

## Farmers observe meeting season

Don Curlee Ag at Large 3:27 p.m. PST December 15, 2014

(Photo: Submitted)

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California farmers have been gathering by the thousands to complete one of the most strategic events on their calendars, the meeting season.

Everything from marketing, cultural and production practices, economics, government regulations, research, politics, farm equipment and, especially this year, water and irrigation needs, are causes for meetings. Expert speakers are lined up, halls and meeting rooms are reserved, demonstrations are arranged and fare for meals are planned.

Sponsors can be trade and commodity associations, university and college departments, bank and business associates, publications and established membership organizations or sometimes community events, festivals or memorial celebrations.

Fall is the time for these gatherings which seem to occur in profusion. Meetings where specific issues or topics are presented are scheduled at other times through the year as needs arise, but the concentrated meeting schedule for the state's agricultural community is fall, primarily October and November. December is avoided for the most part to allow holiday and family emphasis. A notable exception is California Farm Bureau, the state's largest organization of farmers, meeting annually in December.

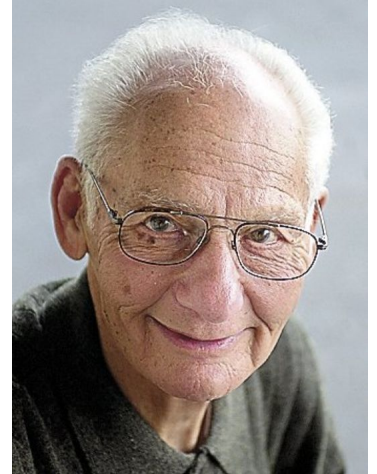
The season begins to taper off in January, but for the past 48 years has risen to an exciting climax with the two major farm equipment shows in Colusa and Tulare during the first and second weeks of February. Each of them includes schedules for seminars and meetings as well amid the colorful displays of shiny farm equipment and specialized supplies and services.

Unlike Midwest agriculture where late fall and winter weather dictate a hiatus in ground-based farming, the California agricultural scene is mostly year around. Producers of some late fall and winter crops such as citrus must make special arrangements to attend strategic fall meetings, leaving continuing work — even harvest — to competent employees on the farm, ranch, orchard or vineyard.

For winemakers fall is strategic as the grapes are harvested, crushed and allowed to ferment under carefully supervised conditions. Meetings away from the vineyard have to take second place. Fall is not the most convenient time for all agricultural producers to come together, but it's the best that busy California farm interests have found.

Most of these meetings do not lead to decisions or pronouncements. They are not structured to do that. They are predominately informative, updating, even educational. Attendees are exposed to stuff that leaves them talking to one another to arrive at answers to challenges presented, or choices they can make.

One publisher of a series of specialized magazines that he sends to nut crop growers, fresh fruit producers, vegetable farmers, fresh fruit growers and dairymen schedules several equipment shows each year. They feature displays of the specialized equipment for each of the industries spotlighted, and attendees are treated to one or more breakfast or lunch meals. Attendance seems to grow each year.



Fall is often the time the major associations of farmers, ranchers and growers choose to meet. These are usually three-day events, with programs for wives, commemorative events, recreational diversions such as golf tournaments and semi-formal dinners. Decisions offered by a group's board of directors are often confirmed by the total group, sometimes setting a course for the year ahead.

Locations chosen for the meetings are often dictated by the event itself. Some are traditionally held at given locations, repeating year after year. Others alternate from a location in the northern section of the concentration of expected attendees, alternating yearly with a site in the southern portion.

Whatever their composition or character, group assemblies are a major part of the communication system for farmers in California to stay informed. Farmers seem to live by seasons. "A time to plant, a time to reap," the Bible says. In heavily farmed California one of the most important, and by no means the least enjoyable, is the meeting season. Dismissed.

*Don Curlee is a freelance writer who specializes in agricultural issues.*

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