



## EDITOR'S COLUMN

*"Who's gonna buy all this food?"* -  
David Retsky, County Line Farm

Spring time. As we plant and plan, this thought expressed by David Retsky stirs the mind a little, no matter what the consumer demand may be out there.

Farmers are a cautious bunch, used to being bushwacked by weather, bugs, gas prices, and fickle marketplace surprises. Even with today's explosive consumer demand for fresh and local farm products, we are careful not to seem too optimistic, or even accept what is happening with the current food to fork phenomena.

But it is happening. A new local meat buying club is well under way in Sonoma County (see article on page 2). Farmer David Retsky has added 26 acres to his operation and growers are looking at adding more specialty crops like apples and pears.

Our office here at Marin UC Cooperative Extension is bustling with our spring activities, with upcoming workshops, helpful publications on farm diversification, fieldwork, and putting the last touches on a video documenting the *"Hidden Bounty of Marin."* We, too, are busy.

The season bursts with activity. In no time at all, the farmers' markets will be packed and we will be feasting. It will be summer.  
- Steve Quirt, Editor

## *County Line Farm moves west*

Family. . .friends. . .work. . .community. . .faith. . .fitness. . .finances. . .personal creativity. . .and now food? And not just food, food with an agenda, food with consequences. Today's eaters must navigate a sea of certifications and terms: organic, humane, salmon-safe, natural, sustainable, transitional, no-spray — all designed to "help" eaters decide what to eat.

Adding another ball to the juggle, we're now aspiring to be locavores. How far does your food travel and where do you draw the line? What does "local" mean to you? However committed you are to eating only what's in season, whatever line you draw for where your food comes from, we believe that the most important piece of the puzzle is being conscious of the fact that the food we eat is an investment in the world we want to create.

It's a lot to balance, but awareness is the first step toward enlightenment, and the farmers' market is the perfect place to practice. So suit up, grab your canvas bags, and we'll see you at practice this Sunday and Thursday from 8am-1pm. Evening workouts in Novato and Fairfax start in May.

David Retsky is a first generation farmer growing a diverse variety of organic salad greens and vegetables on 6 acres in Sonoma county since 2000, and 26 acres in Marin since 2007. For the full interview visit [marinfarmersmarket.org](http://marinfarmersmarket.org).

Q: *Does your family have any history in farming?*

A: David: Promise you won't hold it against me - I grew up in Beverly Hills. No one has a green thumb in my family. I am definitely a first generation farmer. When my family comes up to visit they're like "OK, wow, this is different! . . .OK, let's go." It's dirty up here on the farm, and I'm talkin' real dirt, not tabloid dirt. You don't see dirt like this in L.A.

Q: *What attracted you to farming? How did you land at County Line?*

A: David: I grew up not knowing where food came from, but I remember watching our gardener as a kid and being fascinated. In 1992, I started working on farms in England, Portugal, New Zealand, and Israel. I volunteered at the Fairview Gardens in Santa Barbara, and then studied Agroecology at UC Santa Cruz. I was searching for balance, for a connection to the earth, and I found it in farming. In '99, I put an ad in a few newspapers: "Organic farmer seeks 6-12 acres, must have water." When the County Line property surfaced, my family loaned me the seed money. I bought a couple tractors and just gave it a go. I paid back the loan in three years. Eight years later, we've grown our production from 6 acres to 32 acres - 2007 was a doozy of a year. We've helped some other farmers get started, and we still can't meet the huge demand for organic vegetables.



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## Apple grafting & pruning with Paul Vossen



Fifty farmers gathered at the Chileno Valley Gale Ranch on an icy January Tuesday to learn basic grafting and pruning practices from Paul Vossen, UCCE Specialty Crop Advisor. Paul is a pomologist (apple expert), and a passionate orchardist with his own trees and berries. Peter Worsley from Pt.

Reyes joined in with his considerable experience as an apple grower to shed light on the mysteries of grafting and pruning apple trees. The Marin County UCCE office provided grafting tools, apple rootstock, scion material, hot coffee, and huge pots of hot chile for the freezing farmers and home gardeners. Marin Organic brought sandwiches and, as usual, facilitated the event. Most attendees brought scion (scion is a detached shoot or twig containing buds from a woody plant) from home or rare trees to graft to either a semi-dwarf or true dwarf rootstock provided by UCCE.

After a winter pruning demonstration in Mike and Sally Gale's orchard, the attendees crammed into the tool barn and learned grafting from Paul and Peter, with tools provided by CE. For an hour or more, farmers exchanged scion and technique and grafted over 200 new trees.

Grafting your own varieties to rootstock suited to your regional climate makes a lot of sense. Also the opportunity to reclaim lost varieties from ancient trees is always fascinating. Dennis Dierks from Paradise Valley Produce brought mystery scion from the antique trees on his farm and from relic apple trees that he found in parts of the Golden Gate National Seashore. The more we preserve these heirlooms, the greater our local diversity.

