

THE SMALL FARM HANDBOOK: AN EXTENSION RESOURCE

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For centuries small farms and family farms have been an integral part of American agriculture, and their importance continues today. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) currently defines a *small farm* as one that is family operated and grosses less than \$250,000 in annual farm gate sales. In California, many family farms that run on relatively small acreages produce high-value row crops such as vegetables and berries, and because of this many of them, while small in terms of acreage, exceed the USDA's figure for gross farm sales. Nevertheless, fully 84% of all farms in California meet this standard, with some counties in the state reporting up to 94% of their farms as small.

In California, one of the hallmarks of agriculture is its diversity, not just in the types of crops produced and marketed, but in farm operator demographics, such as ethnicity, gender, age, and style of farm management. Recognizing this diversity, and the need for educational materials that could reach a broad cross section of the farming community, the first edition of the **Small Farm Handbook** was published in 1994. Over 4,300 copies of this well-received publication were sold between 1994 and 2005. It became an invaluable resource, not only for the state's small farm operators, but for agricultural professionals advising them.

In 2006, a group of University of California Cooperative Extension Farm Advisors and Specialists identified a need to update this important resource for the state's beginning and small farm community, and began work on the second edition of the **Small Farm Handbook**. The overarching goal of the project is to provide a comprehensive, up-to-date resource for small farm operators, to discuss emerging trends and issues for California agriculture, and to highlight innovative methods for better production and management, all of which can lead to better farm performance.

This peer-reviewed resource is in the final stages of publication, and information will be available at the International Farm Management Congress. The handbook contains topics relevant for small operators, including farm and financial management, novel or specialty crops, animal agriculture, direct marketing and value-added products, food safety and post harvest handling, risk management, and considerations for labour management. Profiles of six small farm operators representing a sample of California's diverse agriculture are nested within the handbook. A discussion of the vitality and viability of small farms, as well as a statistical history of the state's agriculture is also part of the publication. One sample appraisal reads "**The Small Farm Handbook** is the only publication that covers the entire breadth of the major practices encountered in operating a small farm. The book is very readable and technically accurate."

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