



EDITORS COLUMN

"Just over that hill you can still see the furrows from the artichoke fields poking up through the grass. I guess they might be fifty or sixty years old." - Dan Evans, H Ranch

It's the same on the Lunny Ranch, and on the Gallagher Ranch. These long green mounds poking out of the grass are relics of the Point's diversified past. "Artichoke growing was started on the Point Reyes Peninsula about twelve years ago in a small way by lessees, without irrigation. This industry grew until there were 875 acres in production in 1939, producing 81,000 crates, with an income of 174,000 dollars. These artichokes are of high quality. Our climate is especially adapted to this crop and should be expanded." - Thos. W. Peryam, Agricultural Commissioner, 1939.

The rich, sandy soils of the Point lend themselves to artichokes, raspberries and blueberries, which love good drainage and slightly rolling hillsides. Potatoes, garlic and green onions also grow well, and peas were once grown on the ranches. Hogs and chickens were both added to the the dairy operations. Of course cheese and butter were anchor products for many years. You can't find better pastures and richer milk than the

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Getting to the Point

Grass fed beef and grass fed eggs

David Evans is a fifth generation Point rancher with a Cal Poly education and eyes on the future. He is one the leaders in fostering the natural grass-fed beef program for Marin, and an emerging voice in the sustainable ranching movement. Using models from Joel Saladin and drawing upon a recent visit to Argentina, David is putting into practice intensive grazing operations, pasture rotations, grass-fed genetics and a no-antibiotics no-hormone program. His own company, Marin Sun Farms, markets fine, locally grown grass-fed beef from his website, farmers markets and word-of-mouth. This summer he will be a vendor at the prestigious Ferry Plaza Market in San Francisco. David is a vigorous proponent of local, sustainable ranching and direct to consumer marketing. He does most of his own marketing. "He works real hard," said his father, Dan Evans.

Perhaps the most creative enterprise from Marin Sun Farms (expect even more in the future) is the movable hen house. As it is rotated over pastures it allows the "real" range fed hens to forage right along side the Evans Ranch

triple crossed beef cattle. It's quite a fascinating sight to watch 150 White leghorn and Rhode Island Red crossed hens grazing right along side 100 cattle.

The portable chicken house is built on sleds and dragged with the tractor to different locations around the ranch, fertilizing the pasture, breaking up the cow patties for quick disintegration to reduce bugs, while cutting feed costs. The hens are supplemented with certified organic feeds and oyster shell, and yield about 80 eggs per day per 120 hens. David currently sells all the eggs that the hens can produce and has 300 more hens ready to go out in the second movable chicken house. Plans are in the works to add a timed lock-up to put the hens to bed at night. "They come in like clockwork, exactly the same time each night." David notes.

David's operation reflects much of the integrity of the family farms on the Point Reyes Peninsula. Careful livestock breeding, healthy, well cared for pastures and thoughtful attention to management are the foundations of solid ranching. This simple diversification evolving out of the Marin Sun Farms enterprises is a symbol of some of the new ideas invigorating a fifth generation operation.



David Evans moves his portable hen house every two or three days to a new section of pasture. The hens provide fertility, cultivation and many dozens of eggs.

Organic Certification Workshop



Stacy Carlsen, Agricultural Commissioner, and Anita Sauber, Director of Marin Organic Certified Agriculture, presented the history and development of Marin's own County certification program.

Is it worth the hassle to go through the arduous and time-consuming process of USDA approved organic certification? To find out, forty farmers and ranchers gathered together at the Dance Palace in Point Reyes Station to listen to a panel of certification experts talk about the ins and outs of the National Organic Program.

Stacy Carlsen has been on the forefront of California's organic certification movement for many years. Through his leadership, Marin County became the first government third party certifier in California. He and Anita Sauber presented the program to the audience, with Anita describing how Marin farmers can benefit from working with Marin Organic Certified Agriculture (MOCA). Anita specializes in working with our smaller Marin growers and designed the organic production plan that is the core of the MOCA program.

Kate Burroughs is on the Board of Directors of California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF) and is also co-owner of Harmony Farm Supply in Sebastopol. Kate is an expert on acceptable and non-acceptable materials for the new National Organic Program. She outlined what needs to be known before we introduce inputs into a certified organic system.

Brian Leahy, President of CCOF, talked about the value that certification adds to a product. Brian believes that future agricultural food systems will adopt the organic model. Reducing chemical inputs means less cost of production, safer farmworker conditions, and a cleaner environment.

