



EDITOR'S COLUMN

"Leaders are visionaries with a poorly developed sense of fear and no concept of the odds against them. They make the impossible happen."

- Dr. Robert Jarvik

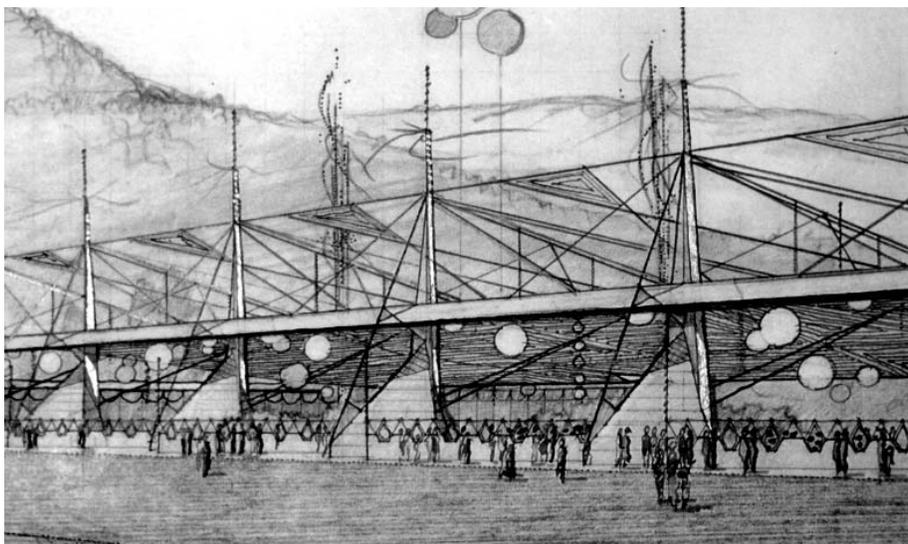
For such a small county, we get a lot of press and attention about what happens here. As I travel around the country to different organic farming and sustainable agriculture events folks sometimes accuse us of operating out of our own bubble! *"That may be true, but it is sure a nice bubble to operate from,"* I usually reply defending our bubble.

Surely such a bubble of progressive agricultural producers, governmental support, farm land trusts, NGOs, multigenerational farmers and ranchers, farmers markets, enlightened consumers, sustainable agriculture support organizations, and an emerging sector of food and farming conscious institutions and school districts is not something to be ashamed of.

From small conscientious farmers and land stewards like Peter Worsley to the Marin County Farm Bureau to the newly founded Agricultural Water Workgroup and everybody

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The Marin Center for Sustainable Agriculture is on its way here



Original drawing by Frank Lloyd Wright depicting a permanent farmers market and food pavilion.

For years many of us have shared a vision of a permanent "center" for our local agriculture that would shelter an outdoor market, a collective farmgate to distribution facility for produce, dairy, shellfish and meat, an educational farm, a permanent indoor storefront for specialty and processed local foods and a meeting place to advance the cause for a sustainable food system. Bold thinkers have toyed with how to make it real. Finally it is happening.

Today, we are more aware than ever that to be a complete, healthy, and responsible society we need to be serious about drawing on our local resources: our farmers and ranchers, our dedicated food and farming activists, and the wealth of talent and resources available to dedicate to such righteous action. Here in our own county, all of these exist in great measure.

Early this year, the Marin County Farmers Market Association Board of Directors put together The Center for Sustainable Agriculture to fulfill this vision. The Board of Directors is a dream team of talent: visionary, experienced, and practical, all selflessly committed to bringing the collaborative vision into reality. This is an organization focused on giving our agriculturists opportunities to not only survive, but to flourish and grow as our local market transforms from a common commodity-based agriculture wedded to diminishing energy supplies to a sensible, sustainable locally rooted food system.

The overall plan for the Center for Sustainable Agriculture is comprehensive. The cornerstone of the project is a permanent year-round home for the Sunday and Thursday Farmers' Markets which serve 8,000 shoppers weekly, at peak season, with regionally local organic and sustainably grown fresh food. This has been the dream of the MCFMA for years. Equally important is the planned distribution system that

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Ron Ford, Brigitte Moran, and Fred Crowder competing for the Best Jack-O-Lantern prize. Fred won.

