



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Grand Opening of Sacramento Strawberry Season Just in Time for Mothers' Day

PRESS EVENT: *May 8, 2009, 10:00am, Lo Saetern's strawberry stand, corner of Florin and Elk Grove-Florin Roads, Sacramento. Come taste the best, freshest strawberries including new varieties and learn about University of California and Farm Bureau efforts to support local farms.*

As May nears, savvy Sacramento shoppers with an interest in buying fresh and local food keep an eye out for the OPEN sign on their favorite strawberry stand.

They eagerly anticipate sinking their teeth into some of the most juicy and deliciously sweet strawberries the marketplace has to offer. Customers tend to buy from the same farm stand year after year, savoring their purchase, but have very little knowledge about who their favorite strawberry farmer is.

Most of the 95 strawberry farm stands in and around the Sacramento region are owned and operated by Mien and Hmong refugees from Laos, a small country in Southeast Asian that neighbors Vietnam.

"Many Americans are unaware of the war in Laos, in which hundreds of thousands of Hmong and Mien allied with the CIA to reduce the spread of communism in Southeast Asia" says Jennifer Sowerwine, UC Berkeley researcher.

When the U.S. left Southeast Asia in 1975, hundreds of thousands of Hmong and Mien fled their homeland to avoid persecution. Over 120,000 were eventually resettled in the U.S. The population today has expanded to an estimated 300,000, with nearly 35,000 residing in the Sacramento area alone.

Most of the refugees were farmers in Laos. In an effort to rebuild their lives, many turned to farming in the U.S. Most growers lease small plots of land, growing several varieties of strawberries to perfection. As one customer put it, "You simply can't buy this quality of berry anywhere else than at the farm stand!"

A team of researchers and scientists from UC Berkeley and Sacramento County UC Cooperative Extension are trying to increase the availability of the top-quality fruit. With a grant from the USDA-National Research Initiative, they are exploring various strategies to enhance the economic viability of Southeast Asian farms in Sacramento and Fresno by identifying new marketing opportunities for these growers. These include sales to local grocery stores, inclusion in public school lunch programs, community farm stands, and other creative venues.

In addition, the grant aims to expand culturally appropriate training in crop and pest management, and food safety through on-farm training and cooperative, on-farm research into possible new strawberry varieties and ecologically based pest management. They are developing an educational DVD in Hmong, Mien and Lao languages as an enduring outreach method to reach the evolving population of Southeast Asian growers. The project also seeks new land opportunities for these limited resource growers.

The Sacramento Farm Bureau and the UC team, with funding from the Sacramento County Economic Development Department, are addressing barriers faced by local farmers who are trying to sell food through local supermarkets, restaurants, and direct markets in Sacramento County.

A Grow & Buy Local Initiative was developed by a committee that includes the University of California Cooperative Extension, agricultural commissioner, rural home owners associations, farmers and ranchers, and local officials.

“The end result is to get a distribution system in place so fresh, wholesome products, produced locally, are consumed locally,” said Charlotte Mitchell executive director of the Sacramento County Farm Bureau and contact for the Grow & Buy Local initiative.

Consumers can play a big part in supporting local, family farms in Sacramento by sampling some of the strawberry growers’ exceptionally delicious fruit beginning in mid April. To find the farm nearest you, visit the following link that displays a searchable Google map of the strawberry farms in Sacramento:

<http://cesacramento.ucdavis.edu>

To learn more about this work, please refer to the following resources:

UC Berkeley-UC Cooperative Extension NRI Collaborative

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Sacramento County Farm Bureau and Grow and Buy Local Initiative

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To learn more about the Southeast Asian Refugee Community, please refer to the following publications available at online bookstores:

The Latehomecomer: A Hmong Family Memoir by Kao Kalia Yang

The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down by Anne Fadiman

Tangled Threads: A Hmong Girl's Story by Pegi Deitz Shea

**The Hills of Home: A Collection of Folk Stories By the Mien Community
Portland, Or.** by Long Tzing Tzeo and Kay Donahue