



EDITORS COLUMN

"I am a conservationist and a farmer, a wilderness advocate and an agrarian. I am in favor of the worlds wildness, not only because I like it, but also because I think it is necessary to the worlds life and to our own. For the same reason, I want to preserve the natural health and integrity of the worlds economic landscapes, which is to say that I want the worlds farmers, ranchers and foresters to live in stable, locally adapted, resource-producing communities, and I want them to thrive."
- Wendell Berry

A few years back I had the opportunity to collaborate with a world renowned conservation biologist, Dr. David Western from Nairobi, Kenya. Dr. Western is a far-seeing thinker and pioneer who was instrumental in fashioning a new model for national parks worldwide. As a boy growing up in Tanzania, he would skip school and wander through the African savannahs with his Maasai friends, developing an everlasting friendship with these remarkable people. The Maasai are a pastoral culture and were the one group in East Africa that never buckled under to colonial rule. What Dr. Western learned from his Maasai friends,

"Editor" continued on page 3

Working Landscapes: Balancing Environmental Stewardship & Food Production

The livelihoods of the 250 or so agricultural operations in Marin are dependent on a number of highly variable factors. Commodity price structures and subsequent fluctuations, increasingly stringent regulations and escalating land prices present constant challenges. No one of these factors dominates the whole picture. When things go right, the ranch will be called *"economically viable"*. It's the farmers task to juggle and balance the business of farming and making a profit. At the same time they must maintain the health and vigor of the landscape to be able to pass the whole responsibility on to the next generation. Farmers and ranchers throughout the West are becoming increasingly aware of the roles they play in conserving natural resources.

Henry Grossi is President of the Marin Farm Bureau and a third generation rancher. *"Costs are always rising in farming so the pressure is always on. As ranchers, we are always looking for ways to improve our operations, and healthy, rangeland is an economic benefit for us."* It makes both ecological and economic sense to be a good land steward. Dan Benedetti with Clover Stornetta has helped foster sound sustainable manage-



Amanda Wisby, an Angus Beef rancher from the Stewart Ranch, and her recently certified organic flock of hens. The Stewart Ranch has sound rangeland management practices with a rotational grazing program and a no-till-drill seeding operation.

ment practices for twenty-five years. *"We are in the process of perpetuating a climate for the permanent growth of sustainable agriculture. The dairy operations in the North Bay are realizing the fact that this (sustainable practices) is the right way to do business."* Regulations have forced producers to tighten their management practices. Water quality issues are at the top of the list and progress is being made. Bob Berner, Executive Director of the Marin Agricultural Land Trust, agrees: *"Today the agricultural community is paying attention to conservation issues. There is an enormous amount of collaborative effort going into natural resource protection"*. Work is being done on watershed restoration through the Resource Conservation District, Tomales Bay Watershed Council, Tomales Bay Agricultural Group and UCCE Watershed Management Advisor, David Lewis.

Continued on page 4

Grass-Fed Beef Certification

In the spring of 2001, a few Marin cattle ranchers, UCCE staff and County Agricultural Commissioner set out to see if there was a future for the fledgling grass-fed beef industry. We began by taking a look at; (1) standardization and certification, (2) support services and (3) local marketing. The program has evolved steadily. Stephanie Larson, UCCE Range and Livestock Advisor, has put into motion key building blocks that will help ranchers with a viable grass-fed natural beef program. There is, in the works at UC Davis, a cost of production study that is comparing the conventional model of shipping calves to be grain finished with grass-fed, grass finished and local direct marketed beef. This study should be completed in the spring. Also simmering is a nutritional comparison between natural grass-fed animals and their corn and grain finished counterparts.

Perhaps the most visible part of the program is the adoption of a set of standards for grass-fed beef producers to follow. The standards were worked out over the past year and a half with the help of local producers Bill



Barboni, David Evans, Mike Gale, Kevin Lunny and Al Poncia. Once the standards were worked out, the next step was to bring the program to our Marin County Agricultural Commissioner, Stacy Carlsen, to develop a grass-fed certification program that will provide industry with an incentive to pursue innovative and sustainable animal agriculture practices. The new certification program will insure product integrity for the consumer with accurate and accountable standards of production. The program hopes to:

- ☞ Broaden knowledge of sustainable livestock production methods
- ☞ Encourage the development of alternative technologies and tools
- ☞ Increase accountability
- ☞ Strengthen local markets and develop new ones
- ☞ Enhance environmental preservation to optimize the health of the land, plants, animals and people
- ☞ Maintain economically viable operations

We are planning a spring presentation of the program to explain the standards and certification, which is open to Marin and Sonoma County producers. We will be sending out an announcement and invitation to cattle ranchers and interested individuals at the first of the new year.