Rootstock is readily available from nurseries like Treco Nurseries (<http://www.treco.nu/>) and Willamette Nurseries (<http://willamettenurseries.com/>), both in Oregon. Other sources are available; do your research. Three-eighths-inch rootstock can be had for about 70 cents each in bundles of a hundred. It may be good idea to form a buying group to get the rootstock, divide it up and graft away.  
- Steve Quirt

## Agricultural educational resources now available through the Grown in Marin website

You can now access local educational resources about agriculture through the Grown in Marin website. In cooperation with the Marin Agricultural Education Alliance (MAEA), the UC Cooperative Extension 4-H program created a "Resources for Educators" section to showcase the wealth of local agricultural information available for teachers in Marin County. You can now find the full "Food for Thought" curriculum, learn more about field trips to local farms, download the Marin Farm & Ranch map produced by MALT, and check out the Marin County Master Gardeners as school garden consultants, to name a few options. We're proud to announce that we will be holding another Summer Ag Institute for teachers in 2008 - information and registration is also available online through the Grown in Marin/Resources for Educators website. For any suggestions or questions, please contact Janice Alexander at [jalexander@ucdavis.edu](mailto:jalexander@ucdavis.edu) or 415-499-3041. - Janice Alexander

## Sonoma County consumers buy locally produced meat

Preferring to support local producers and reduce global warming, residents join the Sonoma County Meat Buying Club

First there was the low carb diet, now there is a movement toward a low carbon diet. Conscious of global warming and the size of their own carbon footprint, consumers in Sonoma County have begun buying their meat locally to reduce transportation pollution that spews carbon into the atmosphere.

The year-long pilot project is organized by University of California Cooperative Extension and Sonoma Direct, a local meat company with processing and distribution capacity, to connect consumers with local family-owned farms.

"We intend to create an entity that is self-sustaining in the long run and can serve as a model for other communities," said Stephanie Larson, UC Cooperative Extension livestock and range advisor and club organizer. "If this club proves to be successful, we will recruit and train a county-based nonprofit organization to take over managing the meat-buying club after the pilot year ends."

The Sonoma County Meat Buying Club has 65 members so far, but more have expressed interest in buying from local ranches that practice humane treatment of animals and environmental stewardship. In the organizers'

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"Meat" continued from page 2.

survey of 300 Sonoma County residents, 83 percent of those surveyed said they make an effort to buy locally produced agricultural goods. Residents also want to support Sonoma County's ranching landscapes and heritage.



Club member Heather Curran of Windsor has been a member of a CSA (community supported agriculture) for produce for the past 12 years. She is glad that a CSA has been formed to buy meat

because she likes supporting her agricultural "neighbors."

After reading in Michael Pollan's book "The Omnivore's Dilemma" about the stressful lives of livestock that are mass-produced in feedlots, Curran wanted to buy meat produced in Sonoma County. "We have open pasture and if you have happy animals, they are going to be healthier," Curran said. "And the less it has to travel, the less pollution."

Curran also likes the fact that she can meet the people producing her food. By meeting their food producers, consumers feel more confident about the quality of the meat.

Club members receive a monthly mix of frozen meats -- grass-fed beef, pasture-raised lamb and roaster pork, in a variety of cuts -- from Sonoma County ranches. Members can sign up for a small, medium, or large package. They may also add monthly featured products, such as rabbits, ducks, and eggs. Members picked up their first installment of meat on Feb. 20 at Sonoma Direct in Petaluma or at the UC Cooperative Extension office in Santa Rosa. Tucked into each reusable cloth bag of food was a monthly newsletter that suggests recipes and tells members about the ranchers who produce the meats.

The February issue of "The Prime Cut Review" features Chris Cornett, a fifth-generation rancher who raises lambs in Valley Ford; Bill Barboni of Petaluma, a fourth-generation cattle producer who raises grass-fed beef cattle; and Jube Begley, a Santa Rosa pork producer who took up raising pigs while participating in FFA in high school.

The newsletter also introduces Roger Praplan, chef of La Gare Restaurant in Santa Rosa. Chef Praplan provided 18 recipes, including grilled bavette steak, spring lamb stew and winemaker-style filet of pork loin, in the February package for cooks to try at home.

The next meat club allocation will be available for pick-up on March 18. New members are being accepted.

For information about joining the club or starting a meat-buying club, contact Stephanie Larson or Jacqueline Rotlisberger, Sonoma County Meat Buying Club coordinator, at (707) 565-2621. - Pamela Kan-Rice

## You are invited to apply for funding for agricultural worker housing

In 2003 the Marin RCD applied for funding from the State of California Housing and Community Development Agency, Joe Serna Farmworker Program. Although the proposal was not funded at that time, many valuable lessons were learned and it is time to try again. (Says rancher Bob Giacomini, "We applied in 2003 and hope to do so again.") The Marin RCD will not be the applicant this time, but will be supporting the effort.

