



EDITOR'S COLUMN

"I want my kids to feel the same excitement and involvement in being an important, involved part of the ranch that I felt growing up here." - Kevin Lunny, G Ranch

The kind of Italian green globe artichoke plants that were originally dry-farmed on the Point Reyes peninsula are not easy to find. They need to be cultivated from root divisions as the seed stock is somewhat unstable and open to genetic variability. So when we got a call from a farmer down in Davenport that he had "half a bin of roots" that he was willing to part with, Kevin Lunny and I jumped in the truck and headed south. The ride down and back gave us plenty of time to talk shop. Kevin is a dedicated family man with a big family of triplets, parents, brothers and sisters, and more than one family business, so family was a natural topic of discussion. The artichoke quest and the health of the family farm are inseparable in this case. Kevin has embarked on an ambitious farm diversification plan to rekindle the enthusiasm for farming that he experienced growing up as a family member of G Ranch. His plans highlight a number of

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Artichokes and Grass at G Ranch

Diversification is underway at the Lunny Ranch



Kevin Lunny displays one of the 500 heirloom green globe Italian artichokes that he and the UC Cooperative Extension program found in Davenport, California. Kevin and his family turned the truckload into 18 manicured rows out on the Point.

Joe Lunny was staring at over 500 Italian green globe artichokes. "What am I supposed to do with these? I'm a cattle rancher!" Joe and the rest of the Lunny family, his wife Joan, his son Kevin, the Lunny triplets, and Kevin's wife Nancy, have plunged head first into an ambitious diversification of the family ranch. Starting with the kind of green globe artichoke that was popular on the Point Reyes peninsula 70 years ago, the farm plan calls for innovation and exciting times for the family. In addition to the chokes, the small market garden will produce berries and traditional cool weather veggies. Also in the works are renovations to the existing buildings in keeping with ranch history and tradition, including a modest roadside stand that will offer farm products and help park visitors to better appreciate the role of agriculture in the National Park. "We're excited. We like the idea of bringing traditional family farming and ranching closer to the park visitors."

Kevin and his father Joe were dairymen until the mid-seventies when they switched to cattle. The slow transition to premium quality beef is complete and the Lunnys run a closed herd on their rich, cool-weather pastures out on the Point Reyes peninsula. But transition is a continuing process.

The Lunny Ranch now has the largest acreage of organic pasture in Marin with 1400 acres under certification, and Kevin is looking at transitioning a small part of the herd to organic, along with a grass-fed program. Internal parasite control is a big issue for coastal cattle ranchers, and the Lunnys are well aware of the challenges they face keeping their cows healthy and meeting the strict requirements for both organic and grass-fed certification. "We are beginning to experiment with reducing or eliminating parasiticide use. We test and keep a close watch on the cows' health. We think we may be able to reduce parasite loads by breaking life cycles through more intensive management and smaller paddock rotational grazing," says Kevin.

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Jeff Creque at the McEvoy Ranch Compost operation

On-Farm Compost Workshop

Jeff Creque, range and soil consultant and manager of the McEvoy Organic Olive Ranch compost and soil fertility program, gave an expert and information-rich workshop to 30 Marin and Sonoma farmers on a warm and sunny day at McEvoy Ranch. Jeff is the architect and advisor for several large-scale, on-farm and commercial compost operations in Marin, including the Bolinas Resource Recovery Project, which produces high-quality compost from local green waste.

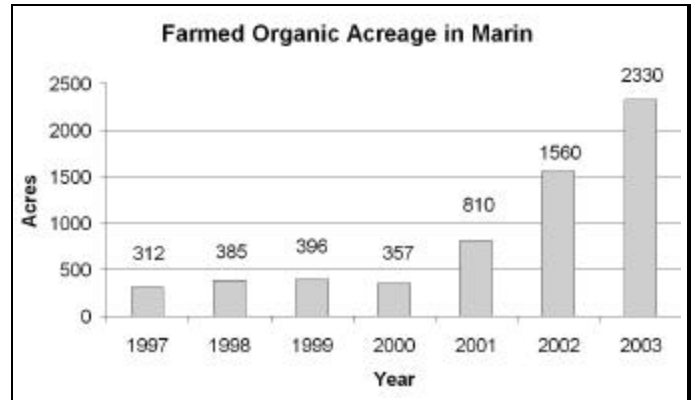
Jeff's passion and commitment for composting is backed by science and experience. He led the group through each phase of compost-making with information on pile construction, temperature influences, and feedstocks. The audience consisted of experienced farmers, and the ongoing Q&A was interesting and lively. No question went unanswered.

