



EDITOR'S COLUMN

"Farming with the wild requires extreme dedication, courage, and altruism. Embracing, rather than vilifying endangered species and relinquishing a sense of historic agricultural entitlement represent acts of true leadership in society that require both an open heart and an open mind." - Farming with the Wild

We have a working landscape of traditional family cattle ranches, dairies, and organic row crop farms that are all set in ecologically diverse environments. The picture of unending acres of Central Valley agricultural enterprises simply doesn't exist here. Wooded hills and valleys separate and define our farms and ranches. The cattle maintain the grasslands and the oak and bay laurel woodlands provide watershed and biodiversity - a visual quilt that is of unestimable value to all of us.

The farms and farmers featured in this issue are all stewards of these working landscapes. They are representative of our agricultural population, and each has some special stewardship role.

The fresh heirloom vegetables that fill our tables, from Fresh Run Farm run by Peter Martinelli, come with a blue ribbon environmental

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Farming in the Wild at Fresh Run Farm



Peter Martinelli of Fresh Run Farm harvesting his strain of Rainbow Chard seed for next year's planting.

Small farmers discover what works best for their resources, labor, bioregion, and market access. It may take a decade, but growers learn to optimize their resources and variables to get the most for precious time and money. Some farmers also look at how their operations fit into the bigger picture: the environmental balances that they depend on, the natural cycles that affect

decision making, and their own personal sensitivity and relationship with their farms and the land they tend. These farmers become true stewards of the land.

The first thing you notice on a visit to Fresh Run Farm is the seamless weaving of a small organic farm into the lush coastal landscape of Paradise Valley. It feels like nothing is out of place here. The pumpkin lines curve along the road, in symmetrical design with the floor of the valley. The main fields are painted with vegetable varieties that Peter Martinelli has selected from years of patient trial and error. Rows of beans exploding with blossoms, heritage chard bursting with color, and heirloom chiodga beets tucked nicely back in the lower part of the farm are all from seed saved over and over again. *"These plants have been self-selecting and adapting for years,"* says Peter. *"The vigor and vitality is fantastic. These varieties are now part of the farm."* Peter is obviously passionate about seed saving.

He has become a master at using nature wisely on her own terms. Rather than dominating the natural cycles and rhythms, he adjusts and optimizes the most basic and obvious elements of nature. For instance, four or five years ago Peter let a hundred feet of chard seed out. After putting away gallons of seed, he disked in the rest. In the spring, chard seedlings emerged at just the right time, on their own biological clock. Peter and his crew had their nursery work done pro bono by nature. They transplanted out rows and rows of homegrown chard. He direct seeds everything these days. *"I grew tired of all that nursery work, and anyway, the plants seem stronger and have more vitality when seeded out at the right time."*

Fresh Run Farm is embedded in a wilderness setting, with coastal oak forest on one side and Pine Gulch Creek on the other, with grassland swathes here and there.

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Myriam and Mark Pasternak at Devil's Gulch Ranch

Devil's Gulch Ranch Tour

The first in a series of tours that focus on farmers and ranchers who have successfully diversified their operations was held on August 31 at Devil's Gulch Ranch in Nicasio. The tour was coordinated by UC Cooperative Extension in partnership with the Marin Agricultural Land Trust and Marin Organic.

Mark and Myriam Pasternak bought Devil's Gulch Ranch in 1971, and have been on the move towards sustainability and diversification for the last three decades. Today, the operation is a palette of various farming and ranching enterprises that includes a premium pinot noir vineyard, a rabbitry, horses, sheep and hogs, range-fed chickens, asparagus, a well-run and successful farm summer camp for kids, and a brand-new wind mill for alternative energy.

What is most amazing, though, is how the couple has interwoven the diverse elements of the farm into a successful, well-designed tapestry of activity. The sheep supply wool for the Summer Camp projects, and then are herded to the vineyards in the winter to keep the grass down and prune the lower stories of the vines. The chickens forage in the vineyard in the spring and provide eggs for market. The asparagus is interplanted with vines and goes to high-end restaurants in March. The rabbitry is growing and is featured on the menus of prestigious restaurants such as Chez Panisse and Manka's.

