



## EDITOR'S COLUMN

*"Steve, you're the one who started all this!" - Doug Dolcini, rancher, Hicks Valley.*

Not true, Doug. We all started it. Doug Dolcini and I had a conversation about seven years ago, when I was hanging out with him at the Hicks Valley Dolcini home ranch. We were leaning on the fence looking east at some rich bottom land just below his large reservoir. "You think anyone might want to farm this piece of ground?," he asked me with a slight drawl. I said, "Yeah Doug, this is a nice set-up for a vegetable operation, with the water and all," while thinking how great it would be if I had the time and tractor to farm this amazing patch of ground. Well, seven years later David Retsky and his crew have about 30 acres under cultivation, producing some of the finest vegetables and berries in the county. Kitty Dolcini has been growing strawberries and just opened a farm stand at the corner of Petaluma-Pt. Reyes Road and Hicks Valley Road, and is doing well. This is all part of the ongoing change in Marin County agriculture. Julie Evans Rossotti and her new husband, Tony Rossotti, are also part of the change, with their new

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## Rossotti Ranch: Straddling Marin & Sonoma Counties to produce food for the community

**Julie Evans-Rossotti**, at Rossotti Ranch, is a fourth-generation farmer, and her husband Tony, from the Corda clan, is fifth generation. That makes a combined nine generations. Julie was raised on the Point Reyes Seashore Historical H Ranch, feeding, managing, and chasing cows from her parents' cattle operation. "I grew up as a rancher. My whole life has been growing food for people," Julie says. Recently married, Julie and her husband found a ranch straddling the Marin-Sonoma county line overlooking Bloomfield Valley. They purchased it with savings, and so begins their own farming and ranching operation. Julie raises Boer goats, naturally raised and fed only on pasture. She takes pride in the health and quality of her animals, and markets them locally to restaurants and discerning customers. Long a favorite with Latino and Asian communities, goat is gaining popularity with San Francisco restaurants and chefs as they discover its flavor. The couple are finding that they have discovered a profitable and growing niche.

Already Julie and Tony are planning to add an educational component to their operation by offering a series of rustic ranch dinners, which will feature local fare and also a true-to-life tour of Rossotti Ranch, showing guests how things are done behind the scenes on a working ranch. "I have to stay in farming; it's my whole life," explains Julie. This is the kind of enthusiasm that makes for innovation and discovery. Julie plans to add honey to the farm product line and is open to more diversification.

All of this activity is the result of Julie and Tony's passion for the land and farming. "This ranch is really about who we are and what we do. I have been producing food for my community my whole life. That's how I look at it - it's not just ranching, it's all about us producing the best food for our local community to enjoy."

## Recent legislation expands opportunities for farm stand sales

*"It is the intent of the state to promote the consumption of California-grown produce"* - CALIFORNIA FOOD AND AGRICULTURE CODE

Kitty Dolcini opened her Hicks Valley farm stand last year so she could sell her strawberries directly to customers. Since fresh berries have a very short shelf life, carrying them straight from the field, down the driveway to her small farm stand, ensures that they are their very best. Berries not sold on day one are offered at a reduced rate the next day for making jam or pies.

Kitty and her brother Doug own the family ranch in Hicks Valley, where they grew up with cattle and horses. After the Dolcinis rented part of their ranch to organic farmer David Retsky, Kitty said she "just wanted to learn more about farming" and started growing strawberries.



Kitty likes the extra income that she earns from her farm stand, where she also sells fresh vegetables for David. However, she described the

greatest reward as *"the feeling at the end of the day when you've worked outside and you're so tired that when you lie down in bed, you just think how good you feel and fall asleep so easily."* Her customers love the stand, too.

*"Customers always thank you for being out here,"* Kitty noted.

