



EDITORS COLUMN

"Cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens. They are the most vigorous, the most independent, the most virtuous, and they are tied to their country, and wedded to it's liberty and interests by the most lasting bonds." - Thomas Jefferson.

Thomas Jefferson was of course a farmer as well as a statesman, and well understood his value as such. Today we are still working hard to realize these ideas that he put forth. This issue of "Grown in Marin" will touch on several of our local farmers who are not only "valuable citizens" but innovators in the struggle to keep the family farm viable. Today, agriculture is changing, for better or worse. Here in Marin, farmers face the same pressures as family farms nationwide. Rapidly rising land prices, stringent regulations and fierce worldwide price competition put all our farms at risk. Ranchers and farmers are being forced to look beyond their traditions into new diversification strategies. At the Doughty Ranch, Sharon and Steve Doughty have added Point Reyes Vineyard Wines and a Bed and Breakfast business to their dairy operation. Sally and Mike Gale have restored Sally's Chileno Valley family ranch and are producing, natural grass-fed beef and organic apples.

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Adding Vines to Bovines

Wine grapes in Point Reyes Station? That was the first response I had when I noticed vineyards on the hillside of the Doughty Ranch just north of Point Reyes Station. It's too cool and too wet to grow wine grapes here was the thinking! Sharon Doughty admits it was a "bold move." With her husband Steve and son Scott they decided to defy the odds and go with Steve's hunch that the micro-climate in their tiny valley would yield enough fruit to make at least a respectable sparkling wine. In 1990 they planted 2.5 acres of pinot noir and chardonnay and were off and running. Together, the family including daughter Kathleen, with help from consultants, made the first vintage of sparkling wine in 1995. The 1996 vintage followed and



Scott Doughty at the Point Reyes Vineyard starting up the spring grass cutting of their hillside vineyard.

more grapes were planted. The family had become more committed but deeper into the financial risks of a new enterprise. Winemaking has a delayed cashflow since you have to wait at least a year before the product can be sold. The 1995 and 1996 sparkling wine vintages were very successful and the family came up with a simple, elegant label featuring the historic Point Reyes lighthouse. Sharon explained the choice of imagery this way, "People come to the area to enjoy what we have here, intense natural beauty, tradition and a healthy lifestyle. They can take some of our West Marin culture home with them with wine grown and produced right here." Steve and Sharon had discovered the consumer niche that they needed for direct marketing - the visitors to the Point Reyes area. The expenses of the new venture were adding up so the family looked around for another income stream to keep the winery going until the inventory built up, and came up with the bed and breakfast idea, the Point Reyes Vineyard Inn. This nestled nicely into the overall farm plan and provided an outlet for wine sales through the B & B and adjacent tasting room. This all happened with the 300 cow dairy in full operation! "Yes, we've been working non-stop for the last ten years," noted Sharon.

Today the Doughty's are farming seven acres of grapes, vinting 800 cases of very quaffable wines, running their dairy and managing the Point Reyes Vineyard Inn as well as leasing some land to an organic farmer. This is quite a different picture from the late eighties when Sharon took over the ranch, and wrestled with how to keep the dairy operation viable. "I used to go out on the pasture and look at the ranch. There was no way that I would let it go. I was determined to find a way to keep it going. You need passion to make something like this work. You need to have the courage to be different, you need to work hard and take risks, but above all you need to believe in what you are doing and have a passion for it."

Farm Diversification Workshop

Do I want to diversify my farming operation? How do I find out which is the best crop or livestock to expand with? How will this new enterprise fit into my existing farm plan? How about help with my business plan? All these questions were covered at our "Grown in Marin" Farm Diversification workshop held on May 30th at the Dance Palace Community Center in Point Reyes Station.

Al Poncia, a fourth generation Tomales rancher, set the stage by asking the big question, "How?" Al is representative of the ranching population in Marin. He has operated his own dairy and is now raising beef and sheep. "O.K., I want to diversify, now you tell me what and how?"

David Visher, an agricultural marketing consultant from Davis, started out by explaining the importance of doing your marketing homework before you make a farm diversification decision. Is there a market for your product in the area? How does the new enterprise fit into the existing farm plan? David suggests planning and forethought followed by a comprehensive business plan.

