



EDITORS COLUMN

"People saw different things and knew different things, but the differences, it seemed to me, were not true contradictions." - John Hart, from the Tomales Bay Environmental Study

When Ellie Rilla asked me to put together an issue of *Grown in Marin* on watershed management in Marin, I cringed. This complex issue has a long and passionately charged history. How clean should the water in the Bay be? What is clean? Where is pollution coming from? The oyster growers need to shut down when the bacterial count reaches a certain number. Is this avoidable? Whose fault is it? The ranchers, oyster growers, dairy operators, concerned environmental community and the agencies involved each take a legitimate position with convincing determination. I have good friends from each side of the issue and have learned from talks and field visits with people like David Lewis from UCCE, Bob Giacomini, John Finger from Hog Island Oyster, Brannon Ketchum from the Point Reyes National Seashore and Sally Gale, who both ranches and sits on the board of the Marin Resource Conservation District (RCD).

What I have learned is that

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Tomales Bay in a quiet mood. The Bay has been called both "pristine" and "impaired at the same time."

All Streams Lead to Tomales Bay

The freshwater tributaries that flow into Tomales Bay from Walker Creek, Lagunitas Creek and the varied sidelets carry with them a story. During big storms, the story gets more complicated and the cast of characters increases like a Russian novel. On a particularly intense and blustery storm event, Michael Lennox and David Lewis from UC Cooperative Extension head out to West Marin to read the book of runoffs. Sampling during 40 knot south winds, through flooded Highway One at 4 a.m. doesn't sound like a whole lot of fun, but these two scientists thrive on it. What they read, measure, and decipher is the scientific measurement of the fecal coliform bacteria in runoff. These measurements give us a way of knowing how many of the microorganisms are being picked up and moved by runoff on or near dairies, pastures and open space watersheds.

The fecal coliform count is like the proverbial "canary in the coal mine," an indicator that harmful pathogens may be present. For swimming, the beaches are posted at 200 mpn/100 ml (Most probable number per hundred milliliters of water). The closures are an expensive deal for aquaculturists and an issue of real concern. Weeks of closure put a real dent in cashflow.

John Finger of Hog Island Oyster Company, an active member of the Tomales Bay Watershed Council, knows this situation well. *"The shellfish industry has the strictest regulations for water quality. We need to have the highest water quality to stay in business. Tomales Bay has been listed as both 'pristine' and 'impaired,' and both are true. What we want to see is a raising of the standard, to leave the Bay and the watershed to the next generation in a healthy, productive condition. This would be a great legacy."* Up the hill from Hog Island Oyster Company, Albert Straus, from Straus Family

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Marin Organic Hires an Executive Director

It would take a long time to find a more qualified person than Helge Hellberg as the first Executive Director of Marin Organic. Helge comes to us from California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF) in Santa Cruz where he has served a productive three years as Marketing and



Helge Hellberg of Marin Organic

Communications Director.

Helge hails from Hamburg, Germany, where he earned a Masters Degree in marketing. In search of a healthier, more holistic way to live, Helge found a new mission in organic food and nutrition. In response to the need for a new environment, Helge came to San Francisco where he took a job as mar-

keting manager for Wild Oats Market and then moved to CCOF in 2000.

Helge is passionate about the Marin Organic mission and very open about his ideas, *"I am very excited about this new opportunity to contribute to developing Marin organic agriculture. I found such a great and progressive environment here to do this work, and am impressed by how many talented people are working together under a shared common vision."*

Marin Organic Funds a New Position for the County

Last winter Anita Sauber and Stacy Carlsen found out that the Marin Organic Certified Agriculture (MOCA) program



Juan Hidalgo

was growing much faster than planned. They had 28 certified growers to manage and a fast growing queue lining up down the hall. Anita was stretched thin over the county and the program was about to be halted at the current number of certified farmers. Marin Organic, who helped develop the original concept for

local organic certification, took the situation seriously and found funding for Juan Hidalgo to join Agricultural Commissioners' Office as a MOCA inspector and certifier.