With the recent passage of AB 2168, Kitty and other California farm stand operators may now sell processed agricultural products, such as jams, preserves, pickles, juices, cured olives and other "value-added" products made with ingredients produced on or near the farm, without having to meet all of the "retail food facility" standards as defined by California Retail Food Code. Before this legislation came into effect, only fresh produce and shell eggs could be sold at such stands, unless the farmer could meet the same standards to which grocery stores are subject.

This legislation expands direct sales opportunities for farmers, but the best thing about farm stands will always be offering the best, freshest produce right off the farm and right from the farmer. (See back page for more farmstead news.) - Lisa Bush

## Join the MO Glean Team!

Produce left in the field because it doesn't meet aesthetic requirements of the market, but is harvested anyway, is termed "gleaned." This can account for up to 20% of what is grown: potatoes, squashes, spinach, leeks, beets, carrots, arugula, lettuces, meats, eggs, yogurt, ice cream, and more.

Marin Organic incorporates gleaned food into their Organic School Lunch and Gleaning Program, supplementing school purchases with the produce. This offsets cost, enabling schools to choose local and organic while staying within their budgets. Marin Organic has donated and delivered over 100,000 pounds of gleaned products to about half the schools, camps, and underserved communities in Marin. Each week the program enables 12,000 children to enjoy organic foods grown from Marin soils.

What's new about the program? Scott Davidson, the Program Manager, has made gleaning open to any and all who would like to contribute their time in the field. Hilary Jeffris of Mill Valley, a newcomer to the group, was so excited about her experience that she posted to the Marin Open Garden Project blog on Monday, August 10th:

*"While I work at the College of Marin IVC farm every Wednesday, it was a great experience for my kids to try their hand at 'real' agricultural work. Don't get me wrong, we harvest from our home garden and regularly work together at the Park Elementary School Garden. But this was an opportunity for them to directly 'give back' to kids who don't have the access to fresh, local, organic food that we do."*

Visit Marin Organic's website ([www.marinorganic.org](http://www.marinorganic.org)) and get on their "glean team" email list. Extra hands make "short work" of the task at hand. - Paige Phinney

*To join the Marin Organic Glean Team, please contact Program Manager Scott Davidson at 415.663.9667 or [scott@marinorganic.org](mailto:scott@marinorganic.org). "There's plenty of food to glean and so many people to feed. Many hands make light work."*



*Healthy and local food for all*

Believing that access to healthy, local farm-fresh food should be a right, not a privilege, Marin Farmers Markets began an EBT (electronic benefits transfer/food stamps) acceptance program in Fall 2008. Today the program is running in all eight of MFM's markets.

Farmers markets are community gathering places, aimed at providing an opportunity for people of all demographic backgrounds to come together and enjoy healthy and local food. Still, affordability is a barrier that limits the accessibility of farmers markets to members of low socio-economic status.



The original Food Stamp Program was designed by the federal government to assist people of low or no income to meet basic food needs by providing coupons to purchase food. In 2002, paper Food Stamps evolved into Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) nation-wide, which added a layer of logistical complexity for farmers markets, many of which lacked the infrastructure to transition to the new system.

Now, EBT users can come to a Marin Farmers Market information booth with their EBT card. They are issued unique MFM \$1.00 wooden coins which they can spend at MFM farmers markets to purchase fruits, vegetables, meats, fish, and poultry, dairy products, breads, and cereals.

EBT usability at farmers markets is an important way to insure that all people have access to fresh and nutritious local foods.

MFM is getting the word out about EBT at their markets and through partner organizations in Marin County. They would like to invite farmers, local organizations, and the community to join in helping make local food accessible to as many people as possible.

- Leah Smith, Marin Farmers Markets

To learn more about how affordable it can be to shop in season at your local farmers market visit [www.marinfarmersmarkets.org/index/affordability](http://www.marinfarmersmarkets.org/index/affordability).



