



# On-Farm Visitors: Do They Help or Hurt Working Farms?

*CAFF Sonoma County VIP Tour October 24, 2025  
Deep Roots Farm, Penngrove*

## Agenda:

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|---------------------|--|
| <b>8:30-9:00:</b>   | <b>Coffee, tea, and snacks</b>   |
| <b>9:00-9:05:</b>   | <b>Introductory remarks</b>  |
| <b>9:05-10:00:</b>  | <b>Panel 1: <i>Benefits of visitors on farms</i></b>                   |
| <b>10:00-10:45:</b> | <b>Farm tour of Deep Roots Farm</b>                                    |
| <b>10:45-11:40:</b> | <b>Panel 2: <i>Why &amp; How to Responsibly Manage Agritourism</i></b> |
| <b>11:40-11:55:</b> | <b>Audience Q&amp;A</b>  |
| <b>11:55-12:00:</b> | <b>Closing remarks</b>   |

# Panelists

## **Moderator: Evan Wiig, Community Alliance with Family Farmers**

Moderating today's panel is Evan Wiig, CAFF's Director of Membership and Communication. Evan is a former farmer and has also served as a Sonoma County Planning Commissioner.

## **Christopher Herrera, Deep Roots Farm**

Christopher Herrera is a multigenerational Sonoma County farmer, carrying forward his family's long heritage of working the land. As the founder of Deep Roots Farm, he blends traditional farming values with modern regenerative practices to grow nutrient-dense food for his community. With a background in business, marketing, and hands-on agriculture, Christopher's mission is to connect people to where their food comes from through fresh produce, community events, and authentic farm experiences that celebrate Sonoma County's farming legacy.

## **David Plescia, West County Community Farm**

David Plescia got his start working on CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) farms in Patagonia, Argentina, and Massachusetts. He was inspired by the community spaces these farms created, and the win-wins they delivered to both farmers and members. David and his wife Kayta moved to Sebastopol in 2013, where David worked at New Family Farm. West County Community Farm, which they founded in 2017, is known for a CSA program that operates like early CSA programs in New England and Europe.

## **Elizabeth Kaiser, Singing Frogs Farm**

Elizabeth Kaiser and her husband Paul Kaiser have operated Singing Frogs Farm in Sebastopol, California since 2007. Elizabeth is the lead farmer as well as the lead on all farm education, including farm tours, workshops, talks, and educational resources. Singing Frogs is a regenerative, intensive, ecological no-till vegetable and flower farm, and employs 5-8 full time crew members. Their CSA has 200 year-round members, and they sell to farmers' markets and a few restaurants.

## **Eric Sias, PhD, Monte Bellaria di California**

Eric Sias is the farm manager of Monte-Bellaria di California, a lavender, olive, and beekeeping farm in Sebastopol. Eric oversees staff, plant sustainability and propagation, honey production, and agritourism tours. By welcoming visitors to an active operation, he focuses on how on-farm tourism can strengthen farmer-customer relationships while safeguarding land stewardship and farm viability.

## **Rachel Boring, Boring Farm**

Rachel Boring grew up on a farm in Dalton, Georgia before pursuing a career as a contemporary ballet dancer for over 7 years. In 2017, after injuries prevented her from continuing, she looked for a change and found it in Sebastopol, California. Shortly after, she founded Boring Farm, a Certified Organic raspberry u-pick. Rachel bought the farmland from the Taber family, who built the historic farm house in 1850.

## **Carmen Snyder, Farm Trails**

Inspired by the mission of "farms forever," Carmen has served as the Executive Director of Sonoma County Farm Trails since 2012. She is passionate about promoting local farmers, educating the public about the importance of supporting local food systems, and working to instill an appreciation of agriculture as a vital part of a resilient community. In addition to overseeing Farm Trails operations, she produces the nonprofit's annual fundraiser, the Gravenstein Apple Fair.



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**\*\*A digital copy of this handout and an event summary will be sent to attendees following the event.\*\***

## Visitor-serving uses in the General Plan

The Sonoma County General Plan aims to ensure “the stability and productivity of the County’s agricultural lands and industries.” The General Plan prioritizes agricultural production over other uses of agricultural land, consistently stating that visitor-serving uses must be “**secondary and incidental**” to use of the land for “**the production of food, fiber and plant materials.**” Some key language from the General Plan’s Agricultural Element includes:

- General Plan Goal AR-6: “...visitor serving uses and facilities...must be beneficial to the agricultural industry and farm operators and compatible with long term agricultural use of the land.”
- Objective AR-6.1: “Give the highest priority in all agricultural land use categories to agricultural production activities. Visitor serving uses shall promote agriculture and enhance marketing of Sonoma County agricultural products, but shall be secondary and incidental to agricultural production.”
- Objective AR-6.2: Permit visitor serving uses in all agricultural land use categories if they support and do not adversely affect the agricultural production activities of the area.
- See the [Outline of Related Agricultural Resource Element General Plan Policies](#) for more details.

