Cal Poly Hosts Rare Fruit Growers, State Ag Secretary

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California Secretary of Agriculture Speaks at Cal Poly Sept. 8

SAN LUIS OBISPO - Ever munched a miracle? Chewed a cherimoya? Peeled a purple banana? They were standard fare at the 2006 Festival of Fruit, held at Cal Poly Sept. 8-9.

The Festival of Fruit was sponsored by the Central Coast Chapter of the California Rare Fruit Growers, the world’s largest association of amateur fruit growers, and co-hosted by the College of Agriculture.

The guest of honor was California Secretary of Food and Agriculture A.G. Kawamura. Following a morning tour of the Crops Unit and Community Orchard on campus, Secretary Kawamura delivered the keynote address at the opening session in Chumash Auditorium.

Just in time for apple season, local orthodontist and See Canyon fruit grower Dr. John DeVincenzo touted his latest creation, “Heaven Scent,” during the Friday afternoon session. DeVincenzo says the name says it all, “tender flesh, incredibly crisp, melts in your mouth.” It's one of five new apple varieties DeVincenzo has recently created with his innovative growing techniques.

Another apple expert, Phil Forsline, the curator of America's apple “museum” at Cornell University, shared his insights on one of the world’s most popular fruits. Forsline has tasted every one of the 2,500 apple varieties at the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s collection at Cornell. He eats at least three apples a day and says his mission is to improve the flavor, quality and nutritional value of the commercially grown apple.

All the way from Helsinki University in Finland, world-renowned banana specialist Markku Hakkinen wrapped up the afternoon session with a presentation on rare and wild bananas.

More than 400 rare fruit growers, local high school agriculture leaders, Future Farmers of America officers, and horticulture experts from around the world attended the event.

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