



EDITOR'S COLUMN

"When people bring their food home, I hope they sometimes remember who makes it. It's us, the farmers. We make it." - Paul Zimmerman, herdsman, Robert Giacomini Dairy

We have been interviewing farmers all summer for our upcoming documentary *"The Hidden Bounty of Marin,"* spending long hours on farms, ranches, and creameries, filming and just hanging out. We could fall into the everyday rhythms of farm life, capturing the story about the workers who bring to life the visions and hard work of the farmers themselves. Perhaps this short glimpse into the daily lives of our farm workers will give us more appreciation of what it takes to bring us this food.

Marin is a tiny county, geographically and in overall population. The farms and ranches and processors who give us our local bounty are our friends and neighbors. As John Finger said recently to us, *"The public really needs to step up and support us. Today it is hard to make money in agriculture, and especially in this county. Nobody's survival is guaranteed. We need to get a fair price for our products in order to remain viable."* O.K., so maybe a "fair

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The faces behind the farmers

FARMWORKERS DO THE HEAVY LIFTING

What a delight we enjoy when we pop a Hog island oyster into our mouths, bite into a fresh local apple from Chileno Valley Ranch, open a pint of awesome Straus Organic Ice Cream, or enjoy crispy fresh organic salad from Star Route Farms. We take it for granted - we, the finishers of the process, the eaters and ultimate enjoyers of the spoil - that these products are miraculously conjured up through the images of the farmers whom we all know and see. Behind the farmers are hundreds of gifted and skilled men and women who nurse these products, such as oysters, along the way to our tables, sometimes for years at a time.

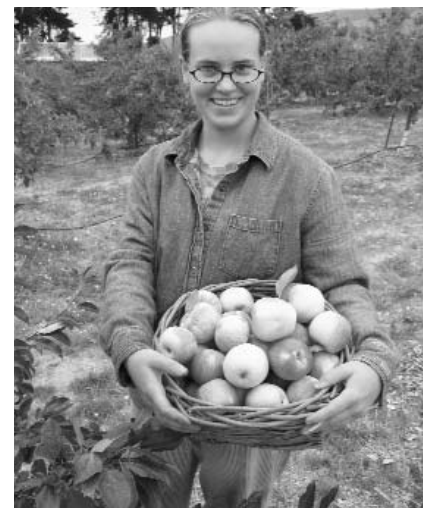


Oyster bed workers from Hog Island Oyster Company

Let's take a closer look "behind the scenes" at some of these operations and direct processors. Hog Island Oyster Company employs 50 men and women who work the Tomales Bay Estuary mudflats, the oyster farm on the shore, and in the office. The guys are on the job early, and with the low tides, have acres of oysters to look after, keep free from barnacles, and move through different stages in the bay. From little baby oysters a quarter inch wide, through various stages of growth, the men move the oysters many times to locations offering the best tidal nutrition, nursing the oysters for up to four years, through fair weather in the summer and fall to ferocious weather in the winter months.

In Marin, half our farms and ranches report hiring farm labor, with 500 workers employed by producers as both part-time and full-time employees. There are 11 farms in Marin that report using migrant farm labor. Almost \$3 million is spent on on-farm employee payroll (Census of 2002).

Of the 108 farms that have employees, 27% have five or more employees, while 73% report employing four or fewer workers.



Intern Katie Bjorkman on Chileno Valley Ranch

FARMWORKERS

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Interns and new-entry young farmers make up a growing population on the organic and micro farms. These dedicated young people love what they do and add a much-needed youth element to an aging farm community. Dennis and Sandy Dierks of Paradise Valley Produce bring on five or six young interns each year to help and learn how to grow organic vegetables.

