



EDITOR'S COLUMN

My commute from Tomales to the Farm Advisor's office in Novato is all back roads, one of which takes me right past the Gale Ranch in Chileno Valley. I can't resist stopping in and having a cup of Mike's fresh espresso to jump-start my morning. Recently, Mike and Sally have inherited Daisy, an 11-year-old Jersey cow just retired from the dairy string. The Gales' milk is blessed with the rich, fat cream that graces our espresso this morning. That's what I love about living here in West Marin: I can stop in and get the news, or spend an hour at the Tomales post office chatting with Bill Jensen or Jean Straus about what's going on with their operations. It's how I found out that Bill had just invited Shane Harvey, the world's fastest sheep shearer, up from New Zealand. "Come on over and hang out," was Bill's invitation, so I did. Bill is an impeccable land manager and operator and likes to have everything in line and ready to go. I arrived and the crew had already been through 200 ewes, with Shane on the shears. Anna Jensen, Bill's mother, was helping out and at

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Farming on the edge . . . of change

A CONVERSATION WITH MIKE GALE



Mike Gale is the new president of the Marin County Farm Bureau. He also sits on the board of both Marin Organic and the Center for Sustainable Agriculture. Mike and his wife Sally raise grass-fed beef cattle, organic apples, and heirloom tomatoes. Between the two of them and all the farming they do, they have an excellent grasp of the history and future of agriculture in Marin County. Below are some thoughts and gleanings from my conversation with Mike.

Mike has recently become president of our Marin County Farm Bureau (MCFB), and I asked him what his plans are as president:

"I would like to let people know that the ranchers and farmers in West Marin are serious about our work here. We put in long hours. This is our home and center of our family life. We operate the business of agriculture and we need to make a living, just like people with other careers. Our homes depend on how well we do, our families depend on us, and those that enjoy the food we grow need us. Farm Bureau and the other organizations that Sally and I belong to all help to keep us in business."

Driving through the agricultural pastures and valleys of West Marin at first glance showcases a pastoral wonderland of contented lazy cows and diverse and timeless landscapes. Behind the curtain of these scenes are hard-working men, women, and kids engaged in the day-to-day acts of keeping their farms and families going. Casually, one sees the beautiful exterior, and we sometimes miss the blood, sweat and tears that form the body of agriculture. I asked Mike about some of the issues on his mind:

"You know, one of the things about our survival is that we need to figure out how to keep farming with all these pressures on us. Our location is a mixed blessing; we are next to a fantastic population for direct marketing, with affluent educated consumers. But on the other hand, we have intense environmental scrutiny, increasing regulations, and the pressures of maintaining a livelihood in "Marin's back yard." These are all real issues and dealing with them takes us away from what we do best: grow food. I am hoping that all the farmers and ranchers can come together through our organizations to talk about and sort out these issues."

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UCCE Marin Intern Program Welcomes Anne Kehoe

With a grant from the Marin Community Foundation, UCCE Marin has been able to hire Anne Kehoe from the Kehoe Dairy family to help update and expand the Grown in Marin Website. Anne is on-board for the summer until she resumes her Agricultural Business degree at Chico State University in the fall. UCCE received funding from the Marin Community Foundation for an internship program to help introduce students to the kind of community service and education that the Marin UCCE office specializes in.

Anne comes from one of Marin's oldest continuous dairy operations. Founded in 1922 by James Kehoe, the dairy was passed down to her grandfather, Kenneth "Skip" Kehoe, and today is owned and operated by her father, Tim, and his brothers, Tom and Mike Kehoe, who together milk 550 Holstein cows. The brothers have recently begun transitioning part of the herd to certified organic production and Anne says that *"things are going well, and the family is happy with learning organic management."*

Anne joined the Cooperative Extension staff May 21 and immediately began updating the <http://www.growninmarin.org> website. Kids that grow up on dairy farms know how to work hard and efficiently, and Anne is at the top of that list and much appreciated by the rest of the staff here.