Farm Bureau lunch to honor our county government & supporters

EVERY year the Marin County Farm Bureau puts on an all local, home-cooked luncheon at the Corda Family Deer Camp just off San Antonio Road, to recognize the support given to them by our county government and supporters. Farm Bureau members, Marin County Supervisors, and representatives from our agricultural organizations gather together to “touch base” and share news and accomplishments for the past year.

The luncheon speeches are always lively and informative. Supervisors Steve Kinsey, Susan Adams, and Cynthia Murray, all enthusiastic supporters of agriculture in Marin, offered strong support for our agricultural community. Cynthia Murray, always an advocate for our farmers and ranchers, gave a warm goodbye as she leaves her spot as supervisor for District 5. She has always been a strong supporter of agriculture and will be sorely missed.

Hank Corda, from the Marin Resource Conservation District, reminded everyone that farmers and ranchers are still not “out of the woods” by any means, and that the pressures of over-regulation, development and increased cost of operations are serious obstacles to remaining profitable.



Sam Dolcini at the grill.

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will deliver fresh farm products from regional growers to schools, restaurants, hospitals, and institutional kitchens. This program has already begun with the MCFMA providing fresh produce to Marin General Hospital and Dominican University. In addition to the regular market days, producers will be able to sell product through a permanent indoor market that will be available every day, supplying us with fresh, local, organic, and sustainably-produced produce, milk, cheeses, meats, shellfish, and added-value farm products.

A permanent indoor set of small market stores will be built into the structure, with a butcher shop that highlights and distributes Marin-branded beef, lamb, and pork.

The idea and plan for an agricultural education mini-farm has also been in the wind for years, and this umbrella may well end up giving that worthy project a permanent home. Also on the drawing board for the Center for Sustainable Agriculture is a conference facility for related events, as well as offices and a meeting facility for other like-minded not-for-profits.

So where are we today with the Center? Where will it be located? When will it be completed? To all of those questions the answer is the same: it’s under way. Currently two steering committees are being formed: a design and building committee and a fundraising committee. If you are interested in serving on one or the other, contact the Center for Sustainable Agriculture at 415 456-3276. The Board of Directors has a number of sites under consideration, and the selection process is just getting under way. Stay tuned. Once the site is selected, the fundraising will begin in earnest.

Yes, there is a long way to go, as in any worthy endeavor. But this one definitely has teeth. A professional, highly motivated, and selfless group of dedicated pioneers are focused on making the Center for Sustainable Agriculture a part of our lives here in Marin. They are building on the years of envisioning, planning, collaborating, brainstorming, researching, and just plain hoping of all of those who came before. So many people and organizations have contributed to this vision.

Knock and the door will be opened. The highly educated public here in our beautiful county is ready and willing to support this kind of step forward. Our team, from county government to not-for-profits to educational bodies to the fine and dedicated producers themselves, is positioned to move us forward in our quest towards a sensible and sustainable society with this project. Working together harmoniously and selflessly we can continue to build on our reputation as innovators and creators.

A Drop in the Bucket: reclaiming water for farming

During the early to mid-1900s row crops of all kinds painted Marin's rural landscape. Before the county's deep alluvial soils were covered with houses and water was pumped in from the Russian River to serve a quarter of a million residents, water was more available for growing everything from peas to tomatoes and almonds to apricots. Some of Marin's fertile valleys, including much of the greater Novato area, were veritable fruit baskets while hydrologically challenged areas produced crops that could be dry farmed, such as hay, grains, silage crops, and potatoes.

Today, we find ourselves in an era where water is not only in high demand for residential, manufacturing, and other urban uses, but also for the fish and other important creatures that live in our streams, lakes, and wetlands. With all of these competing needs, it seems that there is barely enough to go around for all users. Somewhere along the way, farming seems to have been all but forgotten as Marin developed and commercialized. It is time for farmers to reclaim a greater share of the water supply.