Eco-friendly farming practices

The original philosophy guiding our organic ancestors was to use resources found on or near the farm, to rely on crop rotations, animal manures, legumes and crop residues, green manures, and aspects of biocontrol to maintain soil productivity and regulate pests, weeds and diseases. These pioneers were small family farmers who grew diverse crops for local markets. They embraced farming as a way of life and worked hard to be in tune with the rhythms of nature.



Thanks to the pioneering efforts of these growers, organic farming has spread over California and throughout the world. Retail organic food sales have grown by 20 percent per year for the past six years. But there is a rising concern - are the new organic farmers and the associated industry following the original path of our organic ancestors? Is there a danger that organic farming is being incorporated into a blueprint system of intensified production, finance management and distribution typical of conventional agriculture? This concern has inspired some of the organic community to aspire to a "beyond organic" approach to recapture the founding principles of the movement. Local production and distribution, socially just labor standards, and ecologically sustainable farming practices are facets of the original concepts of "organic agriculture" that many believe have been sacrificed.

MOCA was created to provide an organic certification resource that is affordable and local for our growers. MOCA cannot certify higher or beyond the national organic standards. We are now preparing a plan to give recognition to many of our producers who exemplify these sustainable practices that often go unrecognized. We will be conducting a survey with our Marin growers (both organic and traditional) that incorporates the principles of agroecology and sustainability. The wise use and conservation of renewable resources, minimization of toxics, ecological management practices, and farm diversity all empower community and promote health. Good farmers are true land stewards and need to be recognized for their contributions. This program will be an important step towards reclaiming the core values and vision of our "organic ancestors." - Anita Sauber, Marin Agricultural Commissioners Office

Linking Local Food to Marin Schools

Imagine Marin students enjoying fresh apples from the Gale Ranch, winter squash soup from Fresh Run Farm, crisp salads from Star Route Farms and fresh organic milk from Straus Dairy. This is the vision of the Marin Food Systems Project. With the support of MALT, Cooperative Extension and Marin Organic, the collaborators work to build improved school food service, to integrate agriculture and nutrition into the school curriculum, and to implement local policies that support local food systems and farming.

On October 7, the Marin Food Systems Project of the Environmental Education Council of Marin hosted a group of food service directors and school representatives at Star Route Farm in Bolinas. The afternoon program focused on connecting schools with local farmers by giving participants first hand experience of Marin Farms. The group discussed the opportunities and challenges of connecting local farms and schools and came up with concrete actions to implement.



Leah Smith, of the Marin Food Systems Project, explains the importance of serving our children fresh local farm products to a group of Food Service Directors at Star Route Farms.

Food service personnel from the following schools and districts attended: San Rafael School District, Novato Unified School District, Santa Rosa School District, Community Action Marin, San Domenico, Ross Valley School District, and Bolinas Stinson School District.

Our Marin farms are not yet able to provide fresh and local food to each and every school in Marin. Yet making the edible connection between our schools and local farms will help to ensure a future for Marin's agriculture by instilling an appreciation of local agriculture in our young children. They learn from the start how farming supports them and their community. When they become consumers and voters, they will no doubt appreciate and support the continued viability of farming.

Enjoying fresh, locally grown food in Marin schools has entered the dialogue of our food service directors. Meeting regularly with their counterparts in Sonoma, a strong alliance is forming that promises to improve the health of our children along with the health of the agricultural landscape. - Leah Smith, Marin Food Systems Project

Editors Column from Page 1

that wildness, agriculture and human culture can live together harmoniously, permeated his professional career and helped form the thinking that led to his work as a leading "conservation biologist." His first real impact was the formulation of a plan to create a national park out of the Amboseli savannah region. To the amazement of everyone, he provided a model that included the Maasai people along with their traditional cattle culture and grazing patterns. His inclusion of human culture into a "natural system" was at that time (circa 1967) revolutionary. After much effort and persuasion, Amboseli Park was created with Maasai stewards as an integral part of the structure. Humans have been a key part of the ecosystem there for millennia. Removing them would have altered the whole system.

So what does this have to do with farming and ranching in Marin? No, I am not comparing our farmers to Maasai warriors, although when riled a rancher can be formidable. What I am suggesting is that today landscapes, humans and agriculture constitute a working system, and when managed responsibly, provide a multitude of benefits for us all. In nourishing this working landscape, we preserve wild habitat, human culture and food production.

