

Expanding Agritourism In Butte County, California



Shermain Hardesty & Penny Leff,
University of California Cooperative Extension-Davis, USA

Holly George, University of California Cooperative
Extension, Plumas-Sierra County USA

Case Study Issue



- We examine the strategies and impacts of collaboration among diverse Butte County stakeholders to support agritourism development as a means for fostering economic development



Case Study Overview

- Context
- Initiatives
- Collaborations
- Implications and Lessons Learned
- Discussion



Government Policies

- US has very limited policy supporting agritourism
- California's 1998 "Ag homestay" legislation allows working farms to host overnight visitors and serve meals cooked in the farm kitchen
- More recently, regulations adopted allowing sales of processed ag products at farm stands
- Counties bear responsibility for regulating agritourism operations
 - Some incorporated agritourism into their General Plans

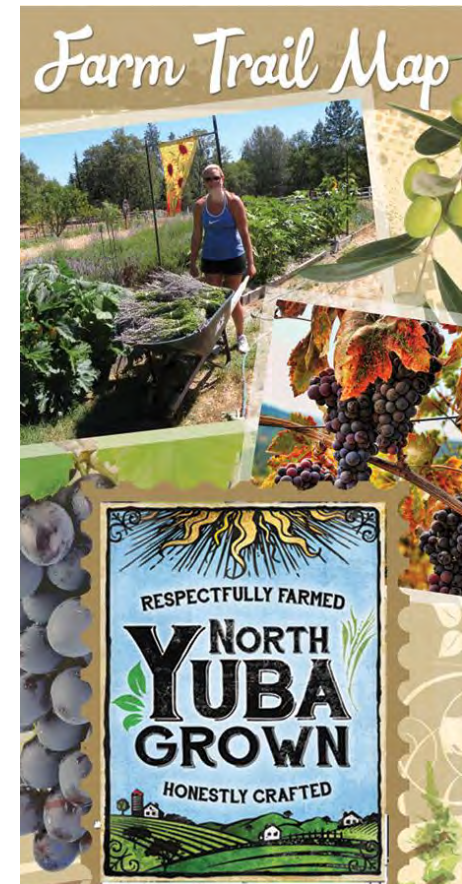
Location & Economy

- Remote location
- Sparsely populated
- Large scale agriculture dominates
 - Walnuts, almonds & rice major crops
 - Mostly sold in commodity wholesale channels
- Agritourism operations are usually part of smaller-scale farms marketing citrus, olive oil, wine, nuts, cheese & meat



Limited Extension Involvement

- In 2011, UC Small Farm Program workshop included speakers and agritourism operators from Butte County
- In 2013, UC Small Farm Program initiated a *Farm Trail* project to bring together 3 new agritourism associations in Northern California
 - Included North Yuba Grown, with 4 wineries, an olive oil ranch and a farm located in southern Butte County



Butte County Initiatives

supporting agritourism

- Sierra Oro Farm Trails Passport Weekend builds collaboration, promotes farms & wineries
- Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID) launches “Explore Butte County” marketing program
- Butte County’s supportive regulations, low permitting fees & helpful county staff



