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### **WORKSHOPS HELP SPECIALTY CROP FARMS “BEAT THE ODDS”**

Farming has always been a risky business. This is even more so for today’s high-return crops such as nuts, tree fruits and vegetables. To maintain profitability, specialty crop farmers are encouraged to look at new ways to manage risk.

A series of workshops with information about new programs and strategies to reduce risk in the marketing of specialty crops is being offered by a group of California bargaining associations in conjunction with the University of California and the United States Department of Agriculture’s Risk Management Agency.

“Beating the Odds: Reducing Market Risk for Specialty Crops,” will be held twice during the year. The first workshop takes place May 22<sup>nd</sup> at the Yuba City Veteran’s Building. A publication containing workshop presentations will be distributed by the University later this year.

“A wide range of strategies exist to reduce risk and farmers are already familiar with traditional methods like crop insurance and crop contracting,” said Shermain Hardesty, Cooperative Extension economist and director of the Rural Cooperatives Center in the UC Davis Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics. “Many new opportunities are available to farmers through government programs and producer associations. The more farmers know about risk management strategies, the better equipped they will be to employ them in their own operations. Successful management of risk can mean the difference between a profitable farming operation and unsustainable losses.”

Hardesty’s May 22<sup>nd</sup> presentation will be *The Power of Producer Collaboration*. “Bargaining associations have been in existence for many years to ensure farmers receive a fair price for their products,” she noted. “Today bargaining associations are about much more than price negotiations with buyers. Modern bargaining associations work with farmers to navigate complex government programs, develop marketing strategies and understand international supply/demand conditions.”

A group of specialty crop bargaining associations for commodities, including tomatoes, prunes, walnuts, olives and raisins, has partnered with the University on its grant from USDA's Risk Management Agency to help educate farmers about improved risk management strategies. The workshops are part of this effort. In addition, the bargaining associations are offering to visit local farms and conduct smaller "tailgate" meetings to provide similar information.

"The May 22<sup>nd</sup> workshop being held in Yuba City is the first formal event designed to help farmers learn more about new programs and ideas for risk management," said Greg Thompson, President of the Prune Bargaining Association. "We have a great program planned with speakers from several commodity groups and the University. We even have an expert on negotiations coming in who will teach new skills for bargaining."

The Yuba City event begins at 8:30 a.m. with coffee and pastries. Sun-Maid President Barry Kriebel will open the event with the outlook for dried fruit and nuts and a report from the International Nut Conference held recently in Spain. Other agenda topics include a presentation on assessing long-term planting decisions by Karen Klonsky, Cooperative Extension economist at UC Davis, and a panel discussion on emerging specialty crops in the Sacramento Valley.

"During lunch, our keynote speaker is Dan Sumner, director of the UC Agricultural Issues Center, who will provide an update on new programs for specialty crops being proposed as part of the 2007 Farm Bill," continued Thompson. "We have heard that the proposed Farm Bill includes some significant changes for specialty crops and we are all interested in learning about what new opportunities may exist as part of this legislation."

Thompson urged growers to attend the meeting and to register now to receive a price break. A flyer and registration form has been mailed to several thousand growers, but all farmers with an interest in the topic are invited to attend. Cost for registration and lunch is \$25 if received before May 13. After May 13, the cost goes up to \$35. To register or for more information, please contact Jonathan Barker, Agricultural and Resource Economics, UC Davis, One Shields Ave., Davis, CA 95616. Phone (530) 752-2408; or e-mail [jbarker@ucdavis.edu](mailto:jbarker@ucdavis.edu).

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