**Strong rancher participation in Conditional Waiver Program**

As of August 18, 2009, 192 ranchers have submitted Notices of Intent and another 23 property owners have submitted Notices of Non Applicability to the San Francisco Regional Water Quality Control Board in compliance with its Tomales Bay Watershed Grazing Operations Conditional Waiver Program. The waiver program was approved by the Board on July 08, 2008, and requires ranch owners and managers to submit these notices and begin development of ranch water quality plans, as part of the Board's regulatory programs and policies to improve water quality in the watershed. "We are pleased with this level of participation," explained Carmen Fewless of the Regional Board. It represents approximately 84% of the properties and ranches that are covered by the Waiver Program.

A working group, made up of representatives from the University of California Cooperative Extension, Marin Resources Conservation Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service Petaluma District Office, Marin Agricultural Land Trust, Marin County Farm Bureau, Western United Dairymen, California Cattleman's Association, and Marin Organic, have been working with Regional Board staff to provide Tomales Bay ranchers with the information and assistance needed to comply with the waiver requirements. The working group held workshops on September 2, September 10, and September 12 to provide ranchers with the resources and tools to complete required ranch plans, conduct ranch inspections, and submit annual certification. Ranchers who have questions or need assistance can call David Lewis at 415-499-4204 or Stephanie Larson at 707-565-2621.

Admittedly, regulatory requirements are not readily welcomed by anyone. However, Marin ranchers have a long history of working to improve and maintain water quality. As Merv McDonald stated "We have to do this." Through these workshops and combined work group resources, ranchers in the watershed are demonstrating the progress in watershed stewardship they have made.

- David Lewis

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ranch populated by Boer goats and honeybees straddling the Marin and Sonoma county line. Both these young folks come from long-standing Marin farm families and are fulfilling family traditions by producing premium, healthy food. Thus the passing of the generational torch is still alive.

In all segments of our agricultural family, good work is growing. Marin Farmers Markets continues to expand its services to all of our population by making food stamps available to those who need them at the farmers market. What a fine use of the stamp program, increasing access to fresh and local produce.

Marin Organic's Gleaning for Schools Program is maturing into a real workhorse, getting lots of fresh organic produce into the schools and campuses of Marin. Often, volunteers walk away full of experience and enthusiasm after participating in the program. Rob Fowler, a recent volunteer, said, "I can't believe how much I learned about farming. Helping get this food into Marin schools was a real honor."

Lastly, the Regional Water Quality Control Board's new, strict requirements for water quality have put most of our ranchers at a loss as to how to comply. UCCE Farm Advisors David Lewis and Stephanie Larson have been working with seven partnering organizations to help ranchers find ways to comply and ease the pressure everyone is feeling.

This issue combines news and observations from all branches of our agricultural tree. It is truly amazing how much we are accomplishing by working together in this place called Marin. - Steve Quirt, Editor



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## Marin Farm News

- ☞ Check out the **Small Farm Center at UC Davis** for recent articles in the fresh edition of *Small Farm News* (<http://www.sfc.ucdavis.edu/>):
  - More options for farm stands. Article explains new rules for California farm stands.
  - Read about farm stands, local meat, and transition planning.
  - Early results from agritourism survey that **Ellie Rilla** is conducting with other UC researchers. Farmers report agritourism can be profitable.
- ☞ **West Marin backyard gardeners** have begun holding a **produce exchange** behind the **Point Reyes Dance Palace on Saturdays at 1:30 pm**. Gardeners with surplus come to trade produce, dried and fresh herbs, eggs, worm compost liquid, seedlings, and seeds with other gardeners. It is a great way for people in the community to meet and exchange information.
- ☞ **Cowgirl Creamery** has won two awards at the **2009 North American Regional Jersey Cheese Awards**. Their recently-created Inverness won a gold medal and their spring seasonal St. Pat, a whole milk cheese wrapped in nettles, won a silver.

**Note:** We encourage our readers to give us their email addresses ([fhealey@co.marin.ca.us](mailto:fhealey@co.marin.ca.us)) in order to receive the Grown in Marin newsletter in electronic form. Thank you. - The Editors.

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