



EDITORS COLUMN

"Farmers should belong to us all because when we lose one it affects us all. Protecting farmers is just as important as protecting the land."

- Anna Thomas, author of *The Vegetarian Epicure*

Whenever I travel I become fixated on food and farming issues. Where does the produce come from? How big is the dairy herd? What's produced locally? Recently in Limerick County, Ireland, my daughter ran out of patience with my chatter and editorial comments, and stopped me cold with, "Dad, you are obsessed with food!" I took a moment to regroup, and a recent conversation that I had with an Irish dairy producer came to mind. We were talking about local distribution, grass-fed dairy cows and the plight of the farmer. Somehow we got onto food and farm relationships, and he said somewhat off-handedly, "It's not just about food, it's about the farming." So my obsession with food is really an obsession with ecologically sound, economically viable and socially responsible farming.

Whenever a farmer or rancher, either here in Marin or southern Ireland, finds a way to keep the farm healthy and the family secure, we all benefit. The producer may benefit from reduced food transportation costs, natural and healthy

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Where does it all go? Marin farm products are getting easier to find

People are always asking us, "You talk about local products, but where can I find them?" There's good and bad news. Marin County is primarily an animal agriculture system, which accounts for 76% of the gross sales. The remaining 24% consists of 5% aquaculture, 2% nursery crops and 17% in row and tree crops. Most of the beef leaves the area for out-of-state finishing and processing. From our 2003 *Status of Marin County Agriculture* report, 11 of the 64 beef producers stated that their primary market was Marin or the Bay Area. With dairy products it is difficult to figure out where the milk ends up, but both Clover and Straus produce and market locally.

The produce, tree crops and aquaculture stick around a little more. You can find Hog Island oysters and shellfish at the Ferry Plaza Building and Farmers' Market, as well as in Marshall. You can also pick up oysters at Tomales Bay Oyster Co. in Marshall and Johnsons Oysters in the Seashore. Our great coastal produce can be readily sourced at local farmers' markets. Star Route Farms, Nicasio Valley Farms, and Paradise Valley Produce can be found at the Marin Civic Center Market and other markets throughout Marin. The Point Reyes Farmers' Market has an organic and sustainable line-up of local farm producers: Marin Sun Farms, Fresh Run Farm, McEvoy Olive Oil, Point Reyes Original Blue Cheese, Little Organic Potatoes, Paradise Valley Produce, Sartori Ranch Strawberries, Peter Worsley, grower, and Wild Blue Farms.

You can get sweet organic strawberries and produce from the Nicasio Valley Farm Stand in Nicasio throughout the season, and pumpkins in the fall.

The Marin Organic CSA has locations in Ross and San Geronimo. Members can pick up boxes on Saturday and also shop at a local farmstand.

Retail availability is a little tricky. Tomales Bay Foods in Point Reyes Station carries local produce and organic apples from the Gale Ranch. Toby's Feed Barn carries some local produce in season. Woodlands Market and Good Earth both carry some locally grown vegetables. Better restaurants in the county are beginning to

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The new Ferry Plaza Building in San Francisco hosts a variety of Northbay producers, and is emblematic of the reputation that Marin and Sonoma Counties are generating for premium quality artisan products. Permanent shop locations now exist for Cowgirl Creamery, McEvoy Olive Oil, Hog Island Oyster from Marin, and Oak Hill Flower Farm from Sonoma.

Outside at the Farmers' Market, the Northbay presence is notable: Star Route Organic Farms, Marin Sun Farms (grass-fed beef and free-range eggs), Green Gulch Farm, Little Organic Potatoes, Cowgirl Creamery and Point Reyes Original Blue Cheese from Marin; Andante Dairy, Redwood Hill Goat Cheese, Devoto Gardens, Bodega Goat Cheese, Petaluma Farms (fresh eggs) and Tierra Vegetables from Sonoma.



Lisa Bush talks with Jim Moore at his ranch in Nicasio about what may be needed for a new ranch diversification.

Help with Sorting out Permits

In our survey to Marin agricultural operators we asked what we at U.C. Cooperative Extension (UCCE) could do to help producers. The majority voted for help with the county permitting process. So we found the perfect person to help us out, Lisa Bush. The County of Marin has funded Lisa for two years to help guide new projects through the regulatory and permitting mazes.