The "grow soil, not plants" philosophy was in play throughout the whole workshop, and Jeff helped everyone get a better handle on the importance of a healthy and biologically rich soil base. In particular, he helped us all understand the importance of a carbon-rich soil structure that supports the all-important microbial populations. Carbon-rich compost applications and cover-cropping can both help the microbes flourish, with one result being higher rates of nutrients made available for hungry plants. Jeff demonstrated this by showing the class the lush, healthy rows of olive trees and grasses that cover 100 acres of McEvoy Ranch, and his long, neat windrows of compost carefully laid out on the compost "pad."

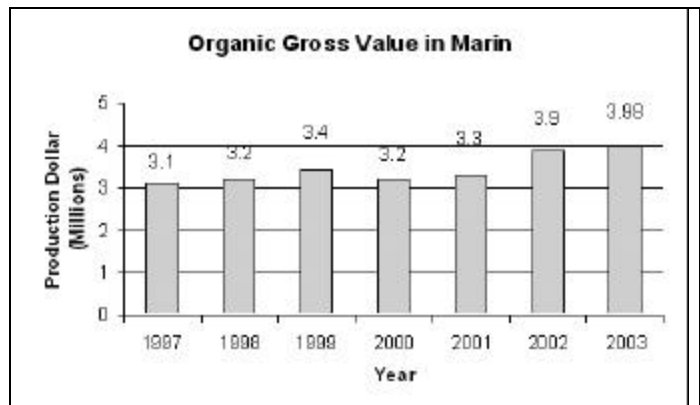
Making compost on the farm is a good idea if it fits into the farm plan. Bringing in feedstocks like manure is an added cost and needs to be compared with the cost of off-farm compost. But optimizing our natural on-farm nutrient cycles by composting has extra benefits like quality control for maximum productivity and a closer relationship with our soils, and ultimately, our farms.

A Bright Future for Organic Farming in Marin County

The future of organic agriculture in Marin looks bright with trends that show increases in organic acreage, registered organic growers, and increases in gross value for organic products. The total gross value for organic growers for 2003 in



Marin was \$3.98 million. Demand from consumers for organic products and sustainable farming practices helps fuel this trend. Part of the recent increase in acreage is due to hay producers certifying pastures as organic. There has been an increase in registered organic vegetable growers as well. The average size of an organic farm in Marin is five acres, with 88 percent of the growers producing vegetables and fruits. There were 24 registered organic growers in 2002, and the number increased to 33 in 2003.



With an increased interest in organic agriculture in Marin, the growing trend toward organic acreage is likely to continue. There is interest from grass-fed livestock producers to certify pastures as organic for even more added value, which will impact the organic acreage growth rate.

Price premiums and growing demand for locally grown organic products are encouraging new farmers to enter into organic farming, adding to the growth in acreage. - Juan Hidalgo, Marin County Agricultural Commissioners Office

Sustainable San Domenico School



Shelly Flint

Shelly Flint, Director of Sustainability for San Domenico School in Sleepy Hollow, grows a lush, organic acre of veggies, fruits, flowers and herbs. She also helps to grow all the San Domenico kids!

Sustainability practices and organic gardening are built into the school curriculum here, and

Shelly frequently takes a class or two into the garden to help grow organic veggies, much of which end up in the school cafeteria. "The kids really like to dig. Just give them a shovel and they are happy!" she says.

But the program is much more than digging. Shelly gently journeys the students through the web of relationships that their little garden represents with the local watershed, the school kitchen, and themselves as part of the system. The children learn the importance of fresh, local food sources and why it is important to support local agriculture.

The whole sustainability program was begun by Sister Gervais in 1994, and is an important foundation for the San Domenico School curriculum. In addition to organic gardening, the kids learn about the importance of alternative energy sources, recycling, and watershed restoration. The concepts are woven into the overall curriculum.

In the middle of the garden is a story circle, a fountain, and a beautiful outdoor shelter designed by Sim Van der Ryn - and the beginnings of a garden kitchen that will teach the kids how to prepare fresh garden bounty for others.

Shelly is preparing much more than good garden food, though. She is preparing kids to understand growing good things in the earth. She says, "When they get their hands down into the soil, they feel their relationship with the larger, living earth. When this happens, the children bring that experience into their whole lives."



Garden class at San Domenico School

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issues that we deal with daily here at U.C. Cooperative Extension: organic farming, grass-fed livestock issues, and broad-based diversification plans. But the primary issue here is how to find ways to keep the farm viable and attractive for the next generation to inherit. What a challenge!

