

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

I believe there are four mandatory elements:

- 1) Our environment: we must have:
 - our community plans in place;
 - a process that works for permitting and opening new businesses as quickly as possible;
 - accountability to the social and physical environments;
 - a community vision for all people to prosper.

- 2) Our attitude: we must commit to:
 - being positive toward each other, especially our elected officials;
 - help others succeed;
 - issue their permits expeditiously;
 - saying YES to requests from new people to live, work and play in Butte County or any of its cities.

- 3) Our behavior: we must actually DO things like:
 - issue permits on time;
 - say yes to those new people's requests;
 - VOTE as individuals and in our official capacities, particularly focusing on issues of private or public investment opportunities;
 - work with the entire community.

- 4) Our investment: we must financially support:
 - each other's work, business and new ideas;
 - those who wish to join our community;
 - the infrastructure and the service providers we use and need for the future by paying our share;
 - our neighborhoods by maintaining our buildings.

These elements MUST be present; they manifest in the form of capital availability, planned and consistent growth, positive community participation and JOBS.

Are there any other elements to ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT?

Diversity is key to successful farming in the Sierra foothills

By Bob Johnson

Horton Iris Garden in Loomis is situated on land that Doug Horton's gold miner and cattle rancher ancestors settled 150 years ago. Horton's grandparents later turned what was a 200-acre farm into a tree fruit orchard with pears, plums, peaches and a few dozen apple trees.

"All of the Loomis Basin used to be in fruit trees until fruit started coming in from farther south to hit the market first and get the best prices," said Horton, who is a fifth generation farmer on land a few miles east of Sacramento.

Horton's grandparents eventually sold off pieces of the land to be able to retire, but the family held onto 40 acres. They farm seven acres in iris bulbs, day lilies, lavender and pumpkins.

"We managed to hold onto a part of the farm," Horton said, between tours as a tractor driver carrying visiting youngsters around a seasonal pumpkin patch.

The two-acre pumpkin patch started four years ago when Doug Horton planted a few pumpkins with his daughter. The youngsters were on the farm as part of the 5th annual Placer Farm & Barn Tour that brought thousands of urban residents to 10 farms in the Sierra foothills in the middle of October.

Nearly all of the harvest at Horton Iris Garden is sold directly to visitors to the farm, and Horton said he figures many of the people who came on that Saturday afternoon this fall will be back for iris bulbs next spring.

Mandarins are one crop where growers in the foothills outside Sacramento have an edge on their competition from flatter, warmer areas.

"We're right on the edge of the region where you can grow mandarins," said Gordon Poulsen, who owns Willow Creek Ranch in Pearyn. "This is the coolest area where you can grow them. Any cooler and you won't get a crop, but any warmer and I don't think the taste is as good."

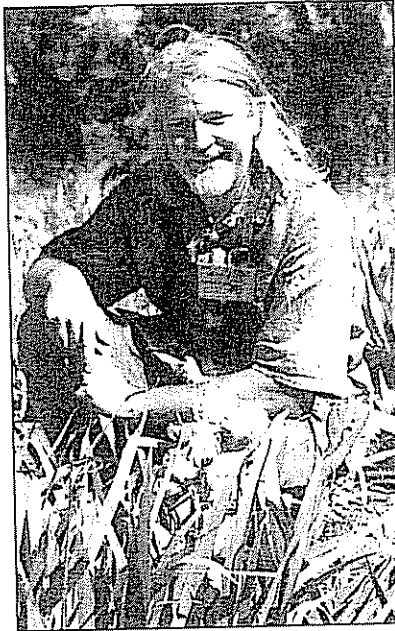
Poulsen spoke as he demonstrated how to graft and tape a new tree. He advised the visitors against using flat-edged pruners on citrus in their yards because they bruise the trees. And he also advised against using dwarf rootstocks because they starve the trees of water and nutrients.

"I won't have a dwarf tree on my place," he said. "People ask me why I plant mandarins on tight 10-foot by 10-foot spacing with standard rootstocks. I'm going to prune them to the size I want."

Poulsen takes full advantage of the cooler weather in his orchard, which is around 1,000 feet in elevation. He said he delays his harvest until the mandarins are sweet and ready to eat, which is usually around the second week of November.

"Buy from local growers," Poulsen said. "You know what you're getting, and if you have a problem with the fruit you can come and see us."

Many of the foothills farmers rely heavily on sales to nearby residents of the Sacramento metropolitan area.



Doug Horton of Horton Iris Garden in Loomis has found a way to make his small acreage produce agricultural income. The family farms seven acres in iris bulbs, day lilies, lavender and pumpkins.

Three-fourths of the bonsai trees and landscape plants from Hiro Matsuda's nursery outside Newcastle are sold to people who live less than 50 miles away.

"In bonsai we learn to keep the trees the size we want," Matsuda said, as he showed a group of well-proportioned olive trees less than 2 feet tall.

The keys to bonsai production are trimming the plant correctly and confining the roots to restrict growth to the desired size.

"There are no bonsai varieties, but we usually use dwarf varieties of fruiting plants for the proportions," Matsuda said.

While Matsuda explained the art of bonsai to several visitors, young people on the tour were drawn to a pair of gentle alpacas Bonnie Potter had brought to the nursery from her Fair Winds Alpacas in Auburn. Potter breeds and sells the animals, which naturally produce wool in a striking range of colors.

The Placer Farm & Barn Tour has become so popular among area residents, and so helpful to the foothills farmers, that it is about to evolve into a number of smaller and more manageable events.

An estimated 2,500 area residents took part in this year's tour, according to Placer County agricultural marketing director Nancy Jo Rieske. The event has become so successful over the last five years that it is being replaced by a series of seasonal events rather than one annual event. The first of these seasonal events will be this December and include Christmas tree farms, mandarin orchards and vineyards.

(Bob Johnson is a reporter in Magalia. He may be contacted at bjohn11135@aol.com.)