



## EDITOR'S COLUMN

*"Niche markets are becoming a big part of the landscape in Marin, and I think that's going to be the way of the future." - Bill Jensen, Tomales rancher*

Changing an operation from the relative safety of the national commodity market to a new venture in the niche specialty business is challenging. But the Pomi family partnership (feature column) is typical of a growing handful of forward-looking ranchers and farmers who are tailoring long-standing family operations to fit the swelling Bay Area farm-to-fork culture, hungry for premium quality, locally family-farmed food. We are seeing a slow but sure diversification on our farms and ranches occurring as traditional dairies, cattle, and sheep ranches add new products. Marin dairies are selling fresh milk to cheese and yogurt makers. Locally grown grass-fed beef is a growing trend, and goat meat operations like Big Oak Farms grow beside new sheep cheese and goat cheese start-ups.

In order to inform and support this activity, UC Cooperative Extension Marin has just published a series of fact sheets that will help farmers and ranchers to better understand how to navigate the regulations and permit process.



## Big Oak goats on the horizon

The farmers and ranchers of Marin continue to diversify their operations and find new Bay Area niche markets in an effort to keep family farms viable and productive. Big Oak Farms is the latest family entrepreneurial experiment in family cooperation and niche marketing.

Small ruminant sheep and goat farming is the latest trend in Marin agriculture. Joining more established operations, like the Volpi goat dairy, are several new ventures like the Barinaga-Goodman sheep cheese dairy, Toluma Farms goat dairy, and Big Oak Farms. "We like the smaller animals. They are easier to work with than cows, and we can get our kids (children) to help us with the feeding and care of the kids (goats)," says Cindy Pomi, partner in the business. Sheep and goats generally take a little more care than cattle. Goats, in particular, are less predictable than cattle and have their own personalities and quirks. "We love working with them," says Cindy. "We keep them mostly on the pastures, except during really bad weather, when they go into the barn."

The herd of mostly Boer goats shares five hundred acres of pasture with a few beef cows from the traditional family herd. The Pomi



## BIG OAK RANCH

*"Big Oak" continued from page 1*



Ranch is typical of other Marin family farms. Originally a dairy farm, the changing times forced the family into a cattle grazing operation with the owners working off-farm to keep everything viable and the lifestyle alive. Cindy and her husband, Mark, joined with the other Pomi siblings, Kim and Jimmy, and Ron and Patty Pomi to find a way to put new life into the farm. Looking at current market trends, they found an opportunity to bring a grass-fed goat meat specialty item to the rich Bay Area gourmet food culture.

Big Oak Ranch is adding value to their product through organic certification of the pastures and raising the animals without hormone treatments or heavy antibiotic use. "We treat the animals with care and respect, and go out of our way to raise and treat them humanely through the whole cycle," says Cindy.

You can certainly see the emphasis on care when you visit the ranch. Two hundred does, about a hundred kids, and five robust bucks roam and graze in the meadows and beneath the oaks of the ranch. "We would like to grow the herd, but a lot depends on how we market the meat," says Cindy.

The family is planning on a direct-marketing approach, selling to fine restaurants and specialty outlets. "Marin Organic has really helped us out," says Cindy. "They have helped us get going by introducing us to the right people."

The diversification of Big Oak Farms from a marginal commodity operation to a new, niche specialty marketing venture is emblematic of the kind of forward-looking agricultural steps being taken today by Marin's farmers and ranchers. Reinvention is the key here. The Pomi family has all the necessary components for success: a working ranch set-up, cooperative family energy, and a marketplace ready and hungry for diverse and quality products. Good luck to Big Oak Farms!

*"These innovative producers have responded to changing consumer demands, creating a local, humanely raised food structure." - Stephanie Larson, Livestock & Range Management Advisor, UCCE Sonoma*

## UPCOMING WORKSHOPS

### ***Pasture-based dairy farming: managing for forage productivity***

This training workshop for Sonoma and Marin dairy operators is designed for dairymen to learn about :

- ☞ Installing & operating liquid manure systems
- ☞ Applying agronomic rates of manure fertilizer to pasture and silage fields
- ☞ Choosing the right forage species for your soil conditions and production goals
- ☞ Grazing practices to enhance milk production and to reduce feed costs

Sponsored by Gold Ridge RCD, Clover-Stornetta, USDA NRCS, UCCE, Western United Dairymen and Arolo Co.