The workshop was well attended by organic farmers and also traditional farmers taking a look at organic production. Since we are primarily an animal-based farming population, it is exciting to see dairy and cattle ranchers eyeing the organic model. "Organic animal agriculture has a real future, and we are just beginning," Brian explained in the question and answer portion of the workshop.

USDA Funds for Certification!

Good news for certified organic producers and handlers! The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has provided funds to the California Department of Agriculture (CDFA) to be distributed to operations that have been certified organic by a USDA accredited certifier. Any operation in California that has been certified between the dates of October 1, 2002, and September 30, 2003, may apply for 75 percent of their certification cost (maximum of \$500.00) to be reimbursed.

The USDA cost share program is on a first come first served basis, and a one time deal.

The Organic Certification Cost Share Application was mailed out April 11, 2003, to all California organic registrants. The applicant must submit the application form along with a copy of certification and a copy of the associated expenses required by your certifier to maintain your certification.

If you did not receive an application form in the mail, you can acquire them at the following locations:

- ☞ Each Organic Certifier operating in California.
- ☞ Marin County Agricultural Commissioners office
(415) 499-6700
- ☞ Website at www.cdca.ca.gov/is/fvegc.htm
- ☞ CDFA Program Manager (916) 445-2180

This program is a great opportunity to recoup a decent portion of your certification cost. If you have any questions, feel free to call Anita Sauber at the Marin County Agricultural Commissioners office.

Diversification Workshops Coming UP

"Cut Flower Production"

Dave Smith from Organic Bouquet and other leaders in the specialty cut flower field talk about opportunities and growing. July 17, 2003 ☞ 4:30 - 7:30 PM
Dance Palace Community Center, Point Reyes Station

"Specialty Crops for Marin"

Artichokes, raspberries, tree crops and olives will be the focus with UCCE Specialists and local growers leading the event. September (date TBA)
Dance Palace Community Center, Point Reyes Station

"Adding Value to Farm Products"

How can farmers increase the value of what they grow? This workshop will cover strategies and "how to" pointers for adding value. November (date TBA)
Dance Palace Community Center, Point Reyes Station



Al Poncia and friend feeding the Angus bull from a safe distance.

Dear Farmer Al . . .

*Dear Farmer Al,
I really enjoyed the farm. Thank you so much for taking your time, and letting us see the animals. I liked the part when you fed the bulls and the sheep. It was fun planting the tree. Thank you so much for the branch.
Sincerely, Sophie*

Sophie and her classmates learned a lot about farming from local rancher Al Poncia last fall when she and her 22 classmates visited Al's family ranch in Tomales. The kids' excursion out on the range is part of the Marin Summer Agricultural Institute (see the back page for more information on the Summer Ag program) and Marin Farm Field Studies Program sponsored by the Marin Agricultural Land Trust (MALT). Last year, five schools were able to visit ranches, dairies and farms throughout the county to get close to the source of our bountiful Marin food. In addition to Al Poncia's sheep and cattle ranch, the kids visited the Nunes Dairy on Point Reyes, the LaFranchi's Nicasio Valley Farms, the historic Murphy Ranch and Mike Casey's Longhorn cattle.

Anne Murphy coordinates the tours, and says, *"The kids really get a lot out of these farm visits. They are outside with us and experience a little of our life on the ranch. They especially love the animals. But they go home remembering everything, even the smells."*

This well-run program provides our kids with an invaluable experience; connecting the land, the farmer and the food with their own lives. It used to be that kids were part of the farm, or at least were linked to the local farm community through friends, relatives or social interaction. The Marin Farm Field Studies Program brings kids back to an essential part of their education -- where our food comes from and that good farmers like Al Poncia and Randy LaFranchi work hard growing it for us. Supporting programs like this is good insurance that our children will help future farmers.

For information about this program call Anne Murphy at MALT's Office of Education at (415)663-1338.

Cool Weather Coastal Crops

Artichokes, caneberries, strawberries, and potatoes are all well suited for coastal Marin rowcropping. Artichokes, potatoes and asparagus have been successful and the cool, temperate climate is well suited for berry production. For the most part, these are high value specialty crops much in demand by Bay Area consumers. Certified organic production adds even more value to these crops.

Artichokes can be grown from seed or root cuttings. The annual seeded variety produces spring and early summer artichokes when planted in the fall. The chokes are a little smaller and a little less tasty than the traditional Green Globes, but are quick and easy. With this variety, harvesting the smaller chokes early, when tender, is a good idea. The perennial variety yields those huge green globes that we are used to. Root stock for these is a little more difficult to obtain in commercial quantities, and the management of long standing perennials is more complicated than annual production.