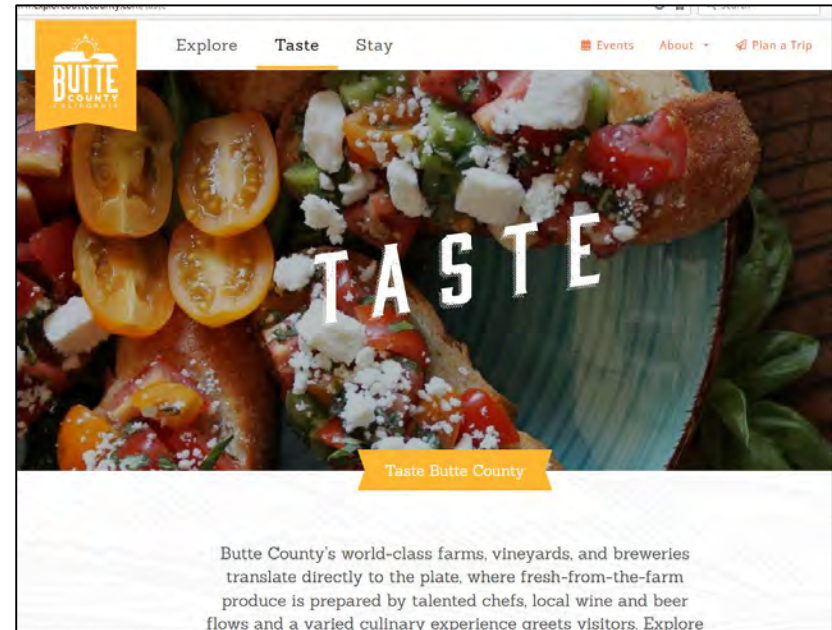
Sierra Oro Farm Trails Passport Weekend

- Two-day self-guided tour event of Butte County member farms and wineries – every fall since 2005
- Founder, director & core staff is Nicole Johansson, marketing professional and owner with her husband of Lodestar Farm olive ranch and olive oil tasting room
- 34 participating farms & wineries each pay \$250 to participate
- Tickets cost \$30 – ticket sales online, capped at 3000
- SOFT markets in other seasons for members, promotes on Explore Butte County website

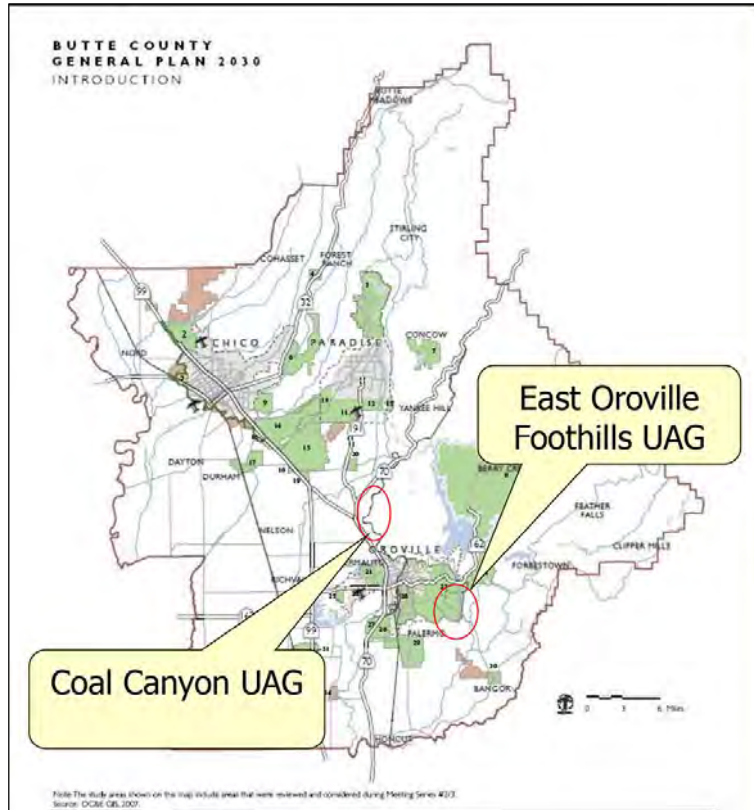


Explore Butte County Marketing Program

- Funded by Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID)
- TBID assesses 2% of revenues on overnight stays in communities where hospitality industry participates
- TBID directed by hospitality industry board; also includes SOFT director
- Website launched in 2017
- Early media campaign utilized SOFT assets, promoted farms
- TBID funding Certified Tourism Ambassador training program
- Zone marketing grants allocated to chambers and others



Agritourism-supportive county government



- Low permit fees and ease of permitting for small winery, olive oil, micro-brewery, etc. tasting rooms
- Unique Agricultural Overlay allows many agritourism activities “by right” in limited regions of county
- Low fees and friendly staff for licensing “Cottage Food” operations
- Overlay has not generated expected economic impact
- Minor Use Permits still required, for event facilities outside overlay zone
- ADA still a challenge to new operations

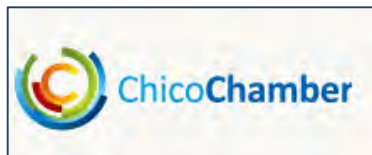
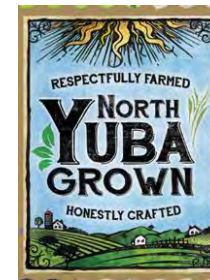
Collaboration Among Community Organizations