Perhaps the most impressive integration of this diversified farm is the kids' summer camp, run by Brian King. "We want the kids to experience a real ranch. They participate in all aspects of the work. We involve them in projects and the same day-to-day tasks that we ourselves work on," noted Brian. This year the camp hosted 130 kids from kindergarten through high school.

The tour ended with a diversified lunch at the Pasternaks' sprawling ranch house, featuring products from Devil's Gulch Ranch and also other local farms. Everyone left quite satisfied.

Sixth Annual "Taste of Marin" Presented by Marin Organic and Marin Agricultural Land Trust - A Great Success!

Gourmet pizza with Cowgirl Creamery cheese, McEvoy Olive Oil, and Fresh Run Farm vegetables, hot from a wood-fired oven; smoked oysters from Drakes Bay Food Co. (previously Johnson's Oysters) on handmade potato chips from David Little; and Teriyaki Beef Salad from Marin Sun Farms' grassfed beef, with greens from Paradise Valley Produce, were just some of what the 450 guests were treated to at this year's Taste of Marin on Friday, September 9. Held in the 150-year-old Italianate courtyard of St. Vincent's in San Rafael, the evening was spectacular.



Farmers and ranchers from all parts of Marin County were featured at this year's Taste of Marin event. Here, Sandy Dierks from Paradise Valley Produce displays their organic produce.

Aside from the incredible food, good company and festive live music, more than a few guests were overheard to say, "I feel like I'm in Italy," as they looked across the piazza filled with white linen-covered tables decked with flowers and twinkling candles.

Over 40 of Marin's food and wine producers were present, with their products transformed by locally renowned chefs into a wonderful array of tasty concoctions for guests to graze on. As a showcase of our local agricultural bounty, Taste of Marin has become the premier food event in Marin County. Even more importantly, "Taste" is a wonderful opportunity for the community to meet and greet our agricultural producers, and to put a face to the many names that feed us every day.

By the evening's end, chefs had made valuable connections with the producers whose food they use in their restaurants, guests had learned a little more about where their food comes from, and the evening had generated financial support for Marin Agricultural Land Trust's farmland preservation efforts and Marin Organic's farmer education, environmental and social programs.

For more information, and to view pictures of the event, please go to www.marinorganic.org. - Wendy McLaughlin, Marin Organic

Stubbs Vineyard Goes Organic

In 1996 Tom and Mary Stubbs decided to plant 11 acres of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay vines in the valley below their home in Hicks Valley, along with several acres of olive trees. With the help of Mark Pasternak, the couple chose a pristinely beautiful valley floor surrounded by mixed oaklands and open pasture. Today, hereford cows share the landscape with premium vines. The vineyard covers the valley floor, with lush vines yielding world class Pinot Noir and Chardonnay fruit. The Stubbs began as grape growers, selling fruit to respected wineries including Schramsberg, Hartford Court, Copain, and Mount Tamalpais Vineyards. Today the couple makes their own wine with 500 cases vinted for 2004.



The Stubbs Vineyard from the top of Red Hill Road, Marin County's first organically certified vineyard.

The Stubbs ranch is neatly tucked away in an elegant woodland setting. Completely off the grid, the residence and vineyard are powered from a discretely placed wind turbine.

Tom Stubbs is a man of impeccable taste and it seemed a natural next step to certify the vineyard and olive trees organic. Mark Pasternak consulted on the project, and with his usual candor says, "We started with the idea that we would eventually certify organic."

The transition was always in the plan. Tom and Mary Stubbs have strong feelings about maintaining a pristine environment. "We farm on a seasonal creek, and are very sensitive to the the overall ecological health of the watershed. Organic production is the best for our situation," Tom emphasizes. "As a winemaker, I really believe that farming organically makes for a superior wine," he adds. "But the most important factor for Mary and me, is that we want to improve the soil quality to pass to our children a piece of land that is healthier and more productive than when we began the operation," he concludes.

