



EDITORS COLUMN

"We need to be able to take over the ranch and keep it all going. We don't want to lose it, to look back and see that it has gone. It we go, we will lose a living link to farming culture."

- Jolynn Mendoza, 21, fourth generation rancher from B Ranch

Last issue we talked about where our Marin farm products end up. Now let's take a look at where our farmers are going to end up. It's getting harder to stay on the farm. Today's operations don't offer the margins nor the family involvement that ranches of the last generation provided. "When I was growing up on our dairy ranch," explained Kevin Lunny of G Ranch, "all of us were active and involved. We loved being home and being a part of the family business. We always had meaningful work to do, and we were key parts of the operation." Today's economic landscape and changed market make it much harder to run a profitable family farm business. Kids are leaving the farm to find other jobs and careers. But those that remain are carving out new niches and meeting the challenges with a remarkable courage and resiliency. Ellie Rilla, Marin County Farm Advisor, affectionately calls them "the young and the brave." These kids are well educated: Cal Poly, Davis or Chico State, and are not afraid of bringing in new ideas. The introduction of

"Editor" continued on page 4

Who will keep on farming and ranching?

The next generation is digging in for the future

There are actually more of them out there than you think; that is, the next generation of young ranchers and farmers from Marin. Most are in school or just out, working and adapting. Here are a few examples of young people digging in for the long haul in local agriculture. There are more stories out there about promising young ranchers and farmers than we can talk about here, and we apologize for not being to tell all their stories.

In talking to Jolynn Mendoza, Bobby Foehr, Samantha Kerby, Herb Rowland and Dave Evans, you find a shared viewpoint. All of them intensely believe in what they are doing. All of them want to bring meaning and purpose to their careers. They love what they do and they all like to work outside. They want farm culture to remain a viable road for young farmers.

Beneath the surface you find an unmistakable connection with the ranch or farm that becomes obvious. Bobby Foehr runs the pastured poultry operation for Marin Sun Farms. He's a Cal Poly graduate and a fourth generation Grossi, although he calls himself a "hybrid" since he didn't grow up on the ranch. "As a little kid I spent time with my grandfather, Alfred Grossi, at our Nicasio Ranch. We had a chicken flock together and he taught me a lot. I always wanted to get back out here. Why would anybody want anything else?" It's hard to talk about anything else but poultry and farming with Bobby, especially if you are out with the flock. He goes spontaneously into his observations on flock management. "We are finding that real range poultry provides a purpose for the roosters. We are selecting for "guardian roosters" to protect our flocks from raptors." Bobby graduated with a degree in agriculture business and poultry management. He could have ventured into factory poultry farming, but chose instead to join the Marin farms set-up with his cousin David Evans. "I didn't want to end up inside a confinement operation doing mass production. Here at the ranch, I am outside with the birds and constantly on my toes. It's not a run-of-the-mill job. It's always changing and besides, it's a lot of fun."

Samantha Kerby is assistant orchard manager at McEvoy Ranch and also manages the Point Reyes Farmers Market. She discovered that she had a deep connection with farming after several gleaning projects with Diane Matthew at Star Route Farms. Samantha represents a growing population of young people who didn't grow up on the farm, yet feel the same kind of connections that ranch and farm-born kids have. The difference is that these kids don't have the land. "It's hard to not be able to farm if you really want to. I get discouraged sometimes

Continued on page 3



Jolynn Mendoza, 21, B Ranch



Bobby Foehr, 23, Marin Sun Farms



Samantha Kerby, 24, McEvoy Ranch



Herb Rowland, 24, Pacheco Vineyards and Winery

Lots of Activity in August & September

This is a busy time of the year for everybody. All of us here at U.C. Cooperative Extension, the Agriculture Commissioner's Office, Farm Bureau, Marin Organic and MALT, have been "harvesting" along with you farmers and ranchers. Here's some of what's been going on:

Grass-Fed Beef Standards and Certification - Stephanie Larson, our Livestock and Range Advisor, has put the finishing touches on a Grass-Fed Beef Certification Program based on standards generated from our producers' advisory group of Bill Barboni, David Evans, Mike Gale, Kevin Lunny and Al Poncia. The Program has been passed to Stacy Carlsen, our Agricultural Commissioner, who will put it into effect after getting County approval. This could be the first government certification for grass fed, and will give consumers an accurate picture of what they get when they purchase "grass-fed beef."