Lisa brings with her years of experience working with the agricultural community in Marin. As a MALT Conservation Specialist, she helped coach new easement developments and spent a lot of time on our ranches. She is also a rangeland consultant holding a masters degree in range management and in her own words, is “crazy about grasses.” She knows the agricultural community well and has years of experience working with Marin County government.

Proposing a new agricultural project today can create time delays and lengthy proceedings leading to all kinds of frustrations. The Board of Supervisors would like to streamline this process and voted to hire Lisa as a “coach” to get things moving for those of us who require permitting. Lisa represents a real effort towards team building and will be an advocate for ranchers and farmers. In addition to this, she will also help train county staff about ranching and farming to increase their understanding of agricultural needs and practices. Her position differs from that of a private consultant in that she “points folks in the right direction,” leaving the responsibility and heavy lifting with the operator.

“Lisa Bush is a living example of a county promise made and kept in our ongoing effort to strengthen Marin’s ag industry. She will be working both sides of the street, helping to train County staff on the practices and needs of producers while also being available to permit applicants to help insure less time, cost, and red tape. I expect Lisa to be one busy worker, and a formidable force for the ongoing sustainability of Marin agriculture.” - Steve Kinsey, Supervisor District 4

You can contact Lisa through UCCE at 415 499-4204.

Organic Pasture & Silage

Marin Organic Certified Agriculture (MOCA) has been busy this year certifying 25 organic growers and one processor with two more applications in the review process. To date, 1,167 acres have been certified in organic crop production. The total acreage represents land in both Marin and Sonoma counties. It's natural to assume this crop acreage reflects vegetable and fruit production, but there is another kind of organic production just getting ready to burst out of the seam, and that is the organic live-stock production!

Straus Creamery has paved the way for organic dairy production offering not just milk but quality butter, cheese, yogurt, smoothies and best of all, ice cream!



Certified organic pasture for silage located on the Straus Dairy operation in Marshall.

Inspired by Straus Creamery and their success, several other local dairies have converted their conventional herds and pasture to organic. This is where MOCA growers Tom Crane, Ernie Nunes and Jessica Radin come in. These three growers total 890 acres (of the 1167 acres) of organic oat hay, oat straw and silage. Tom Crane of Sonoma County produces 700 acres of oat hay and oat straw for animal bedding. Ernie Nunes of Marin County produces 50 acres of silage and Jessica Radin of Sonoma County produces 140 acres of silage. These three growers represent an important connection, providing local organic feed to organic livestock production.

It is only a matter of time before we will begin to see organic beef, lamb and chicken being produced by our local ranchers. It's no secret that organic livestock production is a challenge because it also entails the slaughter and wrapping facilities to be certified organic. However, there are several tenacious ranchers out there who are slowly but surely finding their way through these obstacles. -

Anita Sauber, Director, Marin Organic Certified Agriculture

Grown in Marin ❖ July 2003



Leah McKinney and Debra Ruff with organic whole wheat bread & a fruit tart with fresh golden raspberries and blackberries picked in the morning.

All Local, Mostly Organic and Really Delicious in Inverness

Debra's Bakery in Inverness Park should be a destination for any organic and sustainable aficionado who loves to enjoy gourmet bakery goods (and lunch, coffee and an assortment of goodies).

Debra Ruff, the owner and operator, uses 95% organic ingredients to bake and cook the fare. This has not been an easy road to travel. *"Organic ingredients are getting easier to find, but I still spend hours finding everything needed to run a bakery,"* she tells us as she arranges organic golden raspberries and blackberries on a delicious looking delicacy. She scrupulously seeks out local producers. *"We feel that buying locally is just the right thing to do. In a way, it helps us to be creative, which is one of the best parts of our work."* Her list of local Marin producers is long - organic eggs from Amanda Wisbey, strawberries from Nicasio Farms, raspberries from neighbor Bill Hodgeson, Straus milk, lunch veggies from Peter Worsley and Peter Martinelli. She cleans up her tidy space at the end of the day with organic cleaners and all her paper products are from recycled materials. Debra's Bakery is a certified Green Business and also a charter member of Marin Organic's business membership.

This passion for organic sustainable practices goes far back for Debra and her family. Her husband, John Finger, owns and operates Hog Island Oyster Company, and both of them have been working on sustainable farming and food systems for a long time. *"When we had Zane, our son, we decided that organic and healthy foods would become a priority in our lives,"* Debra commented for both herself and John.

"It is really not as difficult to go organic as most people think. It's our belief that everyone in a community should be encouraged to do this."