Ag Organizations: Sierra Oro Farm Trails, North Yuba Grown, North Sierra Wine Trail, Farm Bureau, UC Cooperative Extension

Chambers of Commerce and nonfarm businesses promoted local agtourism activities to get visitors to “*stay just one more night*”

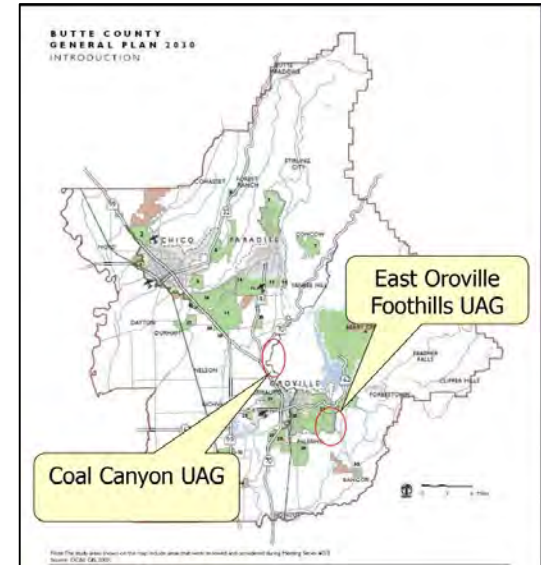
Farm City Celebration, California Nut Festival, Sierra Nevada Brewery, California State University-Chico, Cross-promotion



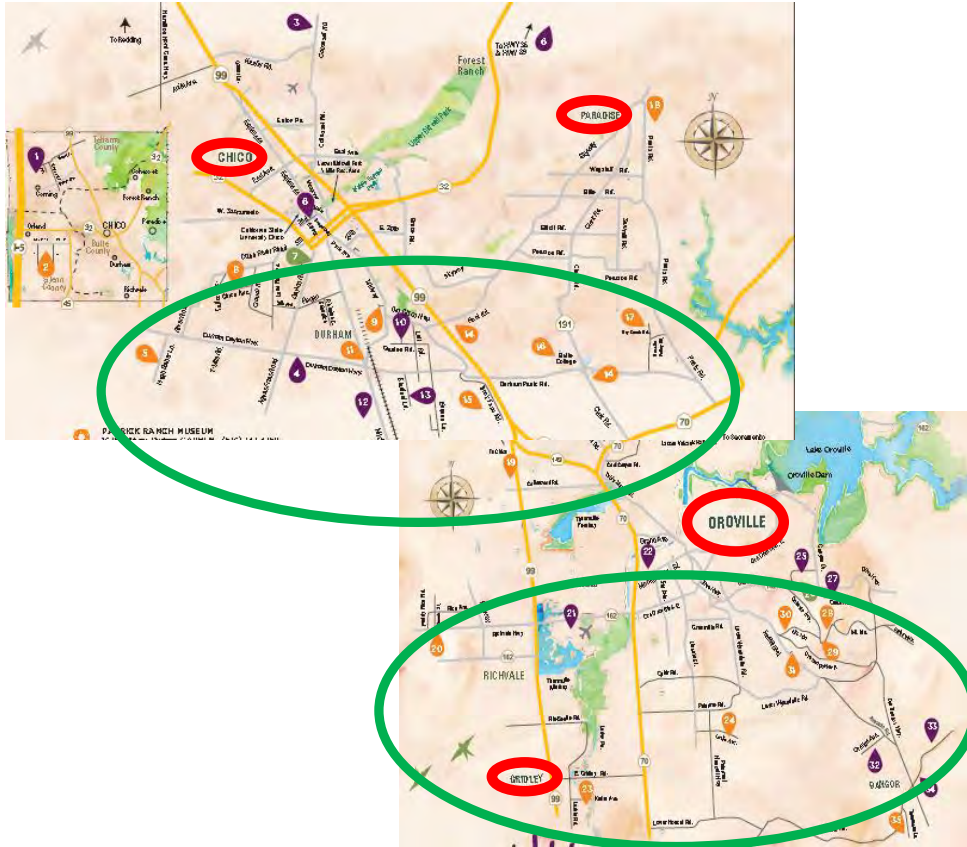
Collaborative Efforts of these Groups led to recognition by County’s Hospitality Industry of Value & Potential of Agritourism as Draw for Out-of-Region Visitors.