This is your opportunity to apply for grant/loan funds from the State of California Housing and Community Development Agency, Joe Serna Farmworker Program. We will be applying for funds to purchase manufactured housing units to replace existing poor quality housing units. The funds are competitive statewide for government, non-profits, and limited partnerships. A not-for-profit housing and service provider, California Human Development Corporation (CHDC), will be preparing the application and overseeing the project implementation. CHDC has many years of experience working with agricultural workers and operates farm worker housing in Napa and Sonoma counties.

We all know how important our farm employees are to the success of our ranches here in Marin. "This is a great opportunity to upgrade your farm employee housing while taking advantage of state funding," says Dominic Grossi, Marin County Farm Bureau President.

The Marin County Community Development Agency and Marin Agricultural Commissioner will be offering support to this program. Leelee Thomas from the Marin County Community Development Agency is assisting with the grant application. Please contact Leelee with any questions at 499-6697 or [lthomas@co.marin.ca.us](mailto:lthomas@co.marin.ca.us).

**All information provided in this application will be used only for the purposes of determining your eligibility for the agricultural worker housing program and will not be shared with other County agencies.** Please call Leelee Thomas at the number above if you have any privacy or confidentiality concerns.

**To be considered for this opportunity you must obtain the Agricultural Worker Housing Application, fill out the form completely, and return the application to Marin County Community Development Agency, 3501 Civic Center Drive, Room 308, San Rafael, CA 94903, Attn: Leelee Thomas, or fax it to 415-499-7880, no later than 5:00 pm on May 15, 2008.**

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Q: Any thoughts on County Line and locavores?

A: David: It's been interesting straddling the Marin-Sonoma border. There are definitely some eccentrics in the county, looking to eat only what grows in Marin. I say, to each his own. I open my door here for people to come visit, to see what I'm doing. If they want to look in my sheds, check out what I'm putting on my field, great. We're growing the same quality of produce on our acreage in Sonoma as we are in Marin. At the end of the day, the boundaries of a food shed are up to the consumer. It's a personal decision based on the relationships you have with the farmers who are growing your food.

Q: Farming has its fair share of challenges. What keeps you going?

A: David: Sometimes I look out at our rows when I'm nervous and I wonder, "who's gonna buy all this food?" But there's not a person that wakes up and says, "You know what, today I'm not gonna eat." People eat every day. They may skip a meal. They may not eat vegetables all the time. But there's only so much junk food you can eat, before you gravitate back to what's good for you.

- Amelia Spilger

The Grown in Marin newsletter is published bi-monthly by the University of California Cooperative Extension, 1682 Novato Blvd., Suite 150B, Novato, CA 94947. Telephone 415/499-4204, <http://cemarin.ucdavis.edu>. Production of this newsletter was made possible with funding from the Marin Community Foundation and the County of Marin.

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## News from Marin County Farms, Ranches, and Producers

- ☞ **Cow Track Ranch** is hosting a cooking class of organic Thai food with **the Marin Agricultural Land Trust** on **May 31**. Future cooking class space is available by contacting **Cow Track Ranch**. [Lizzy42@aol.com](mailto:Lizzy42@aol.com)
- ☞ **Marin Agricultural Land Trust (MALT)** announces the publication of the book, "**Ranches & Rolling Hills, Art of West Marin-A Land in Trust.**" The book, was inspired by MALT's annual landscape art show. Contact **Elisabeth Ptak** at MALT for details. **415-663-1158, EXT. 302**
- ☞ **University of California Cooperative Extension, Merced**, is planning a **Commercial Goat Milk Producers' Workshop** on **May 14 and 15** at their office at 2145 West Wardrobe (Ag Center Auditorium), Merced, CA. Go to the calendar on [www.growninmarin.org](http://www.growninmarin.org) for more information.
- ☞ **UCCE Marin** and the **Marin Resource Conservation District** are co-sponsoring **Carbon, Soils, and Your Ranch - An Introduction to Carbon Sequestration on Rangelands Workshop** on **June 5, 2008, 4-7 pm**, at the **Point Reyes Dance Palace**, Point Reyes Station. For more information, contact **Dave Lewis, 707-565-2621** or **Steve Quirt, 415-499-4204**.
- ☞ **All Star Organics** is hosting the **Second Annual Mother's Day Tea Party: an Afternoon Farm Tour, Sunday, May 11th, 1:00pm**, in Lagunitas, CA, The cost of the event is \$25 for members of **Marin Organic**, \$35 for non-members, and free for children 12 and under. Pre-payment is required for reservations. Visit [www.marinorganic.org](http://www.marinorganic.org) or call Paige at 663-9667 for more information or to make reservations.

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