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soils and pastures, closer relationships with those of us who are nourished by the food, the ability to pass the farm to the next generation, and the fundamental right to be a "price maker" rather than a "price taker."

My Irish dairy farmer friend had just gotten up for the second milking, around 5:30 PM. He'd been up at 3:00 AM for the first one, and then cut silage throughout the day. Farmers work hard and take on huge responsibilities. In order for us to restore farming to its proper place in our lives we, too, must assume new responsibilities. We need to go out of our way to find local agricultural products. Yes, we need to pay more, the true value of what it takes to produce food. We need to get to know farms and farming again. We need to localize agriculture. We need to pass this reclaimed knowledge on to our children. All this means a shift in lifestyle priorities, but it brings with it a sense of personal security and independence. We don't necessarily need to be controlled by circumstance.

Almost daily new world trade agreements are put into place that import commodities into our markets, undercutting our farmers and ranchers, who, one by one, may finally give up and sell the farm. When this happens we lose not only our historical past, but also our present, and perhaps the most disturbing, our future. The preservation and restoration of local and sustainable farming culture are rooted in so many issues that affect our well being: reduced resource use, personal health, local employment, open space aesthetics, social interactions, childhood education and a healthy local commerce.

Too bad all this was not on the tip of my tongue when my daughter commented on my food obsession! At the time, all I could manage was some mumbled apology. These thoughts are dedicated to her and her children and meant to redeem my family reputation as a food-obsessed father. - *Steve Quirt, Editor*

Grown in Marin Producers' Directory Website Up

If you have been wondering where to find local products and who grows what in Marin you can find out all that at:

<http://www.growninmarin.org>

The site is up but still under development. All the Marin growers that we have referred to in this newsletter can be found on the website. Contact us if you'd like to be added.

Also, back issues of this newsletter, workshop dates and other organic and sustainable news can be found on our main site:

http://cemarin.ucdavis.edu/Custom_Program600/

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buy from local farmers. Manka's Restaurant and Debra's Bakery in Inverness and Coast Cafe in Bolinas do a great job sourcing local fresh vegetables and fruit.

Our farmers produce premium quality farm products. Witness the percentages of Northbay artisan producers and growers at the Ferry Plaza Market, which is considered the most prestigious market around. Great growers and a salubrious climate make for incredible premium bounty. The only drawback - not enough farmers! We need more growers, buyers and outlets for this great food. Be sure to ask your local specialty grocer to carry Marin-grown products, support farm-to-table programs like Marin Organic, shop locally at farmers' markets and farmstands and do everything you can to grow more farms and farmers.

In order to support local growers and help them reach their customers, we at UCCE are putting together a website directory (www.growninmarin.org), which is up, but under development. It's a big help in contacting the local growers and producers that we have mentioned above.

Find out a little more about our site on page 3!

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University of California and United States Department of Agriculture & County of Marin Cooperating

News from Marin County Farms, Ranches and Producers

- ☞ The Marin County Agriculture Commissioner's Office has **25 organic certifications** to date, with 4 more pending.
- ☞ The **Organic Farming Research Foundation** reports that **44% of the organic farmers** nationwide indicated that their markets have increased. Also the **U.S. Department of Agriculture** reports that **California** land farmed organically has risen **60 percent** in a five-year period.
- ☞ **Marin Organic** has met most of its **2003 Fundraising Goal of \$100,000** with grants from the **Marin Community Foundation** for \$30,000, the **Columbia Foundation** for \$35,000, **WSARE** for \$13,500 and the **Marin County Board of Supervisors** for \$15,000, for a current total of **\$93,500**.
- ☞ **Straus Family Creamery's** new **organic ice cream** arrived in stores this month in three flavors, **vanilla, chocolate and raspberry**.
- ☞ **The Nicasio Valley Farmstand** is open Thursday through Saturday from 10-6 and will offer fresh, **organic produce, juicy organic strawberries and wild salmon**.
- ☞ **Liz Daniels of Cow Track Ranch** won first place at the **Marin County Fair** for her edible flower mix.
- ☞ **The Marin Agricultural Land Trust (MALT)** and **Marin Organic** are having their annual "**Taste of Marin**" event where you can meet the growers and sit down to a four-course dinner from Marin fields. **Call MALT 415 663-1338**.
- ☞ **SRJC** classes on **Organic Gardening, Ecological Agriculture and Composting** begin this summer at **Shone Farm** in Forestville, Sonoma Co. Go to **www.santarosa.edu**.

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