Conservation Security Program Available to Tomales and Bodega Bay Watersheds

Agricultural producers in the Tomales Bay and Bodega Bay watersheds may enroll in a new USDA financial program this fall. The Conservation Security Program (CSP), a voluntary program run by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), provides reward cost-share payments and technical assistance to producers who implement soil and water quality practices. CSP has a three-tiered payment system based on existing and newly implemented conservation practices. Producers may choose from three tiers, capped at annual payments of \$20,000, \$35,000, and \$45,000, in four ways:

- ↪ 1. Enhanced payments for implementing exceptional conservation efforts by going above the basic level of participation.
- ↪ 2. Small stewardship payments for existing farm practices in soil and water quality.
- ↪ 3. Small maintenance payments for environmentally beneficial practices already in place.
- ↪ 4. 50% cost-share payments for a limited number of new practices.

Under Tier 1, a farmer signs a 5-year plan that includes soil and water quality practices for the part of the farm being enrolled. Tier 2 requires a 5-10 year plan for soil and water quality practices. Tier 3, a 5-10 year plan, pays farmers the most and rewards stewardship, addressing all resources of concern for the entire farm.

The application process is not competitive. Producers must complete the Self Assessment workbook, document stewardship work, complete the CSP application, and meet with NRCS for evaluation. The self-assessment guide is at http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp/pdf_files/CSP_Self_Assess_Workbook_F.pdf.

For more information, visit the program website at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp/> or call the Petaluma NRCS after Labor Day at (707) 794-1242 ext. 3.

- Liz Hilkert, Petaluma Field Office
Natural Resources Conservation Service

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This ideal environment provides a rich endowment of beneficial diversity, which Peter mimics in his farming practices.

Romano pole beans spiral up trellises crafted from eucalyptus windfall, right next to sweet corn and squash, the traditional "Three Sisters" of Native America. Across the valley, field workers are harvesting bags of luscious fingerling potatoes. Recently the deer have been coming down from the nearby mountain and helping themselves to the spuds. "They get about ten per cent of the potato crop," Peter says with a little agitation. "But that's the price you pay for farming in the wild."

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guarantee. Peter farms with the environment, not against it. The hundreds of school kids who become immersed in farm life each summer at Devil's Gulch Ranch, run by Mark and Myriam Pasternak, will carry the experience with them forever. The wind-powered Stubbs Ranch, with its organically farmed vineyards and olive trees, adds another dimension to the slopes and hills of Hicks Valley. These are just a few of the many traditional and alternative farms and ranches that weave the tapestry of sustainable agriculture here in Marin County. The products from these farms are not the result of mass production practices aimed at low prices, but of premium quality local products for those who seek a special relationship with their food.

Our farms and ranches are supported by beneficial organizations like the Natural Resources Conservation Service, which works hard to provide incentives for conservation practices. Marin Organic continues its ongoing work of bringing the organic farms and ranches *"over the hill"* to the greater Marin population with stellar events like "Taste of Marin," celebrating the diversity, quality and farmland stewardship that make up farming and ranching in Marin.

- Steve Quirt, Editor

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News from Marin County Farms, Ranches and Producers

- ☞ **Cowgirl Creamery** and the **Marin French Cheese Factory** were featured in the travel section of the **September** issue of **O magazine**.
- ☞ **Cowgirl Creamery's Fromage Blanc** took **second place** in the fromage blanc category, their **Creme Fraiche** took **third place** in the creme fraiche category, and **Cowgirl Creamery Cottage Cheese** took **first place** at the **American Cheese Society competition in Kentucky**.
- ☞ **Robert McClelland** and **Jolynn Mendoza** are operating a newly restored **organic dairy** at Cooper's former operation in **Valley Ford**. The two are milking 140 organically certified Holstein cows.
- ☞ **Linda Novy, Janis Austin, and Norma Novy** have opened a new business, **Mellinor Farms**, which is dedicated to promoting organic and sustainably grown vegetable, habitat, and cut flower plant starts. They may be reached at **415 457-5268**.
- ☞ **Stacy Carlsen, Agricultural Commissioner for Marin**, was honored at the **Organic Farming Research Foundation's 13th Annual Dinner at the Lark Creek Inn on September 27**.
- ☞ A piece about Marin agriculture called **The Middle Ground** ran on **NPR's Living on Earth** this month. The text can be viewed at **<http://www.loe.org/shows/shows.htm?programID=05-P13-00035#feature5>**
- ☞ **Sharon Doughty's daughter, Karen**, and her husband, **John**, will be managing the **Doughty Dairy** with a 75-cow starter herd.

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