A goal of our intern program is to educate and broaden the experience of students interested in agriculture in Marin. Anne says that she has learned several things here. *"I was happily surprised to see how so many people are interested in helping agriculture. Cooperative Extension is working to keep farmers and ranchers going. We are thankful that there are people who care about farming, so that we all don't fall by the wayside."*

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Marin agriculture is becoming increasingly diversified, although the trend has been in progress for some years. Organic row crop farmers have been joined by organic dairy farmers, traditional families branching into grass-fed livestock, new entry agriculturists experimenting with cheese, and added-value processors, to name a few. Mike commented:

"Well, as for Farm Bureau, we would like to be inclusive of all of our farmers and ranchers. There are different kinds of farmers here, from the small acreage guys up to the dairies. The key here is for all of us to unite and get together on issues and find some common ground. I know this sounds a little idealistic, but Sally and I both feel that it is a risk we need to take. Farm Bureau could be a place, or a forum, where ideas and issues can be discussed. We are hoping that Farm Bureau will be more things for more people."



Mike has a cautious yet ambitious agenda, and I appreciate both his and Sally's time, dedication, and work on securing a future for Marin agriculture. I asked them about the future for farming and ranching here.

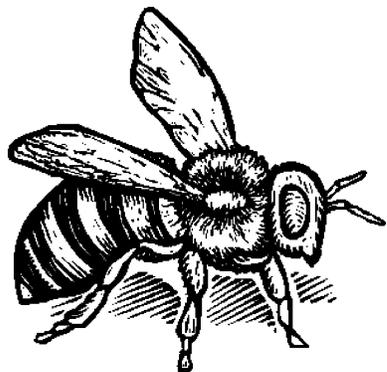
"We really believe that diversification will play a big part. We are hopeful for the adoption of new ideas in the dairy community, like joining together with cheesemakers to provide milk for an exceptional regional cheese industry, things like that. Diversification is growing and farmers and ranchers are becoming more open for these kinds of changes. I think that it is important for us to realize that we have all we need to survive by blending these new trends with our family ranching traditions. We are farming on the edge of change, and working together on these important issues can be a bridge. All we need to do now is cross that bridge."

Bee news

The news is full of concern over the plight of honey bees. Mites, diseases and now so-called Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) have devastated the honeybee hives employed in agricultural pollination. With over a third of our agricultural products dependent on pollination, this will have a severe impact and could be devastating if these problems continue. Although there are many theories offered, experts do not have the answers.

Honey bees are an introduced species brought to America in the earliest stages of European colonization. But there are more than 3500 species of native bees in America and recent studies have demonstrated that a significant amount of agricultural and home garden pollination is actually provided by these natives. Unfortunately, their populations are also declining due to our urban gardening and agricultural practices. Gordon Frankie and his University of California colleagues have been studying native bees at their Berkeley demonstration gardens to determine how to best provide supportive habitat. They have identified over 50 native bee species in just the immediate Berkeley gardens. He believes we have over 80 native species in Marin. Some of these bees limit their flower forage to just one or a few native plant species, but many will be attracted to a wide variety of plants. With only a few exceptions, these native bees are solitary, not social nesters like honeybees, and need special attention to nesting and foraging habitat. As an example, most natives are ground nesters needing access to undisturbed soil. A layer of mulch may prevent a bee nesting in an otherwise satisfactory garden. Removing the mulch in a sunny, sheltered area may bring natives to the garden. A farmer could foster native bees by leaving parts of the landscape wild in native vegetation along field borders.

For more information about these fascinating and hard-working bees, check out the University research team's web site at <http://nature.berkeley.edu/urbanbeegardens>. There is a wealth of information, including native plant recommendations. - Glenn Smith, UCCE Master Gardeners



847 sheep shorn in nine hours

Bill Jensen runs 800 sheep in Tomales on two separate ranches. This year he had Shane Harvey, from Riverton, New Zealand, shear his ewes. So what? Every sheep rancher gets his ewes shorn this time of year; but not from a guy who holds the world record for shearing 847 sheep in nine hours! He also holds the ewe speed shear record for the fastest full wool ewe shorn in 35 seconds.

