



EDITOR'S COLUMN

"It all goes back to having a dream. The idea of keeping pace in the market place is not for the weak of heart. The industry is going to keep changing and this conference is all about being a leader in the dynamic world of agriculture." - Supervisor Steve Kinsey, speaking at Taking Charge of the Future

Supervisor Kinsey closed a session entitled, *"Building a Profitable Business Identity,"* for the October *"Taking Charge of the Future: Today's Challenges and Opportunities for Tomorrow's Agricultural Leaders,"* with the above quotation. That bold, forward-looking attitude was highly visible at the event that brought out the under forty crowd of local Marin and Sonoma farmers and ranchers. This is a group that is very serious when it comes to making a place for themselves in the changing landscapes of modern agriculture. They, like our young farmers, like the host of Marin farmers that visited Terra Madre, and like the newly formed Point Reyes Seashore Ranchers Association (which just received a prestigious Marin Economic Commission Award), are part of a movement of people who are changing their dreams into practical realities. This issue is all about those who are taking this leap.
- Steve Quirt, Editor

Taking Charge of the Future Challenges & Opportunities for the Next Generation of Farmers & Ranchers



Neil Koenig, author of "You Can't Fire Me, I'm Your Father," got the audience going for the first part of "Taking Charge of the Future," held at Walker Creek Ranch on October 9, 2004.

On Saturday, October 9, a hundred or so young and not-so-young farmers and ranchers gathered together at Walker Creek Ranch in Marshall to hear and talk about their future in agriculture in the North Bay. Marin and Sonoma County Farm Bureaus and Cooperative Extension offices brought 30 speakers from the farming and ranching community, from government agricultural groups, and from educational and support organizations to give practical, informative, and inspiring presentations to the mostly younger crowd of local farmers and ranchers.

Keynote speaker for the event was Neil Koenig, popular speaker, family business consultant, and author of "You Can't Fire Me, I'm Your Father!"

Neil's warm, insightful, and humorous approach to family business life was at once understandable and helpful. His long years of involvement with the struggles of running family businesses led to story after story in which he shared with the group positive ways of re-examining everyone's role in the family operation.

In "Options for the Future in North Bay Dairy Farming," Jolynn Mendoza, Dominic Grossi, Rich Silacci, and moderator Sam Dolcini had a lively and energetic discourse on what a young dairy operator needs to stay in business today. There was no silver bullet to success found, but one thing emerged as a theme: nobody is about to throw in the towel.

The day closed with a great tasting of local farm goodies and an exciting auction based on "Ag Dollars" handed out during the day. Participants pooled their play dollars to bid on the great gifts that were rounded up by UCCE intern Renee Grossi. Sam Dolcini auctioned off everything with humor and a booming voice. The Evans Ranch donated a half beef, which was the hot item of the day. The Santa Rosa Junior College Ag Ambassadors pooled their bucks and won the bidding with \$45,000 ag dollars.

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Sue Conley and Peggy Smith of Cowgirl Creamery with African farmers at the Slow Food Conference in Turin, Italy

Terra Madre Slow Foods Event

Albert, Michael, and Vivien Straus of Straus Family Creamery were invited by Slow Food International, an organization that is working to build, support, and maintain alternatives to large-scale industrial food production, to their Turin, Italy, conference. We obtained this description from Vivien.

“Farmers from many countries came in native dress bringing their crops and sharing their stories. There were men from Kyrgyzstan in tall white felt hats sampling Yak ‘vodka,’ milk and butter, a woman from Burkina Faso in West Africa sharing her dried caterpillars, and more vegetables, grains and animals shown in reality or in pictures than we ever knew existed.

“For four days, workshops were held where farmers told the outlay of their farm, their history, their challenges, and their passions.

Translators worked around the clock in seven different languages. We milled around between workshops, introduced ourselves, and tried to communicate and connect.

“The final speaker of the four days was Prince Charles, an organic farmer himself, who spoke of the need to bring both the organic farmers and the small-scale farmers together.

“As we stood in awe of where we were and the once-in-a-lifetime connection we as farmers were making (like the U.N. of food with REAL farmers), we wondered what lessons we should be taking home with us.

“I came away with a few thoughts. One is how wonderful it is to have farmers talk to each other. It’s a rare thing.

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Albert and Vivien Straus, Sue Conley and Peggy Smith



Point Reyes Seashore Ranchers Association Award of Excellence from the Marin Economic Commission

Point Reyes Seashore Ranchers Association is being honored by the Marin Economic Commission for their efforts to support a viable Marin agricultural economy by providing an interface with the National Park Service, modernizing farming and ranching practices, and organizing to preserve their agricultural landscape.

The Association has worked hard since 2001 to provide the ranchers and farmers in the Seashore with a platform to interface with the Park Service in a positive and productive manner, to invigorate and modernize their own farming and ranching, and to reach out to the broader community in order to insure that they and their children will continue to run sound, environmentally healthy farms and ranches. This unique population maintains and stewards thousands of acres of grassland open space and is preserving an important part of Marin's cultural and historic legacy. The Ranchers Association has brought together the Department of the Interior through the Pt. Reyes National Seashore, the Department of Agriculture through the Natural Resource Conservation Service, the University of California Cooperative Extension, and the Regional Water Quality Board to create results that include:

- small diversified agricultural operations that have been approved by the park administration on several ranches, including artichokes at G Ranch and pasture-based range poultry at H Ranch;
- combined efforts to improve water quality on ranches;
- organic certification of Park rangelands;
- proposed joint grassland improvement studies, and
- collaborative efforts to restore historical ranch buildings.