Glenn McGourty is the UCCE farm advisor for Mendocino. Glenn talked about looking at niche markets for crops that are suited for our climate, conditions and farm history. Choosing the right new enterprise to fit into your existing farm infrastructure helps use existing resources. Glenn suggests finding out what trends are happening in your region and capturing those opportunities.



Mike Gale of Chileno Valley Natural Beef thinning one of the 200 organic apple trees that he and his wife Sally added to their ranching operation three years ago.

Steve Schwartz of California FarmLink closed with a talk on farm succession, leasing and creative solutions of farm ownership transfer.

The final consensus - developing a smart business plan is the cornerstone of a successful farm diversification program. California FarmLink has provided us with a concise, easy to read planning document, "Business Plan Workbook for New Farmers," which UC Cooperative Extension is offering at no charge. Call 415 499-4204 for a copy.

Strengthening Local Food Systems

Over the past 50 years, the reach of free-market corporate capitalism has extended around the world. In the United States, local communities and economies are being woven into global circuits of mass production and consumption. Nowhere is this more evident than in the agriculture and food sectors. Fast-food outlets and mass-market food retailers have spread to every corner of the country.

But, a counter-movement organized around smaller scale, locally controlled agriculture and food enterprises has emerged and is strengthening. This civic agriculture is a powerful template around which we can build non-or extra-market relationships between persons, social groups, and



institutions, which have been distanced from each other. Indeed, a growing number of educators and practitioners across the U.S. are recognizing that creative new forms of community development, built around the regeneration of local food systems, may eventually generate sufficient economic and political power to mute the more socially and environmentally destructive manifestations of the global marketplace.

An effective development strategy for civic agriculture should be geared toward fostering problem solving. Policies to promote and strengthen regional trade associations, local agricultural districts, producer cooperatives, farmers' markets, CSA's and other forms of locally-based economic activity would be part and parcel of a comprehensive agriculture-based economic development strategy. Civic agriculture represents an alternative for those individuals who are committed to supporting community businesses, preserving farmland, and substituting fresh, locally produced food for the products offered by the large, multinational food corporations.

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Demystifying the USDA National Organic Program

There are two tiers of government organic over-site in California; national and state. Let's begin with the national. Organic food is produced by farmers who use renewable resources and conserve soil and water to enhance environmental qualities. Organic meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy products come from animals that are given no antibiotics or growth hormones. Organic food is produced without using pesticides, petroleum-based fertilizers or sewage sludge-based fertilizers, bio-engineering, or ionizing radiation. Before labeling organic, an USDA accredited certifier inspects the farm where the food is produced to assure the farmer is following the rules necessary to meet USDA National Organic Program standards. Companies that handle or process organic food before it gets to your local supermarket or restaurant must also be certified.

Under the new federal law (beginning October 21, 2002), growers cannot label their produce organic unless they are certified. The exception is the small grower with less than \$5,000 a year in gross organic sales, who may still use the term organic without being certified, but must follow the same rules as certified organic growers.

But there is more. California has its own State Organic Program. Proposed legislation has been submitted to the California Assembly to rewrite the California Foods Act of 1990 (COFA), which would broaden the provisions of COFA to include organic products such as pet food and cosmetics, items not covered by the NOP. This law would be called the California Organic Products Act of 2003 (COFA 2003), and would provide California the regulatory over-site to enforce the NOP, and regulate organic producers and industries not covered by Federal regulation.

This requires all who produce or sell any type of organic product in California to register and pay a fee annually. Organic registration for initial agricultural producers and handlers should be arranged with your home county Agricultural Commissioner's office.

Here's what you need to do if you are an organic producer or handler:

- ☞ Register with your home Agricultural Commissioner's office annually.
- ☞ Beginning October 21, 2002, producers and handlers must be certified by an USDA-accredited certifying agent to sell, label, or represent their products as "100 percent organic," "organic," or "made with organic," (we'll cover labeling next issue).
- ☞ Small growers with less than \$5,000 a year in gross sales are exempt from certification.



Erik Parks speaking at the second meeting of the Natural and Organic Livestock Workgroup. Chair Mike Gale, David Evans and Travis Potter led the group.