**Oct. 8, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. - Valley Ford Schoolhouse**

**1740 School St., Valley Ford - Lunch included**

RSVP by Oct. 1st to: Patricia Hickey, Goldridge RCD  
707-874-2907 or [patricia@goldridgercd.org](mailto:patricia@goldridgercd.org)



### ***Grazing waiver workshop & spaghetti dinner*** ***Date and location pending***

In July 2008 the San Francisco Bay Regional Quality Control Board passed new regulatory requirements for grazing operators in the Tomales Bay watershed for parcels over 50 acres. This workshop is designed to inform landowners and lessees of the new requirements and to assist folks in completing the first step toward compliance.

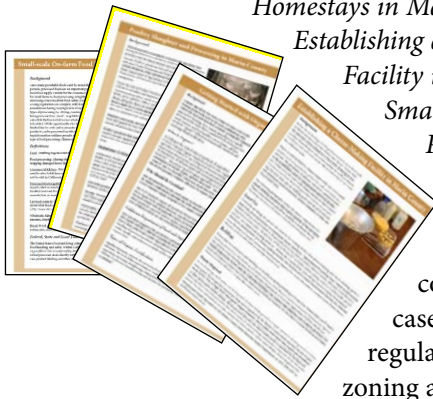
This event is sponsored by: Marin Agricultural Land Trust, Marin Farm Bureau, Marin Organic, Marin Resource Conservation District, UC Cooperative Extension, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Western United Dairymen.

For date and more information about this workshop, please check <http://cemarlin.ucdavis.edu>.

## *New fact sheet series for Marin farmers and ranchers*

The *Grown in Marin* website now offers fact sheets designed to help farmers and ranchers understand permitting and regulations for a variety of on-farm enterprises. This work is part of UCCE's ongoing technical advice program, and is supported by the County of Marin's "Agricultural Ombudsman" Lisa Bush, who researched and wrote the fact sheet series.

Topics include: *Getting Started with Organic Certification, Livestock Slaughter and Meat Processing Requirements in California, Poultry Slaughter and Processing in Marin County, Agricultural Homestays in Marin County,*



*Establishing a Cheese-Making Facility in Marin County, Small-scale On-farm Food Processing in Marin County, and Agricultural Tours.*

The fact sheets cover local, and in some cases state and federal, regulations pertaining to zoning and land use, building, waste disposal, environmental health, and retail sales of products. They also provide contacts for further information, with phone numbers of Marin County offices and links to relevant websites.

Although Bush says, "*these sheets sure don't make agriculture look easy,*" she thinks they identify some of the problems with regulations and "*hopes that they help provide a pathway for change.*"

Stay tuned for more info on AB 2168 (Jones) that would allow our producers more freedom to sell local value-added processed foods at their farm stands.

Currently, only eggs and fresh fruits and veggies that are grown on or near your farm can be sold. CA Farm Bureau and CAFF, Community Alliance with Family Farmers, are leading this effort.

### ***Organic acreage in Marin County***

In 2003 there were 907 acres in Marin County certified as organic. This was an exciting time for the Marin County Department of Agriculture as we had just completed our first full year as an organic certifier. Marin Organic Certified Agriculture (MOCA) was created to provide our local farmers and ranchers with an in-house USDA-accredited certification agency.

*Continued in next column*

Today Marin has a whopping total of 24,176 acres in organic production! Who would have thought tiny Marin could rack up that kind of organic acreage in such a short amount of time? Perhaps the next question might be, what kind of agriculture does that acreage represent? Here is the overall picture for 2008: Of the 24,177 total acres, MOCA certifies 21,314 of those acres. Another 2,848 acres are certified by other outside USDA-accredited agencies. The remaining 15 acres represent growers who are registered with the State of California as organic, but are exempt from certification because their yearly gross sales are \$5,000 or less.

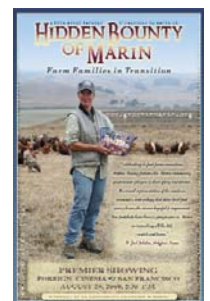
So, what kind of agriculture does that 24,176 acreage represent? Here's the breakdown:  
 ~23,784 acres represent pasture, including silage and hay.  
 ~392 acres represent the production of fruit and vegetables.