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Ellie Rilla, UCCE Marin Director

At the UC Cooperative Extension office, the evaluations for the day were tabulated and there was an overwhelming consensus that it was a successful and valuable event. Ellie Rilla, County Director for UCCE commented, "This event shows how much our young farmers and ranchers mean to us. They are our future, and we hope to be able to do more events like this to assure that we can all work together to provide a profitable future for everyone."

Here are some excerpts of statements from the day's workshop participants.

John Williams, Frogs Leap Winery

"We're at one of the most exciting times for bringing value-added products to market. The market is there and the resources are there. A whole movement is happening - people care about what's genuine, what's real: a piece of beef where they know where the animal was raised, a tomato that tastes like a tomato."



David Evans, Marin Sun Farms

"We established our locally produced and marketed brand, Marin Sun Farms, and it's out there. Our projections are that we can't grow all the cattle we need for the market. So if you look at my values for local, sustainable food, there are a lot



of cattle that are born, raised, and can be finished here in Marin County. I'm talking to local ranchers who see that there's an opportunity for them to feed through the Marin Sun Farms local label. The key thing is, you need more money for your beef."



Peter Martinelli, Fresh Run Farm

"I am personally very interested in agriculture, both traditional ranching and farming, and also as an interest that is linked to preserving our environment. I conduct my agricultural practices through that. What I found is

that through crop farming, what keeps me in the business is the relationship between the natural environment and the farm, and how you can keep on improving things."

Lynne Giacomini-Stray

"The production of cheese is historic in Marin County. The settlers who came here from Switzerland, Germany, and Ireland brought with them dairying and cheese-making skills. There has been a shift today from large industrial operations to small authentic cheese making. The pioneers in Marin are artisans catering to niche markets. They are creating new markets for cheeses and cheese makers. I heard someone say that cheese is the future - but frankly, cheese is the present. Markets exist now and are crying out for more product. Cheese isn't the future; cheese is very much right now."



"I thought that TCOTF was great! The workshops were motivating, informational, and fun. I think that everyone who attended left with some new great opportunities to better their own businesses."

- Renee Grossi, UCCE Intern

"Terra Madre" continued from page 2

Farmers are usually loners and keep their practices and problems to themselves.

"And finally, I'll share one conversation that I had. I was standing next to a farmer from Zimbabwe and I introduced myself. He was a tea and jam producer. He said to me, 'We have never seen people like you before. White people.' That in itself stunned me. Then he continued, 'We have always been seen as "poor African farmers." Now, here we are, getting respect.' I suddenly realized that there was a reason to be here. That we are here to support and encourage each other, to realize we are all in the same boat with our own unique struggles. I replied to this man, 'Well, we don't have water on our place. We need to drill for it.' I meant to show him how we are more alike than different. His eyes lit up. 'Oh! You don't have electricity either?' Okay. So, maybe we're not completely alike. But one thing is for sure. We all love and respect the land."

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Editors: Steve Quirt & Ellie Rilla
 Production: Frances Healey
 Contributors: Vivien Straus, Straus Family Creamery

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News from Marin County Farms, Ranches, and Producers

- ☞ **Sally and Mike Gale** of **Chileno Valley Natural Beef** will be raising **heritage turkeys** next year: **Bronze, Bourbon Reds, and Narragansetts**, sold at Thanksgiving.
- ☞ **Marin Sun Farms**, owned and operated by **David Evans**, has just received approval for **2,087 acres** of **pasture** located in **Nicasio, Tomales**, and on the **Point Reyes Peninsula**.
- ☞ **The Point Reyes Seashore Ranchers Association** received the **Marin Economic Commission's 2004 "Award of Excellence"** for **Agricultural Viability**.
- ☞ **Anita Sauber** with the **Marin County Agricultural Commissioner's Office** reports that she has certified as organic **5,082 acres** in **Marin County** and has certified as organic a combined total of **8,139 acres** statewide.
- ☞ **Marin Organic** gleaned a **ton of potatoes** and other **winter vegetables** from **David Little** of **Little Farms** and **Marty Jacobson** from **Allstar Organics** to donate to the **Novato Unified School District** as part of **Marin Organic's School Lunch Program**.
- ☞ **Leah Smith** of the **Marin Food Systems Project** and **Miguel Villareal** of the **Novato Unified School District** will be presenting their successful local organic school lunch program work at the **2005 Ecological Farming Conference** at **Asilomar** on **January 19**.
- ☞ **Renee Grossi** of **Valley End Farm** in **Santa Rosa** completed a successful and productive internship at the **Cooperative Extension** office in **Marin**. Renee helped produce **Taking Charge of the Future** and performed many other tasks. She will be sorely missed.

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 Novato, California, 94947

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