Juan comes to the position with an Animal Science degree from UC Davis along with his own interest in organic

agriculture. *"I am really excited about this position,"* he says, *"organic farming seems like the most sensible way to get into farming today. Here in Marin we all work together. It's really exciting to be a part of this."* Juan is already doing inspections and is also working on a sustainability survey that will be part of the MOCA program. This new survey is the brainchild of Stacy Carlsen who says, *"We want to find out who is going beyond the National Organic Program standards for certification and reward and recognize those efforts."*

Anita Sauber, heads up the MOCA Program and is very happy to have Juan aboard, *"He's already doing a great job. Juan is bright and good with people and . We want to keep him for a long time."*

UCCE Advisors Cover the Basics on Cover Crop and Soil Fertility

The early spring this year worked out perfectly for the UCCE and Marin Organic "Cover Crops and Soil Fertility" field workshop at Star Route Farms in Bolinas. The bell



Louise Jackson from UC Davis (right) and Richard Smith (left), farm advisor from Monterey County talking up cover crops at Star Route Farms.

beans and vetch were just days away from discing when 40 farmers gathered to hear Richard Smith, Vegetable Crop Advisor from Monterey County, and Louise Jackson, Vegetable Crop and Soil Science specialist from Davis, go over the latest UC research and application of cover crop varieties.

Both advisors are intensely involved in the use of cover crops in larger scale vegetable production, and shared their knowledge of soil fertility. Cover crops are an increasingly popular way of building soil fertility and Louise and Richard relayed useful information about choosing a cover crop and maximizing fertility. Mustards, popular in Monterey and Santa Cruz counties, were discussed at length.

The weather was spectacular at Star Route Farms, and both Warren and farm manager Doug Gallagher joined in the discussion sharing the experiences and practices at their farm. Most of those attending were activity involved in farming, including a group from Sonoma County. Getting that many farmers off their fields and together on a warm, sunny day in the busy springtime was quite an achievement, and worth everyones time.

Sustaining Fish and Farming at the Same Time in Paradise Valley

In 2000, the organic farmers who inhabit the Pine Gulch Creek watershed noticed that, in addition to a healthy steelhead trout population, the native coho salmon were coming back. This is a pretty good indicator of a healthy creek.



Dennis Dierks, farmer, at Pine Gulch Creek. Dennis and the other farmers in the watershed are working to keep the habitat healthy.

These farmers are some of the most environmentally sensitive in Marin, and pride themselves on being responsible watershed stewards. "We want a healthy,

sustainable watershed. This fits right in with what we do, what we are all about." notes Bolinas farmer Dennis Dierks.

The Point Reyes National Seashore owns and manages most of the Pine Gulch Creek watershed, and has an interest in keeping things healthy. "The watershed was working fine when we first looked it. We wanted to stay true to the current usage, but to improve it if we could." relates Brannan Ketchum, of the Point Reyes National Seashore.

Brannan and the farmers met to talk about how, together, they could best insure the long-term health of the watershed and the long-term health of the farms. "The partnership approach offered by the Park put the project in a new light and opened up a new way of communicating," remembers Dennis. "We saw it as an opportunity to enhance our already in-place sustainable practices." Together they came up with a long-range plan to reduce drafting from the creek during the low water season. The Park Service is helping to find funding for research, design and construction of ponds. The farmers agreed to provide space for the ponds and to modify their irrigation plans.

The project has hit various snags and logjams, but remains pretty much on course. Many details remain to be tidied up. Perhaps the most significant result to date is the positive collaboration between the Park Service and the farmers, resulting in an "all-around win" for everyone. "The collaboration to protect fisheries and farms with interested, receptive farmers like Dennis and Sandy Dierks is all part of keeping the watersheds healthy," states Brannan.

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there is really no magic bullet to solve all problems. What I have also learned is that there is an extraordinary amount of talented energy at work to tackle these issues. The Marin RCD and National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) have been working with ranchers for decades to improve watershed management and promote habitat enhancement. UCCE Watershed Management Advisor David Lewis and the Marin and Sonoma Extension Offices dedicate long hours and resources to help find solutions. The Tomales Bay Watershed Council has brought the players to the table in a spirit of consensus.