All responsible farmers and ranchers are stewards of nature. It would be hard to survive on a family farm like we have here in Marin without a real sense of natural systems management. And that kind of management is evolving today. Change occurs slowly and quietly on the farm. Today's farms and ranches continue to move toward more sustainable practices. Non-lethal predator management programs, creek and watershed restoration, reduced tillage farming practices, rotational grazing programs and wildlife habitat restoration are occurring on our farmscapes. These environmental improvements need to be supported and credited, giving momentum to the "greening of Marin agriculture". We have been featuring farmers and ranchers in our "Grown in Marin" newsletters who are engaged in innovative and ecologically successful operations that blend environmental responsibility, successful agricultural production and farming culture together into one landscape. There are many farmers and ranchers here in Marin who go quietly about stewarding their landscapes, raising new farmers and contributing to our food supply. It is important for all of us who are concerned about supporting sustainable agriculture and environmental quality to realize that there is a critical balance between remaining viable and meeting the high environmental standards that are important today. Respect for our environment, our agrarian heritage and each other will take us a long way to achieving the goals that we all aspire to.

- Steve Quirt, Editor

"Balancing" continued from page 1

It's a long, difficult path to a sustainable agricultural system that provides us with healthy food, healthy landscapes and healthy economic systems. These three factors are really just one factor, and cannot be separated. In evaluating environmental protection we need to remember the faces behind the family farms. We really do live in one community here in Marin, as friends and neighbors. The farmlands and open spaces that we enjoy so much are a huge responsibility to those that steward them. This task is not taken on lightly. The slow but sure process of building environmental health and resiliency is underway, with more and more participation from the overall agricultural community.

Stacy Carlsen is the Agricultural Commissioner for Marin and has watched (and participated) in this gradual transformation. *"What began as policy and regulation has become a sound method of management. There is much more resiliency in the system than there was years ago. We need to continue the work; measure and reward those ranchers and farmers who exemplify the sustainable model. We need to continue to create a dynamic for sustainability that is inclusive of farmers, environmentalists and those that enjoy and appreciate the landscape."*

The Grown in Marin newsletter is published bi-monthly by the University of California Cooperative Extension, 1682 Novato Blvd., Suite 150B, Novato, CA 94947. Telephone 415/499-4204, <http://cemarin.ucdavis.edu>. Production of this newsletter was made possible with funding from the University of California Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program, the Clarence E. Heller Foundation, the Marin Community Foundation and the County of Marin.

Editors: Steve Quirt & Ellie Rilla

Production: Frances Healey

Contributors: Anita Sauber, Marin County Agricultural Commissioners Office, Leah Smith, Marin Food Systems Project, Wendy McLaughlin, Marin Organic



The University of California prohibits discrimination against or harassment of any person on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, physical or mental disability, medical condition (cancer-related or genetic characteristics), ancestry, marital status, age, sexual orientation, citizenship, or status as a covered veteran (covered veterans are special disabled veterans, recently separated veterans, Vietnam era veterans, or any other veterans who served on active duty during a war or in a campaign or expedition for which a campaign badge has been authorized) in any of its programs or activities or with respect to any of its employment policies, practices, or procedures. University policy is intended to be consistent with the provisions of applicable State and Federal laws. Inquiries regarding the University's equal employment opportunity policies may be directed to the Affirmative Action/Staff Personnel Services Director, University of California, Agriculture and Natural Resources, 300 Lakeside Drive, 6th Floor, Oakland, CA 94612-3550, (510) 987-0086.

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

News from Marin County Farms, Ranches and Producers

- ☞ **The Marin Resources Conservation District (MRCD)** and the **Marin Agricultural Land Trust (MALT)** are proud to present their brand new **no-till drill and trailer** and also their newly acquired **soil aerator** which can both be rented by Marin landowners. Call **415 663-1170**.
- ☞ **Sally Pozzi** has joined the **Tomales Bay Watershed Council** as a representative from the **Marin Farm Bureau**.
- ☞ **Marin Organic** is accepting applications for the position of **Executive Director**. Interested candidates can call **Wendy McLaughlin** at **415 663-9667**.
- ☞ **Point Reyes Original Blue Cheese** was mentioned in the October **Better Homes and Gardens "In Good Taste"** section.
- ☞ **UC Cooperative Extension** has been given the "**Award of Excellence**" by the **Marin Economic Commission** for "**Excellence in Agricultural Viability**." **Ellie Rilla** accepted the award for **UCCE Marin** at the **Awards Banquet** from **KPIX's newscaster Dana King**.
- ☞ **Hog Island Oyster Company** has just opened its store with a full oyster bar in the **San Francisco Ferry Plaza Market Building**, and is open from **11:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m., Monday through Saturday**.
- ☞ **The Marin County Outdoor School at Walker Creek Ranch** received a grant from the **Chez Panisse Foundation** in December of 2003, with the goal of increasing student participation in agricultural education.
- ☞ **The Point Reyes Farmer's Market** is taking resumes for **Market Manager** for the 2004 season. Call **415 663-9667** for details or submit a resume.

**University of California
Cooperative Extension • Marin County**
1682 Novato Blvd., Suite 150B
Novato, California, 94947

FIRST CLASS MAIL
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
COUNTY OF MARIN