Shane, his wife Charly, and kids Cody and Cheyenne, travel the world shearing on ranches in New Zealand, Australia, England, Scotland, France, Belgium, and Sardinia. Shane says, "We love the travel and mostly the people we meet and work with. These are all genuine, down-to-earth farmers and now we have friends all over the world." Charly agrees, "It's a lot of work. Sometimes we go two months without a break, but we love what we do; the travel, the people we meet, the experiences. We also feel that it is a great education for Cody and Cheyenne until they start school."

Shearing at Bill's place brings in friends and family to help out with the sorting, bailing, and moving the animals around. The shorn wool is bundled into huge bales by hand. Anna Jensen, Bill's mother, packs in the morning and Eileen Jensen, Bill's wife, helps out in the afternoon.

It takes about three days to complete the shearing with a steady pace and with Shane behind the shears. But the best part of the days are the delicious home-cooked lunch provided by Anna Jensen, who liberally dishes out salads, fried chicken and fuels the crew up with rich chocolate brownies.



Shane Harvey, above, shearing at the Jensen ranch in Tomales. Anna Jensen, below, serving lunch brownies to the crew.



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lunch break she served up a fantastic ranch lunch for the crew. Eileen, Bill's wife, stopped by to help close up the day, along with a few friends of the Jensens.

The whole thing is a family affair. This county is our home, where we work and rely on each other whenever we can. Many of us have raised our kids here and some of them have remained to carry on. We all make sure to shut the gate when we come and go.

This is a beautiful and rich land of natural resources and cultural heritage, with spectacular landscapes and open pastures with fat cows grazing away. Remember that generations of hard-working families have lived and died here, having given their lives to their heirs and to the land they love. This is our home.



Eileen and Anna Jensen

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Editors: Steve Quirt & Ellie Rilla
 Production: Frances Healey
 Contributors: Glenn Smith, UCCE Master Gardener



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News from Marin County Farms, Ranches, and Producers

- ☞ **Toluma Farms**, a new goat dairy in **Tomales**, received organic certification for 160 acres of pasture. Owners **David Jablons** and **Tamara Hicks** have spent two years in land restoration with **NRCS, Straw, Marin Organic, and Marin RCD**. The property is now a goat dairy, with 160 goats, which are planned for organic certification next year.
- ☞ **UC Cooperative Extension Marin** has begun work on a video tentatively called "**The Hidden Bounty of Marin**," which will feature the work and lives of West Marin farmers and ranchers, bringing agriculture "over the hill" to east Marin audiences. UCCE is partnering with **Novato Public Access Television**, with funding support from the **Marin Community Foundation**.
- ☞ **The Marin County Farmers Market Association** received a **Green Business Award** for environmental and sustainability education from **Acterra**, a Palo Alto-based environmental organization.
- ☞ This year marks the **20th anniversary of Cowgirl Creamery**, owned and operated by **Sue Conley and Peggy Smith**. - <http://www.cowgirlcreamery.com/>
- ☞ **Assemblyman Jared Huffman** has named West Marin rancher **Sharon Doughty** "**woman of the year**" in his assembly district, for her contributions to agriculture and achievements as a rancher and businesswoman.
- ☞ **Farm Bureau president Mike Gale** is holding monthly get-togethers at the **Pine Cone Diner at 10:00 a.m.** the second Tuesday of the month (before the monthly **Farm Bureau meetings**, which are on the second Wednesday of the month).

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
 COOPERATIVE EXTENSION - MARIN COUNTY
 1682 NOVATO BLVD., SUITE 150B
 NOVATO, CALIFORNIA 94947

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