Cut Flower Production Workshop - Eighty folks showed up to hear Mike Madison from Yolo Bulb, Kevin McInnis from Quetzal Farm, Ted Buckley from Oak Hill Farm and Amadeo Banducci from Muir Beach talk about the ups and downs of cut flower farming. The workshop was, as usual, lively and informing, and the growers shared the secrets of surviving and thriving on flowers.

Organic Dairying Feasibility Workshop - A half dozen dairy people gathered at the Farm Bureau to hear Dr. Bees Butler, an agriculture economist from U. C. Davis, Albert Straus, Mike Griffin from Clover, and Stacy Carlsen lay out what it takes to transition a dairy to certified organic. Right now organic fluid milk fetches twice that of conventional milk but also costs more to produce. The transitional stage is costly and complicated. Economists like Dr. Butler are predicting that an "evening out" of pricing will occur bringing organic and conventional pricing closer together. Transitioning to gain the added premiums may not be enough of an incentive for most dairy operations. Operators with a keen interest in the organic methods make up the majority of certified dairies.

Funders Tours - The Western SARE (Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education) group and Funders for Sustainable Food Systems (FSFS) both toured our Marin farms in August and September. The SARE group started at Star Route Farms, visited Hog Island Oyster Co. and ended up at Volpi's Restaurant for a sit-down family-style Italian meal. Janet Brown from the Center for Ecoliteracy, Sallyanne Wilson from the Marin Community Foundation, and Jamaica Maxwell from FSFS put together a fantastic tour for a group of agricultural funders that started at the Ferry Plaza Market and ended up at the Straus Dairy. The organizers did a great job of showcasing the many productive partnerships that give a special quality to our sustainable food system efforts. It was easy to see that the alliances supporting sustainable agriculture here in Marin are creating models for others to look at.

Little's Potatoes on Poncia Pasture

David Little of Tomales, a Marin Organic grower who is certified by Marin Organic Certified Agriculture (MOCA), has overcome a condition often lamented around the county. There is very little land available for row-crop farming. For years, many of us have driven around West Marin looking at what limited flat land there is, and wondering how to get some for row-crop farming. Well, David went out and started asking folks if they would rent him a few acres to dry farm his now famous spuds. And guess what? Some of those calls paid off and David is now farming 19 acres in Marin and west Sonoma Counties.

One sweet deal for David and Al Poncia of Tomales, is the four-acre patch on Al's bottomland just below his house on the bluff. This is rich, black Tomales loam. After the spring grass is grazed and the ground can be cultivated,



David Little at the Poncia Ranch potato field with Dottymae.

David tills and plants in June. The patch is perfect for dry farming as the low-lying land maintains a high water table. David has become a skilled dry farmer who specializes in 20 varieties of potatoes along with tomatoes, onions and some garlic, which he direct-markets. After harvest, he goes back in and seeds a cover crop for the winter. In the spring, the cows come back for luxuriant clover, vetch and oats. David and Al will move the rotation to another spot on the ranch and maybe return in another year. This is sound and healthy management.

David is using the same system on the Camozzi Ranch on Pepper Road on an nine-acre field. The Camozzi operation has recently converted to organic production. After the certified organic silage is cut, he fertilizes with local dairy compost, tills and plants, then seeds for winter silage production. It's a win-win situation all around, and even fits into both producers' organic farm plans.

These kinds of partnerships help to create more acres of organic production. It's all sold close to home, is entirely sustainable and uses no water!



Award-winning cheeses are freshly crafted three times a week at Cowgirl Creamery in Point Reyes Station.

Marin Cheese Makers Win Big

For the third consecutive year, California's cheese producers took home more awards than any other state in the cow's milk categories at the annual American Cheese Society (ACS) judging, winning 30 awards including "Best of Show." Specialty, artisan and farmstead cheese producers from 28 states and four countries entered 615 cheeses in the highly competitive judging, held as part of the ACS annual conference, August 1-3 in San Francisco.

The competition's coveted "Best of Show" award was presented to Cowgirl Creamery of Point Reyes for Red Hawk, a washed rind cheese. Cowgirl is owned and operated by Sue Conley and Peggy Smith. The cheese is made entirely from organic milk brought in from the Straus Organic Dairy. In addition, California cow's milk cheesemakers took 10 first-place, 10 second-place and 9 third-place awards.