Grass-fed, Natural, and Organic Livestock News

Grass-fed beef has certainly been in the news lately. No less than seven prominent news articles have appeared since spring. Local natural grass-fed beef producers like Sally and Mike Gale of Chileno Valley Natural Beef and David Evans of Marin Sun Farms Grass-fed Beef have suddenly become very busy. These two producers are riding what Mike Gale describes as "the best part of the wave" for the surging popularity of natural grass-fed beef. Both the Gales and David agree that Marin County has a unique and specialized micro climate; a long, cool, grassland growing season that is ideal for natural grass fed livestock.

This new interest prompted a second meeting of the Natural and Organic Livestock Workgroup on June 27 at the UC Cooperative Extension Office. Twenty five ranchers, community and government representatives, and processors attended. Travis Potter from Prather Ranch Organic Beef, Mike Gale from Chileno Vally Natural Beef, David Evans from Marin Sun Farms and Erik Parks spoke enthusiastically about their successes in pioneering the transition from conventional commodity based growing to high value, high quality products marketed directly to the consumer. The speakers agreed that the time has come to grow this new ranching program and capture this emerging market.

The meeting ended on a positive high note with establishment of three concrete objectives; creating of a study group to look at the formation of a Marin County Natural Livestock Producers Association, identifying natural and grass fed standards, and researching a mobile processing program.

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They also opened a bed & breakfast business and offer agriculturally based art classes. Dean and Bob Giacominni found a way to keep the kids on the farm; they diversified into value-added cheese making with their wildly popular Point Reyes Blue Cheese, and involved the whole family with the production, marketing and business administration.

In talking with these families, one thing rings clear and true through all their experiences. It is a deeply held passion for their ranches and the land that they farm. It is this determination to stay on the land and keep farming that has led them into the creative enterprises that we are all able to enjoy today. These families decided that the risk was worth taking, and boldly plunged into new and diversified farm enterprises to insure that their operations will continue on through this century.

The real spirit of American agriculture is reflected not in the large-scale production numbers of big business farming, but in the ingenuity, integrity, risk taking and courage put forth by these farmers and their families.



Organic Strawberry Farming Workshop

July 18, 2002 ☞ 4:30 - 7:30 PM

Dance Palace Community Center, Point Reyes Station

Marin County is well suited for the growing of high-quality and high-value organic strawberries. Growers have reached premiums of up to 50 percent, with net profits ranging from \$3,000 - \$10,000 per acre. This workshop will serve as a starting point for anyone who wants to begin farming this potentially lucrative specialty crop. The speakers will give a market overview and also address planning, management, growing practices and risks.

News from Marin County Farms, Ranches and Producers

- ☞ **Point Reyes Vineyard** just received a **Silver Medal**, for their Sparkling Wine, **Blanc de Noir**, at the **California State Fair**. The grapes are 100% Point Reyes grown.
- ☞ **Marin County Producers Survey and Directory** **UC Cooperative Extension** is preparing a survey of farms and ranches in Marin. The information will eventually serve as a producers directory, for those who wish to participate. Consumers and businesses will be able to find out who is growing what. Look for the survey in late July.
- ☞ **Point Reyes Station Farmers' Market** will officially open on **July 13**.
- ☞ **“Russelberries,”** organic strawberries grown in Tomales by **Russell Sartori**, can be found at **Toby's Feed Barn**, **Deikmanns Store** in Tomales, **Woodlands Market**, **Paradise Market** and **Benjamins**.
- ☞ **Fairfax Fresh**, Patti Elliott's Meyer Lemon Farm and Nursery, is now offering lemon tree starts and Manzanilla olive starts. Call her for seasonal availability at 415 453-5634.
- ☞ **The Marin Organic Certification Agency**, an office of the **Agricultural Commissioner**, has certified 23 growers and processors this year, with about a dozen applicants pending, including an herb grower, organic hay grower and an organic silage maker.
- ☞ **Marin County** ranks 47th out of 56 for pesticide use in California. Fresno County is 1st.
- ☞ **Cowgirl Creamery**, a certified organic artisan cheese maker Point Reyes Station, has opened a second store in San Francisco.

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