Local food production has gained acceptance as the most sustainable way to protect the security of our food supply. Local production means that less fossil fuel is used for long-distance shipping and it guarantees the availability of healthy foods to local residents. But it takes water to grow food.

Thanks to the interest and efforts of forward-thinking local farmers and a supportive county government, a small group of producers and ag staff have started meeting to explore ways to make a little more of Marin's water available for local food production. Ideas include development of non-riparian rainfall catchment ponds, capture of underutilized reservoir water, and other low-impact water developments. Although Marin is a dry county due to its geology, it is rich in dedicated, creative community members who are ready to get to work on this issue.

As Warren Weber said, *"if a farm or ranch could have just five percent of the rain that falls on it, imagine how much food we could grow."* That really does not amount to much, with total water usage in Marin County from Marin Municipal Water District and North Marin Water District alone estimated at 40,000 acre-feet per year. Irrigation of an additional 100 acres of fruit and vegetable crops in Marin (a 50 percent increase) would require an additional 150 acre feet or so of irrigation water —just a drop in the bucket. -Lisa Bush

Successful first year at new Worsley Farms location in Point Reyes

Marin Organic farmer Peter Worsley reports that, after a slow start for the 2006 growing season, his rowcrop, raspberry, and espaliered apple operation out-produced expectations in its first year at his new location one mile north of Point Reyes Station.

"It was a cold, wet spring," he remarked, *"and I guess it just took a while for the soil to dry out and warm up. Things just sat there, and then everything started growing around July 15."*



Peter is a precision farmer and a meticulous craftsman of the earth. At his new farming location he has worked with the soil, adding calcium, raising ph, and improving aeration and drainage by incorporating cover crops.

Peter has put in Gala, Fuji, and Cameo apples in beautifully espaliered rows that climb up a slight grade, giving visual form to the heirloom trees. The apples should begin producing next year. Three varieties of raspberry had their first crop this fall, and continued to bear into November, offering tasty baskets at the Point Reyes Farmers' Market, even on November 6! Vegetables, including melons, corn, and especially dry-farmed heirloom tomatoes all did well. Peter also leases two acres of very fertile sandy loam just west of Tomales, where he grows potatoes, garlic, winter squash, and dry beans.



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else inside our bubble, we are all working to bring our farms and farmland into sustainable alignment with our community needs. All the leaders in this endeavor suffer from "a poorly developed sense of fear and no concept of the odds against them."

This attitude is definitely contagious. The ideas being floated about today are amazing: a school for cheese-making sciences, an all-organic county, local food from nearby farms on school lunch menus, local food in hospitals, colleges and business campuses, farmstead sheep cheese, home delivery of farm products, and the newly formed Center for Sustainable Agriculture. Many of these dreams are rapidly headed towards reality.

What is it that fills our bubble? I would have to say first it is the commonly held vision that we can get what we want and need if we work hard, cooperate, collaborate, believe in the goals and each other, put personal differences aside and go for the gold for our unique county. We are blessed and extremely lucky to live in a bubble of such attainable ideals.

- Steve Quirt, Editor

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News from Marin County Farms, Ranches, and Producers

☞ **Allstar Organics** was honored by Jack Falstaff restaurant in San Francisco at a beautiful event where they created a five course menu with wine appropriate for each course. Each course featured something from the farm. The Executive Chef is Jonnatan Leiva.

☞ **Kathy Voth** will be here in the spring of 2007 to conduct educational seminars on the "Marin We'ed It Project" teaching cows to eat thistle as a means of weed control. Anyone interested in attending can call Susan Lahr at (415) 488-0906

☞ The **Marin County Agricultural Commissioners Office** reports that there are currently **16,177 acres** under **organic certification**. **15,660 acres** are certified pasture for dairies, beef and silage. **517 acres** are under certification for row and tree crops.

UC Cooperative Extension

will be offering the following workshops in the spring and early summer of 2007:

- **Opportunities for Cheese making in the North Bay**
- **Innovative Marketing Methods for Farm Products**
- **Setting Up & Transitioning to Organic Crop Farming**

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