett, Frank Williams and John Teixeira addressed the gathering. They shared insights and experiences on cotton production and marketing.

At the Dos Palos Cooperative Gin, manager Mike Davis led the tour through the bustling operation. The cotton market "has really been down the last few years," Davis said. Today, growers are seeing prices double from what they were a year ago. "China cut back on their cotton production. Cotton is now worth more money because they just don't have the supply."



Throughout the day, the group peppered growers and UC experts with a steady stream of questions.

“Can you defoliate by stopping the water?”

No, explained Munk. “Simply turning the water off doesn’t set up (the crop) for harvest. The leaves just don’t fall off.”

“What about crop rotation?”

Yes, answered Goodell. Growers will plant a couple of years of cotton and then put in tomatoes, melons, field corn or alfalfa as rotation crops.

“They learned a lot,” Crivelli said as the tour wound down and harvesters rumbled through one of his cotton fields. “I always think we need more public awareness in the farming industry.”

Almond Pruning

By Gilbert Mohtes-Chan

There’s a common thought that pruning your almond trees will increase yield at harvest time. You can put that belief to rest, according to one leading almond expert.

“Research shows there’s really little benefit of pruning as far as yield is concerned,” said Mario Viveros, University of California Cooperative Extension farm advisor emeritus. Studies in Colusa, Stanislaus and Kern counties over the years have revealed little correlation between pruning and the number of pounds each tree produces.

So why prune?

“There are other issues than yield,” Viveros told about three dozen growers and pest control advisors attending a fall Almond Pest Management Field Day in Firebaugh. These include improved access for equipment, worker safety in the orchards, controlling the growth of the trees and improving light access to the trees and orchard floor.

In addition to pruning tips, the field day featured dormant season tips from David Doll, almond farm advisor for UCCE Merced, and advice UC Statewide Integrated Pest Management entomologist Walt Bentley about sampling for scale, navel orangeworm and European red mites.

“Prune with a purpose. Maximize light (penetration). Control your tree height. You have to do it at the beginning,” Viveros said. You want to allow sunlight to cover the tree uniformly. At the same, time allowing sun to reach the orchard floor benefits the drying of the nuts at harvest.

Controlling the height of your trees is important for orchard sanitation, allowing crews to use 20-foot-long poles to knock off mummy nuts. It’s almost impossible to do so with towering trees. Now is the time to hedge the orchard - opening up a 3-to-4-foot center avenue between rows to eliminate overlapping branches among trees. “This is really important for bloom.”

In addition, Viveros said growers should eliminate all lower limbs during the first year, which reduces disease problems in subsequent years and also allows better access for tractors and other equipment. When you plant an orchard, it’s important to start thinking about developing a canopy to capture the most sunlight. “I want a full tree. You want to have complete closed systems that also allow light to come in,” Viveros said.



Photo (right): Walt Bentley, IPM Entomologist, Kearney Ag Center, discusses sampling for Scale, PTB, NOW and European Red Mites at the field day.

Recruitment continued from page 1

As a grower, this project will help enhance your biological farming by providing:

- Seed for annual habitat strips along field margins to create food and nectar sources for beneficial insects and habitat for wildlife.
- Weekly field scouting with timely reports.
- Assistance with planning and strategies for optimizing production and yields.
- Cotton growers have the opportunity to participate in the Cleaner Cotton™ market, selling local cotton to the textile and apparel markets pursuing the fast-growing consumer market for sustainable fashion.

For more information or to inquire about enrolling, please contact:

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Keep up with news and information for almond, alfalfa and cotton growers and advisors with these resources:

Ag Fax- Almonds or Cotton:

www.agfax.com

Almond Board of CA:

www.almondboard.com

Almond Doctor:

www.thealmonddoctor.com

CA Cotton Ginners & Growers Associations:

www.ccgga.org

UC IPM Year Round Program- Almonds, Alfalfa or Cotton:

www.ipm.ucdavis.edu

University of California Alfalfa & Forages:

<http://alfalfa.ucdavis.edu>

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