## Example regulations

**[San Mateo County Agritourism Guidelines](#)**: (Passed 2014) The Guidelines provide guidance on establishing agritourism “uses that are **secondary** to the agricultural uses of the land, support the economic viability of farming and ranching, and minimize conflicts with agricultural activities on said lands and/or adjacent lands.” The document establishes the frequency with which a farm can hold events before needing permits. It also specifies where on a farm certain event-related activities can occur, prioritizing the use of prime soil for agricultural production. It also specifically identifies what is **not** considered agritourism (i.e. weddings).

**[Santa Barbara County Ag Enterprise Ordinance \(AEO\)](#)**: (Passed 2024) The AEO aims to “help sustain the economic viability and diversity of agricultural operations.” It specifies how producers can demonstrate that their land is producing agricultural commodities, and lists nine recreational or supplementary agricultural uses. Each use has a corresponding attendee maximum, frequency with which events can occur, construction restrictions, and use permits.

**[Contra Costa County Agritourism Ordinance](#)**: (passed 2024) Contra Costa County’s ordinance “Authorizing Agritourism Uses in Agricultural Zoning Districts” defines agritourism uses as “uses that are located at a working farm, ranch, or other agricultural operation [and] are **accessory** to a primary agricultural use.” The document specifies how many of each type of event is allowed, when additional ministerial or land-use permits are required, and the number of guests allowed for each type of event.

**Low-impact Camping in CA**: [California Assembly Bill 518](#), signed into law on October 1, 2025, allows counties to authorize small-scale campgrounds under local health and safety regulations. Low-impact, on-farm camping allows farmers and ranchers to connect visitors with their agricultural operations, generate sustainable revenue, boost on-site sales, and expand direct-to-consumer efforts – all without costly and time-intensive infrastructure requirements that can be financially prohibitive as well as incompatible with agricultural production.

## Policy suggestions

- Allow these visitor-serving uses by right:
  - On LEA, LIA, DA, and AR zoned properties: tours and educational seminars on agriculture-related topics, without additional activities
  - Farms and ranches participating in Farm Trails scheduled tours
- Require events on non-agriculture related topics to have a zoning permit, occur no more often than two times per year, and have no more than 200 attendees at any time per event
- Limit % of products sold during visitor uses that are not produced or raised by farm/ranch operator
- Consider applying constraints on off-farm products, similar to those applied in the farm retail ordinance
- Create an online hub for visitor-related policy and regulations; provide assistance to farmers and ranchers seeking to navigate regulations around visitor-serving uses
- Include links within ordinances to other regulations that may be required for events, eg. Environmental Health, ABC (if alcohol will be served), Sheriff for traffic, fire regulations, etc.
- Limit infrastructure such as buildings and parking lots for visitor services in ag zones, as inflated land values make farmland less affordable for farming, and infrastructure may make land more attractive to developers and less suitable for conservation
- Clearly define key policy terms, such as “local,” “proximate,” “secondary and incidental,” “one day event”

## Resources and organizations supporting ag-centered approaches

**[Sonoma County Farm Trails](#)**: Connects the public to Sonoma County farmers, ranchers, producers, and purveyors to ensure the economic viability of local agriculture and instill an appreciation of farming and ranching as a vital part of our community.

**[Hipcamp](#)**: Facilitates small scale low-impact camping on farms. CA AB 518, signed this year, sets basic standards. See [this summary of current low-impact camping regulations in CA, including recommendations for Sonoma County](#).

**[Fibershed](#)**: Develops regional fiber systems that build soil and protect the health of the biosphere. Fibershed is based in the North Bay and their work includes workshops and other events on farms.

**[California Agricultural Tourism Directory](#)**: Lists California agritourism operations, regional and local agritourism initiatives, and a calendar of events.

## Further discussion of visitor-serving uses

**[Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education Program Agritourism Hub](#)**: Resource hub for those involved in California agritourism, with resources created by UC ANR advisors and staff, presentations and other materials shared by agritourism stakeholders and educators at UC ANR agritourism workshops, and links to resources created by other universities and organizations.

**[UCANR Workshop on Agritourism Regulations, 2024](#)**: This valuable workshop featured speakers from counties which had recently adopted or updated regulations on agritourism. These included policy makers and agritourism farmers. It's useful to learn about how other CA counties are dealing with these issues. View a recording of this workshop [here](#).

**[UCANR Agritourism Connections Blog](#)**: Short articles featuring topics of interest for agritourism in California.

**[In Oregon, How Much Agritourism Is Too Much?](#)** This article describes Oregon's attempts to grapple with a similar discussion around how much (and whether) to develop its farmland, referencing some examples from California. The article addresses the issue of infrastructure for visitors leading to increased land value, making the land too expensive for farmers and ranchers. Allowing this infrastructure and events on farmland also attracts investors who compete with those wanting to farm the land.