"There is really a much bigger picture out there," says Liz Lewis, Watershed Ecologist from the Marin County Public Works Department, "There is a coordinated effort to get together on these issues and to move forward. All the agencies involved are putting forth time, funding and resources to improve the situation."

Nancy Scolari from the RCD agrees. "The main thing stopping the ranchers from large-scale environmental improvements is funding. If they had resources, the progress would be more rapid." Nancy also observed that "They have been working on this for many years. The ranchers try to address these issues daily to conserve their own resources."

In addition to the RCD and UC Extension efforts, the Tomales Bay Agricultural Group (TBAG), the USDA Natural Resources Conservation District, the Point Reyes National Seashore and the ranchers, farmers and landowners themselves are responding to these challenges. Things are moving in a positive direction. Ranchers and farmers like Randy LaFranchi, Bob Giacomini, Al Poncia, Amanda Wisbey and Sharon Doughty are examples of some of the ranchers and farmers who have been putting in time and money towards water quality and conservation improvements. There is slow but steady progress occurring. It may be a case of the tortoise and hare, but remember - the tortoise wins. - Steve Quirt



Albert Straus of Straus Family Creamery, Nancy Scolari of the Resource Conservation District and David Lewis from Cooperative Extension at Alberts manure separator.

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Creamery, has taken this responsibility seriously and has invested \$600,000 in five holding ponds, four barns and now methane generators and separators. *"We are prepared to go the distance. We need to do this to survive."*

Albert understands that this is part of being in the dairy business in Marin today, and that these issues won't go away. The Walker Creek watershed reaches inland to Chileno Valley where the fertile rangelands support our cattle industry. Here too, ranchers are at work on their watershed management plans. *"It's a kind of housekeeping for our land,"* says Chileno Valley rancher Sally Gale, *"We do everything we can to keep our house in order, so to speak. We fix up our creeks and bring back our riparian areas. We like the wildlife and fish it brings back."* Sally sits on the board of the Marin Resource Conservation District as well as the Tomales Bay Watershed Council, and raises grass-fed beef with her husband, Mike. *"It's all a process, a work in progress. All the information is complex to say the least, but we do all live together here, and we need to work together everyday to improve our ranches and fulfill our obligation to the plants, animals and lands that we have inherited."* After all, this is our home.

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News from Marin County Farms, Ranches and Producers

- ☞ UCCE will be putting on a **grass-fed livestock** meeting at the Dance Palace in **Point Reyes Station** introducing **Marin County's new Grass-fed Certification Program on April 22, 2004**. Call **Stephanie Larson, Range Advisor**, for details **707 565-2621**.
- ☞ **Straus Family Creamery Organic Reduced Fat 2% Milk** will be available at Novato, Rohnert Park and Santa Rosa **Costco** stores beginning the week of **April 19th** for a test run. 2 Gallons per Box. One percent of profits from this milk will be donated to the **Marin Agricultural Land Trust**. The original glass will continue at all other outlets.
- ☞ **Nineteen Marin and Sonoma dairy farms** received an **"Environmentally Certified"** recognition from the **U.S. Environmental Protection Agency** for their work in keeping waste from the waterways.
- ☞ **The Point Reyes Farmers Market** has hired a new **Market Manager, Ed Strausser Jr.**, who also runs the **Olema Campground Store**.
- ☞ **Julie Evans** has been hired by **UC Cooperative Extension** to help put together **"Taking Charge of the Future: Challenges and Opportunities for the Next Generation of Farmers and Ranchers"**. **Sam Dolcini, Jolynn Mendoza, Paul Zimmerman, Cindy Pomi and Renee Grossi** have joined the **Steering Committee**. The event will occur in the fall under the generous funding from the **Marin Community Foundation**.
- ☞ **Marin Organic** has received a generous **\$30,000** grant from the **Marin Community Foundation** for **2004**.

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