Green globe artichokes at Star Route Farms in Bolinas.

All of the caneberries, raspberries, boysenberries and blackberries can be cultivated here. Raspberries have a shorter production life than boysenberries and blackberries, which can be trellised and managed for up to 10 years. There are some great thornless blackberries available that are perfect for u-pick operations. These berries are also high value but high upkeep. It takes lots of little hands to pick and pack.

Potatoes got a black eye awhile back, especially in Tomales, from poor farming practices which caused hillside erosion. But with conscientious management, spuds are a natural for our loamy coastal soils. The Bodega Red potato variety from northern Marin and southwest Sonoma Counties was famous. It seems to have disappeared.

Strawberries have already been a success. Both the LaFranchi Farm and the Sartori Ranch are sending out cases of juicy, sweet red berries of the highest quality.

Again, choosing high value, high quality crops helps to keep the farm or ranch sustainable and profitable.



Will Lieb, a second generation chicken farmer, shows off his championship crowing rooster and resulting trophy. Warfield, a loud and energetic Aracuna, finally won the event on his third try.

Something to Crow About

Will Lieb has been a Novato chicken grower his whole life. Now he can add another feather in his cap after his rooster, Warfield, captured the championship at the American Pride Crowing Contest in Rogue River, Oregon.

Warfield crowed an amazing 46 times in a half hour, beating out the other 50 roosters on hand for the noisy event. Asked the secret to Warfield's championship performance, Will stated, "Bonding. They get to know you and crow when you are around. Also, Warfield has been eating Hunt Behrens feed (Petaluma Feed Dealer) all day."

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Point produces. Artisan cheesemakers look at the quality of the milk, which is the foundation for their craft. The milk comes ultimately from the grass, a unique attribute of the Point Reyes Peninsula, which attracts the attention of fine cheesemakers. The quality of milk and nearby accessibility of an educated, affluent market of 8 million consumers offer a tempting opportunity for on-farm specialty cheesemaking.

Organic cut flowers, organic seed for vegetable growers, raspberries and strawberries are higher value crops that grow well on Point farmscapes.

Concentration trends in the dairy and beef industries threaten the health and stability of long established Point ranches. Falling milk prices remain a major obstacle to financial viability, and beef is marginal.

If you look very closely at sixty-year-old furrows pushing up through grass and clover on the Evans Ranch, you can imagine the artichokes flourishing and feeding San Francisco restaurants and home kitchens, and making a few extra dollars for the the dairy ranches. Perhaps those furrows can once again be tilled.

News from Marin County Farms, Ranches and Producers

- ☛ The **Spring Issue** of *Savor* magazine featured 11 **Marin County** specialty food operations, including **Cowgirl Creamery, Point Reyes Vineyards, Hog Island Oyster Co.** and **Point Reyes Farmstead Cheese Company.**
- ☛ The **San Francisco Chronicle** selected the **2000 Mount Tamalpais Vineyards Merlot** as one of the "Top 100 Wines of the Year". Go to www.marinwines for more.
- ☛ **Point Reyes Original Blue Cheese** won **2nd Place** in the blue-veined cheese category at the **US Championship Cheese Contest** in Milwaukee, WI.
- ☛ **Marin** producers that will be in the new **Ferry Plaza Building** in San Francisco include **Hog Island Oyster, Cowgirl Creamery** and **McEvoy Olive Oil**. The Ferry Plaza Building opens **June 21**.
- ☛ **UC Cooperative Extension**, with funding from **Marin Community Foundation**, has begun work on a **Marin County Producers Directory**, which will show case local producers of agricultural products.
- ☛ **Marin Organic, Point Reyes Books** and the **Point Reyes Farmers' Market** are co-sponsoring "**Cooking West Marin**," a series of cooking demonstrations with noted chef authors to benefit the **Point Reyes Farmers' Market**. There are three events in June with **Janet Fletcher, Judy Rodgers** and **Annie Somerville**. Call **Point Reyes Books** for dates and places; **(415)663-1542**.
- ☛ The **Marin Summer Agricultural Institute for K-12 Teachers** will be held June 17, 18 and 19 this year. The program is designed to educate teachers, and ultimately students, about **Marin Agriculture**. for information call **(415) 499-5877**.

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

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