Tucked away in the hills of Marshall lies Straus Family Creamery, quietly producing the luscious organic milk, butter,



Lindsey Warsaw of Fresh Run Farm



Straus Creamery bottling line

and yogurt, and ice cream that we all love so much. Each morning, very early, a hardworking crew arrives for a full day's production. The place is a veritable beehive of orchestrated activity from bottle washing to butter churning to ice cream making. The creamery is more like a craftsman's studio than an industrialized food factory. The machinery moves at a moderate clip, watched over by crews who have been on their jobs for years. The creamery has four full-time mechanics servicing the bewildering array of pasturizers, churners, bottling lines, and yogurt-making equipment. They are highly skilled professionals, and move about quickly but easily. The equipment is small-scale by today's industrial standards and



Cheesemakers at Cowgirl Creamery

FARMWORKERS

much is still done by hand the old-fashioned way, which adds a real element of care and quality to the products.

For such a small operation, Cowgirl Creamery puts out an astonishing amount of cheese under the guidance of three cheesemakers and five others who wrap, pack, and ship the organic soft cheeses out the door. Once again, these people are working very early in the morning, focused on producing these award-winning cheeses. Everything is fashioned meticulously by hand, from pasteurizing the fresh organic milk from Straus Family Creamery, to hand-wrapping and packing the cheeses.



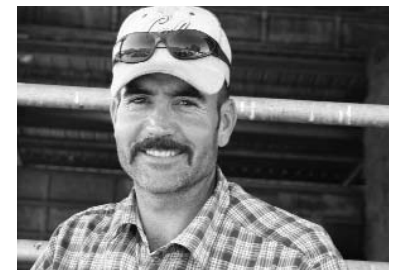
Wrapping Point Reyes Original Blue



Marin Sun Farms meat cutting team

Marin Sun Farms, owned and operated by David Evans, has made a real contribution to our appetite for fresh, local, and healthy food. Behind the Marin Sun Farms label is a team of butchers and meat cutters who can only be referred to as craftsmen. Watching them perform their tasks at the butchery is like watching some kind of ballet of hands and knives and red meat, all smoothly synchronized. This whirl of white jackets and quick hands and flawless packaging is the final step in bringing product that began with the sun, was transformed into grass to food, and will be served at someone's dinner table.

Robert Vallejo grew up on a dairy farm in



Roberto Vallejo of Straus Creamery

FARMWORKERS

Mexico, and was trained by his father. When he came to the U.S. twenty years ago, he signed on as a temporary hand at the Straus Blakes Landing Dairy Farm, and is still there today, managing the milking operation and the herd. He loves what he does and is constantly keeping up with the changing world of dairy. *“Albert sent me to school right away to learn breeding and cow health,”* he says *“and I am always having to learn more things. When we switched to organic, no one else had done that. We had no one to talk to. Now we are the experts and others come to us!”* he says.

When we asked him how he feels about his job as herdsman for the organic dairy he said, *“I like it because I know we are doing the right thing. There is nothing harmful in what we do. It’s healthy for the cows, for the people who drink our milk, and for me too!”*

Those crisp wedges of Point Reyes Original Blue Cheese that you find in specialty food stores really begin their life in rich grass pastures of the Giacomini Dairy Ranch in Point Reyes Station. The Holstein herd converts this grass to luscious raw milk. Each morning and evening, Paul Zimmerman, a fourth generation herdsman, brings in the herd to be milked. He designs the breeding program, follows the cows’ nutritional rations, keeps track of the individual milking yields, and records and carefully follows the health and well-being of the 250-cow herd. Without Paul and other dairy producers here in Marin and Sonoma counties, we would have no blue cheese, cottage cheese, ice cream, or fluid milk. These farm workers are the root of all of our bountiful agricultural products. Paul says

“When people go the market and pick up their food, I hope they sometimes remember who makes their food. It’s us, the farmers. We make it.”



Paul Zimmerman, Giacomini Dairy

USDA

2007 Census of Agriculture

MAKE SURE YOU ARE COUNTED!

The USDA Census of Agriculture is conducted every five years, and is the most comprehensive source of statistics about the nation’s agricultural system. The USDA defines a farm as “any place from which \$1,000 or more of agricultural products were produced and sold (or would have been sold)” including farms, ranches, nurseries, and greenhouses.



The last Census of Agriculture was conducted in 2002. Out of a total 2,128,982 farms in the United States, 59 percent received less than \$10,000 from sales of agricultural products, and 79,631 farms

were located in California. Census information is used to enable policymakers to make informed decisions concerning farm policies and services, including those which affect smaller farms.

The USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) will mail out surveys in late December of this year, and operators will also be able to submit their information online. To be sure that your farm is included in the 2007 Census, visit <https://www.agcounts.usda.gov/cgi-bin/counts>. This USDA-NASS AgCounts Web page includes a short form you may submit online to make sure that you receive a survey as part of the Ag Census. Instead of using the Internet, you could also call toll-free (800) 892-1660 and ask to receive an Ag Census survey. Information that you provide is kept confidential by law, Title 7, U.S. Code.

The 2002 Ag Census included statistics about the ethnicity, race and gender of California’s farmers, see table below.

-- Reprinted from *2007 Census of Agriculture*, by Kristin Reynolds, Small Farm News, Volume 2, 2007, Small Farm Center, Cooperative Extension, University of California.

California Operators by Ethnicity, Specified Race, and Gender Distribution*

(Source: 2002 Census of Agriculture: www.nass.usda.gov/Census_of_Agriculture/index.asp)

| White | Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino Origin | Asian | American Indian or Alaska Native | More than One Race | Black or African American | Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------|-------|----------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|---|
| 112,321 | 11,985 | 5,379 | 1,560 | 899 | 388 | 354 |
| Male 84.2% | | | | Female 15.8% | | |

* Note that numbers will total more than 79,631 (the number of farms in California) because these statistics describe the number of operators, and one farm may have multiple operators.

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price" is a little more than we would really like to spend? But what are we purchasing here? What is happening to our dollar?

Well, first of all, part of that dollar goes to all the folks in the feature article, the "*faces behind the farmers*," our neighbors who get up early and work hard to bring food to our tables. Second, we are supporting a stewardship of our lands and waters. These agriculturists have a deep appreciation for the parts of Marin they farm, and have a huge stake in its preservation. Keeping them in business does more than fill their pocketbooks and give us yummy, healthy food; it supports their roles as stewards. Thirdly, the more that we search out local food and the producers of that food, the more connected we become to our own community and more independent of global and economic uncertainties.

We are as important to the whole equation as the producers and their extended families of staff, the bays and estuaries, the alluvial valleys, and the grassy hills that grow our crops. None of us exists without the other.

-- Steve Quirt, Editor

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Editors: Steve Quirt & Ellie Rilla
 Production: Frances Healey
 Contributors: Kristin Reynolds, UC Small Farm Program, UC Davis



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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 Resource Conservation District (MRCD)**, in cooperation with the **San Francisco Bay Regional Water Control Board**, is seeking projects located on grazed lands in the **Tomales Bay and Stemple Creek watersheds**. Projects will improve water quality, sediment runoff, and nutrient levels using 16 pre-approved conservation practices. A total of **\$560,000** will be available for construction planning and design of restoration projects. **Contact MRCD by November 2, 2007 at 415 663-1170.**

☞ **Bolinas Farm Day & History Room Exhibit Oct. 27**
 Celebrating local farmers, ranchers, and the richness of local harvest time with the opening of a new exhibit, **Farming in Bolinas 1834 to the 21st Century** in the **History Room of the Bolinas Museum - 415 868-0330**

☞ More ranchers and farmers are needed to host farm tours for school groups. The rise of the local food movement and renewed emphasis on nutrition in elementary school curricula have contributed to the call for programs such as the **Marin Agricultural Land Trust's Farm Field Studies Program**. If you are interested in hosting farm tours or interested in having your school group visit a farm, please contact the **Marin Agricultural Land Trust, Education Department, Sandy Dierks, Farm Field Study Program Coordinator: 415-868-0205** sdierks@malt.org

☞ **Marin Organic** has launched **MarinOrganic.TV** - an online view into Marin's agriculture. A link to this feature can be found on the **Marin Organic website, www.marinorganic.org**, or by going directly to **www.MarinOrganic.TV**.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
 COOPERATIVE EXTENSION - MARIN COUNTY
 1682 NOVATO BLVD., SUITE 150B
 NOVATO, CALIFORNIA 94947

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