

ALUMNI FOCUS

CULTIVATING SUCCESS

UC Davis helped Ernie Farley find a rewarding career in the produce industry

ERNIE FARLEY ('87, agricultural sciences and management) is a widely respected leader in the produce industry who is building bridges with his alma mater—quite an accomplishment for someone who had no exposure to agriculture until he came to UC Davis.

Farley built a successful career growing strawberries, founded his own company, Sundance Berry Farms, and became a partner in the fresh produce company, Andrew Williamson Fresh Produce, which sells and distributes tomatoes and berries grown in California and Mexico to major retailers and restaurants.

“Alpha Gamma Rho was the catalyst that showed me farming operations, something I hadn’t experienced before.”

outdoor feeling and expansive campus—and, obviously, its quality education,” he said.

In his sophomore year, Farley joined the Alpha Gamma Rho (AGR) fraternity and the doors of opportunity opened. Through AGR he established lifelong friendships and met his future bride, Kathy Devery.

“That’s when I really began to see agriculture as a career path,” Farley said. “Alpha Gamma Rho was the catalyst that showed me farming operations, something I hadn’t experienced before.”

He visited the farms of fellow fraternity brothers and learned about agriculture from the inside. Two of his current business partners, Fred Williamson and John King, are fraternity brothers and UC Davis graduates.

UC Davis extension specialist Bob Kasmire helped Farley gain more inside knowledge of the produce business by encouraging him to take a short course in the postharvest technology of horticultural crops so he could meet working professionals and learn about real-world industry practices.

“I chose Davis for the atmosphere, its active lifestyle, its



KATIE FARLEY

Ernie Farley has been instrumental in showing UC Davis students the world of opportunity that exists in California’s produce industry.

He described his major as a versatile tool that grounded him in both the business and science of agriculture. “I developed a library of terms and an understanding that enabled me to become an effective team member after I graduated,” he said.

Farley has been active in a number of industry leadership posts, including the Grower-Shipper Association and the Produce Marketing Association. He also is part of the forward-thinking Equitable Food Initiative, a stakeholder group developing solutions for social justice and environmental issues. Through this effort, thousands of farm workers have been trained in communication skills, conflict management, rights and responsibilities and food safety.

In recent years, Farley became instrumental in organizing tours of coastal produce operations for UC Davis students. He also became a member of the CA&ES Dean’s Advisory Council, a new experience he relishes.

“There are so many challenges facing the production of food for the world,” he said. “It’s absolutely inspiring to listen to so many smart people and learn what they’re doing to come up with solutions.”

—John Stumbos