

Drought Impact: Water, Agriculture and Farmers

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AUBURN, Calif. More than 85 local, state, and federal representatives toured Placer County last week to learn about local water resources, agriculture, and how farmers are dealing with the drought.

The tour began at Placer County Water Agency (PCWA), where participants were welcomed by Placer County Supervisor Jim Holmes, PCWA General Manager David Breninger, and Placer Resource Conservation District (RCD) Executive Director Elisa Noble.

PCWA staff began by providing an overview of the water resources in Placer County and of the PCWA system, in particular. Participants then loaded onto buses and traveled to the PCWA American River pump station near the Auburn Dam overlook. Here they saw and learned about the river restoration project and the associated pump station that lifts water 400-feet to make it available to PCWA

customers, including farmers in western Placer County. PCWA were gracious hosts, and participants thoroughly enjoyed this portion of the tour.

The second stop was a ranch just west of Auburn where Dan Macon of Flying Mule Farm grazes his sheep. Dan provided an overview of their business that sells lamb meat and wool, and demonstrated the ability of his herding dog, "Mo," to move sheep. Some of the biggest impacts of drought on Flying Mule Farm have been the need to downsize their flock, find additional feed, and make the decision to not sell any meat products this year.

The third and final stop was Highland Orchard, a mandarin orchard and cane berry farm owned by the Tony Aguilar family in Penryn. Tony explained how they manage their farm, and what management decisions they have had to make because of the drought. Highland Orchard runs a very efficient irrigation system, utilizing automatic controllers to guarantee the timing and exact amount of water applied.

Participants were then provided a delicious lunch of tri-tip and salad sourced from local farms, and ice cream with fresh-picked Highland Orchard berries. Placer High FFA barbequed the tri-tip, served the meal, and helped with many other logistics.

The annual Ag Tour is coordinated by Placer Resource Conservation District with the goal of providing government officials an on-the-ground exposure to Placer County agriculture. The tour is sponsored and supported by the Placer County Board of Supervisors, PCWA, Nevada Irrigation District (NID), Placer County Farm Bureau, Sierra Nevada Conservancy, the United Auburn Indian Community, and several other partners.

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