

Assessing the Local Marketing Potential For Mandarin Growers in Placer County

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Executive Summary

The world supply of mandarins is showing an upward trend, as mandarins become more popular and production efforts increase. The United States is far behind other regions of the world in production, but this is due to a historically lower consumption pattern than in regions such as Asia. In some Asian countries, mandarins are the highest valued citrus family. Still, as mandarins develop a reputation as a healthy, easy-to-eat food, and more Americans include greater amounts of fresh fruits and vegetables in their diet, the demand for mandarins in the U.S. is rising. Currently Americans eat approximately three pounds of mandarins per year. Most are consumed fresh, with very little volume processed for juice or canned products. The majority of the demand resides in the Pacific Northwest; California is among the leaders in increased acreage planted to mandarins. Placer County has been reflecting this growth in recent years. It is ranked fifth in production in the state for increased acreage planted, and per capita consumption in the county was up to almost four pounds last year.

Mandarin sales in Placer County commonly occur on farm, directly between the grower and consumer. With more large-scale operations entering into mandarin production, local growers have had to re-think their marketing habits. Current marketing channels for local fruit include wholesale, direct retail, institutional sales, farmers markets, seasonal festivals and farm tours, and holiday shipping, with the last four methods accounting for only 11 percent of sales. Still, agriculturalists are facing major obstacles to local and statewide markets, largely because of the effects of global agricultural trends, and a lack of grower knowledge about agricultural marketing and promotion. Agricultural livelihoods and farmland are increasingly threatened by development and the rapid urbanization of Placer County.

However, opportunities for increasing mandarin sales for local growers do exist. Placer County has the only county-appointed agricultural marketing specialist, as well as local officials and an agricultural support staff who are sympathetic to farming issues. The county is also the home to a well-established system of farmers markets, the decade-old Mandarin Festival, and a

newly established grove tour. Opportunities for further development highlighted in this report center on increased product differentiation, further utilization of existing resources such as the PlacerGROWN label, the continuation of efforts to organize mandarin growers, increased efforts to educate the general public about this unique local product and the importance of supporting regional agriculture, and increases in innovative and new marketing venues.

Summary of Opportunities:

- **Product Differentiation**
 - Market the unique flavor of *mountain-grown* mandarins
 - Promote the *local* aspect of mandarin production
 - Develop value-added products such as juice, jams, chutneys, and sauces

- **Utilization of Existing Resources**
 - Take advantage of educational opportunities and support from University of California Cooperative Extension, including farm advisor Cindy Fake
 - Utilize the support and resources offered by the Agriculture Commissioner, Christine Turner
 - Utilize the marketing and networking services of PlacerGROWN and the Director of Agricultural Marketing, Joanne Neft

- **Continuation of Efforts to Organize Mandarin Growers**
 - Increase the level of cooperation among local producers
 - Consider the non-profit and coalition models of other agricultural associations

- **Targeting and Educating Consumers**
 - Capitalize on new residents moving into the area as a pool of potential consumers
 - Market beyond Placer County to surrounding areas
 - Raise awareness about the existence, uniqueness, and significance of locally grown mandarins
 - Educate consumers about the health benefits of eating mandarins

- **Development and Expansion of Marketing Strategies**
 - Internet Web sites
 - Direct retail
 - Direct sales
 - Placer County mandarin label
 - Ag Tourism
 - Newly established Mountain Mandarin Magic tour
 - Increased investment into marketing