The Lunnys are looking broadly at ways to expand the farm. Organic farming is one option, simply because it's the fastest growing section of American agriculture. The price premiums are healthy and stable. We live close to a potentially lucrative market that loves to buy the high-quality farm products that we produce here. Organic hay and silage are becoming more popular as dairies and livestock producers sign on to the organic program. Public demand for healthy, local grass-fed livestock continues to rise. Farmers are looking at expanding direct marketing venues with farmstands and innovative alliances. There are opportunities out there, and perhaps these new venues and challenges can be seen as ways to add enough income and growth to the family farm to keep it going. The Lunnys think it's worth a try. - *Steve Quirt, Editor*

Taking Charge of the Future Steering Committee of Young Ranchers Formed

The Marin Farm Bureau office was the scene of a fortuitous gathering of young farmers and ranchers recently. Sam Dolcini, Julie Evans, Renee Grossi, Cindy Pomi, Jeff Carlton, Jolynn Mendoza, and Paul Zimmerman joined the Cooperative Extension team to form a steering committee to help organize the *"Taking Charge of the Future: Today's Challenges and Opportunities for Young Farmers and Ranchers,"* which will be held at Walker Creek Ranch on October 9, 2004. Neil Koenig, popular author of *"You Can't Fire Me, I'm Your Father,"* will be the key-note speaker for the day.

The steering committee brainstormed topics for breakout sessions and sharpened the goals of the event. *"I think we made great progress, and it's really fun to plan this with my peers,"* Julie Evans commented. Julie and the others came up with a dozen or so workshop topics that will help young farmers and ranchers from age 18 through the "early 30s" get a better handle on "what to do next." The topics include: Becoming a Family Decision Maker; How to Access Resources to Move Your Farming Operation Forward; Marketing and Branding Your Farm; Trends and Opportunities in Dairy and Beef Operation; and Farm Planning and Venues for Diversification. A concurrent tradeshow will run simultaneously all day, and there will be a surprise raffle at the end of the program to use up "ag dollars" that will be dispensed throughout the day.

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As if Kevin doesn't have enough to do with the ranch and family construction business, he is also hoping to develop an on-farm composting operation that could utilize green waste from the park, similar to the one he is operating at the La Franchi Ranch. "We're into compost," he casually states.

All of this activity is designed to re-ignite the fire that fuels the resurgence of the Marin family farm. Kevin says, "I want my kids to feel the same excitement and involvement in being an important, involved part of the ranch that I felt growing up here. We can provide that, with a lot of work and a few risks. Already, the whole family is excited about our new direction."

The unknown risks of stepping out of the fold are challenging, but the Lunnys are looking ahead to the future of the family enterprise and more hard work. "We want to re-engage the whole family. We spent the whole weekend planting artichokes, but everybody pitched in together and we had a fantastic time of it."

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News from Marin County Farms, Ranches, and Producers

- ☞ **Canvas Ranch** in **Two Rock Valley** is featured in two national publications, **Gourmet** magazine and **Fortune**, and on a national TV show, **Fine Living** hosted by **Nell Newman of Newman's Organic**, which features a CSA and Babydoll Sheep program run by **Canvas Ranch** owner **Deborah Walton**.
- ☞ **Taste of Marin** will be held this year on **September 23**, from 5:00 - 8:30 p.m., at the **Marin Art and Garden Center** in **Ross**. The event is put on by **Marin Organic** and the **Marin Agricultural Land Trust**. Great local cuisine and blue-grass music will be in store. Call **Wendy** at **415 663-9667** for more information.
- ☞ **Miriam and Mark Pasternak** have multiplied their rabbit population from three to 400. The **Pasternaks** also raise wine grapes, free-range laying hens and eggs, and asparagus. (See "**The Point Reyes Family Album**" by **Art Rogers** in the **Pt. Reyes Light** May 27 issue.)
- ☞ **Michael Pollan**, author of "**Botany of Desire**" and **New York Times** contributor, toured Marin Ranches with **David Evans of Marin Sun Farms** in early July.
- ☞ **Ellie Rilla** and **Steve Quirt** gave a poster session on "**The Development of Marin County Organic Agriculture**" at **UC Berkeley** on **July 15** at the Fourth Session of the California Conference on Biological Control.
- ☞ **The Marin Agricultural Land Trust** invites you to join them for the 9th annual **Harvest Day at the Farm, Sunday October 17, 2004 - 10am - 4pm** - at the **Nicasio Valley Farm**.
- ☞ **Dennis and Sandy Dierks of Paradise Valley Produce** in Bolinas are looking for field help for the growing season. Call them at **415 868-0205**.
- ☞ **Sustainable Ag Classes** begin in **August** at **Santa Rosa Jr. College**. For details, call **Laura Mendes** at **707 527-4649** or **AG/NR Department** at **707 527-4408**.

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