These numbers make sense when you consider the number one agricultural product in Marin is dairy and livestock. In 2003 there was one organic dairy; in 2008 there are seven certified dairies, 25% of the total number of dairies. Also, there are two organic poultry operations and one organic beef operation.

What these statistics don't reveal is the dynamic renaissance of agricultural diversification. It is not uncommon in West Marin to observe small sections of pasture converted to vegetable production with goats, pigs, sheep, chickens, turkeys, and beef cows around on certified organic pasture. These combined conventional and organic operations are creative diversification strategies, and they illustrate the degree of innovation that is typical of Marin farmers. - *Anita Sauber, Marin Organic Certified Agriculture Inspector*

### ***Hidden Bounty of Marin***

The stars of Hidden Bounty of Marin stepped out for their debut on August 29, 2008, during the Slow Food Nation week-end. Foreign Cinema Restaurant in San Francisco hosted the event. The evening kicked off with a screening in the gallery room, ending with much applause. The hoopla continued with alfresco candlelight dining and a menu featuring our very own Hidden Bounty's local fare. Our stars



appeared larger than life during dinner as Hidden Bounty replayed in the outside movie courtyard. Hidden Bounty was a year-and-a-half in the making and the debut was a culmination of all the hard work. A very warm thank you to all the stars who lent their time and shared with us their personal stories of farming and ranching to bring local sustainable, high-quality food to our tables. Also special thanks to Kate Baron of Marin Organic, who made this debut at Foreign Cinema possible. - *Kat Marando*

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You can find these helpful fact sheets on our *Grown in Marin* website by clicking on the *Resources for Farmers* link on the main page left sidebar. The list of fact sheets is at the top of the page, under *How to permit your diversification project in Marin County*.

Also in line with the changing winds of Marin agriculture are two upcoming workshops: Pasture Based Dairy Farming, to help dairy operators save on feed bills by getting more out of their grazing practices, and a special Grazing Waiver Workshop, to help ranchers understand the new regulations from the San Francisco Bay Regional Quality Board.

Organic farm and ranch certification continues to increase, indicating more and more farmers and ranchers are taking advantage of the increased added-value premiums that organic production can offer.

Last but certainly not least, UC Cooperative Extension's new documentary, *Hidden Bounty of Marin*, previewed at the Slow Food Nation event to positive response. For more information and upcoming showings of the video, please check the *Grown in Marin* website. - *Steve Quirt, Editor*

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://cemar.ucdavis.edu> and [www.growninmarin.org](http://www.growninmarin.org). Production of this newsletter was made possible with funding from the Marin Community Foundation and the County of Marin.

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## Marin Farm News

### ☞ Sudden Oak Death & Woodland Management

**Practices on Farms and Ranches** - This workshop will present an overview of Sudden Oak Death (SOD) on Marin farms and ranches, and demonstrate best management practices for both healthy and infected oak woodlands. Speakers from the University of California Integrated Hardwood Range Management Program and the California Oak Mortality Task Force will cover the maintenance of hardwoods on rangelands and managing sudden oak death-infected trees. Location: Dance Palace in Pt. Reyes Station on October 30, from 4:30 – 7:30 p.m. Reservations should be made with Franny Healey at 415-499-3261 or [fhealey@co.marin.ca.us](mailto:fhealey@co.marin.ca.us).

☞ **Lease Land to Farm: Theory & Practice** - Learn the basics of leasing land to farm. Examples of topics to be covered include working agreements between row crop farmers and ranchland owners, as well as the basics of written lease arrangements and crop share agreements. November 13, 2008, 1:00 p.m to 4:00 p.m. Location to be announced. Check [www.growninmarin.org](http://www.growninmarin.org) for details or call Frances Healey at UC Cooperative Extension, 415-499-4204.

☞ **New Non-Profit Formed** - Devil's Gulch Ranch is pleased to announce the addition of Devil's Gulch Educational Services (DGES), a non-profit whose mission is to provide agricultural education through its year-round camp programs, international outreach endeavors, seminars, and workshops. The Board of Directors are: Constance Washburn, Diane Del Signore, Scott Buse, Don Starnes, Myriam Kaplan-Pasternak, and Brian King.

☞ **Kevin Lunny of Drake's Bay Family Farms** will be honored as Business Citizen of the Year by the West Marin Chamber of Commerce at the Spirit of Marin Awards Luncheon on September 26, 2008.

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