

Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau Ask Laura Newsletter Column  
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Q: How would you recommend I learn more about farming? I'm a fairly new farmer of about 20 acres and there is so much to know.

A: The University of California Cooperative Extension has the perfect resource for you! We just completed and published the second edition of the Small Farm Handbook in March 2011, which has something for everyone. The intent of the handbook is to provide small farm operators such as yourself with a comprehensive, up-to-date resource that will help you better understand all of the major considerations of small-scale farming. The publication is the result of the efforts of many UC specialists, farm advisors, and small-scale farmers, all of whom provided expertise and insights into the many topics, issues, and facets of California's small-scale agriculture. The handbook has three main sections:

1. *Background Skills and Knowledge*, which covers the basic considerations and requirements for farming successfully.
2. *The Business Side*, which includes chapters on how to select a particular crop or animal enterprise for your farm, considerations for managing your farm and your finances, marketing and selling your products, and managing employees you might hire.
3. *The Farming Side*, which has information on growing crops, postharvest handling and safety of perishable crops, and raising animals.

There are also six profiles of small and family farms distributed throughout the book that include information about each group, how they started in farming, and how they have successfully managed their operations over time. These are very interesting and inspiring stories that show how innovative, dedicated, and industrious California farmers are!

Finally, there are chapters that discuss the viability of small-scale agriculture in California, and statistical information that traces the history and current status of small and family farms in the state.

For more information about the handbook, you may visit the following web link: <http://anrcatalog.ucdavis.edu/NewAdditions/3526.aspx>, or please stop by our office, which has copies available for purchase.

A few other helpful on-line resources include:

The Small Farm Program, based at UC Davis: <http://www.sfp.ucdavis.edu/>

The Farm Business and Market Place Web Site:  
<http://ucce.ucdavis.edu/farmbusinessandmarketplace/>

The National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service: <http://attra.org/>

Please let us know how else we can assist you, and best wishes with your new farming operation!