Challenges

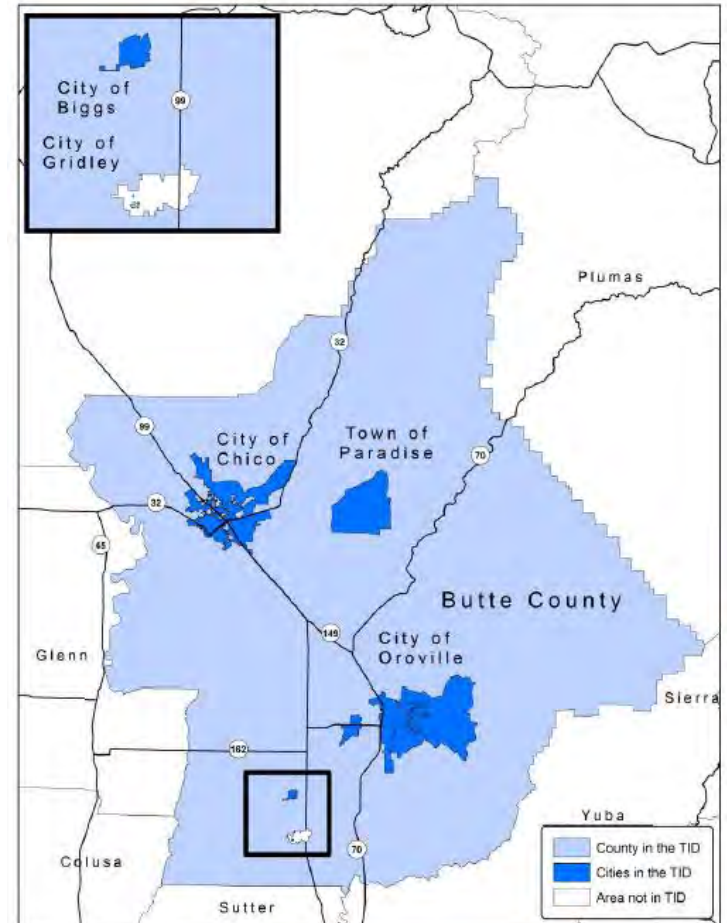
- Folks Outside Overlay Area still have regulatory hurdles
- Chicken & Egg Issue: Small Scale Operators need to be open more regular hours to be included in PR/advertising; but difficult to cover costs without increased sales
- Infrastructure Issues/ADA: Roads, Signage, Etc.
- Hospitality Training: People Skills, Communication



Sierra Oro Farm Trails Map



Butte County TBID Map



Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID)

Provides Financing, Leadership,
Marketing... With Challenges



Professionally created SOFT materials provided the new TBID with ready-made assets & promotional content – leading to easy inclusion of agritourism in the *Explore Butte County* website.

Distribution of initial grants proportional to funds collected from bed tax TBID members – lodging isn't uniformly dispersed across the county.

TBID didn't collect funds when lodging was filled with long-term patrons following 2017 Oroville Dam Issues and Repairs nor after the 2018 Camp Fire that destroyed Paradise, both in Butte County.

Lessons Learned

- Community Collaboration Set the Stage
- Regulatory Change Helps; But Is Not Enough
- Hospitality Industry Financing & Leadership a Huge Boost, With Challenges
- Continued Participation Needed by Agritourism Operators



It Might Be Beneficial

Agtourism Operators Need to Engage with Others to Help Track and Participate in Community Efforts to Encourage the County to Make Some Changes....

- Provide Road Improvements and Signage to Support their Operations
- Continue Investment of Some ***Explore Butte*** Funds for Coordinated Promotion of Agritourism
- Reduce Costly Regulatory Requirements for Event Operations that are Outside the Unique Ag Overlay
- Hospitality Training...similar to Oregon's Tourism Studios

Discussion Questions

- Are there opportunities to collaborate with Rice Producers, Audubon, Art and Others like Land Trusts to Broaden Support?
- How do opportunities/challenges faced by Butte County agritourism operators compare to those in your area?
- What are your suggestions for helping small-scale operators to increase visitors and sales without increasing financial obligations?
- Funding from TBID appears to be an asset for Butte County Tourism. How might ag operators throughout the county better engage with TBID for mutual benefit?
- Any ideas for engaging policymakers into making changes related to road improvements, signage and costly regulatory requirements?