Among the first-place winners was one of the state's oldest cheese producers, Marin French Cheese Company, of Petaluma, which won five awards this year, including a first place in the Soft Ripened Cheese category. Spring Hill Jersey Cheese won a first for its Dry Jack and Cowgirl also won a third place for its St. Pats.

"These awards are a testimony to the high level of cheesemaking in California today," said Nancy Fletcher, California Milk Advisory Board Vice President of Communications. "The competition received a record number of entries this year, nearly 200 more than last year. That California producers won more awards than ever before confirms that California is at the forefront of fine cheesemaking in America."

California, the second-largest cheese producing state in the country, turned out 1.72 billion pounds of cheese in 2002 and is home to 60 cheesemakers who make more than 200 varieties and styles of cheese. Half of the state's cheesemakers are specialty, artisan or farmstead producers.

"Who will keep on farming and ranching?" continued from Page 1

and think about giving up my dream of full-time farming. But then I remember that I want to do something in life that matters, that I feel good about."

Herb Rowland, son of Herb and Debbie Rowland, is a third generation winegrape grower. His family owns and operates Pacheco Winery. He is a junior at Cal Poly and can't wait to get back to the family vineyard. "I grew up around vineyards. It's what I love to do, and what I want to keep doing. There is a rewarding feeling in growing our own grapes and producing a quality product. When we hand someone a bottle of our wine, we have a connection." Herb spent the summer as an intern at the Marin Agriculture Commissioner's Office and is now back at Cal Poly to finish his degree in Fruit Science and Viticulture. "Education is important. You need to know that what you are talking about is real. You need experience and to surround yourself with what you love. But at the same time you need to realize that nobody does it the same. You need to do what works for you."

Jolynn Mendoza, daughter of Linda and Joe Mendoza, is the fourth generation of a Point Reyes dairy family. She says that the love of the dairy is in her blood and she will keep on dairying no matter what. One look at her determination and composure and you know she's not kidding. But her enthusiasm and commitment go beyond her own love of dairying. "There are less and less of us who know the ropes. Every time someone leaves the farm it is a blow to farm culture. We need to be able to keep farms alive and healthy. Soon, we will be the only ones left who know how to keep small farms going." Jolynn feels lucky to be able to live her lifestyle, even with all the grueling work and limited financial rewards. "The ranch has been a great place to grow up. I want my kids to have the same chance to be productive, learn the work ethic and offer the service of producing wholesome food."

No discussion about young farmers is complete without including Dave Evans of Marin Sun Farms. Dave, son of Dan and Delores Evans, is fourth generation on his mothers side, the Grossi family. Coming home from Cal Poly, Dave launched into a number of innovative ranching enterprises like grass-fed beef and pasture-based poultry. His enthusiasm is absolutely infectious and his knowledge and dedication to sustainable farming are both practical and inspiring. David believes that developing a sustainable local food system will help save farming and ranching. "We can preserve the quality of our lives here. Small farms everywhere can survive if we re-establish relationships between producers and consumers. That kind of connection really matters. We need to keep factoring in the quality of our lives and products that we grow. People recognize that. We live in a rich land that can produce so much more."



Dave Evans, 31,
Marin Sun Farms

"Editor" continued from page 1

"change" is not new. Again in a conversation with Kevin Lunny, "My Grandfather was the first on the Point to begin using AI (artificial insemination). Everybody thought he was nuts. What? You sold your bulls? But in a few years most everybody went to AI." It looks like that spirit of agricultural adventurism is still at work here on our farms and ranches. And added into our landscape is a group of young farmers from urban backgrounds like David Retsky from County Line Harvest and "hybrids" like Peter Martinelli from Fresh Run Farm, and Bobby Foehr, who runs the poultry operation at Marin Sun Farms. These young farmers and ranchers are serious and committed.

Grass-fed beef, organic dairying, pasture-based poultry, specialty crops of all kinds, change and diversification are all beginning to happen. Much of it is getting its start from the younger generations. And some of it is beginning to rub off on the elders. If you look closely you may find a potato field or a few organic calves tucked away somewhere on the ranch. "If we are dedicated and interested in carrying on and trying new things, maybe our parents will also," shared a young rancher.

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Editors: Steve Quirt & Ellie Rilla
 Production: Frances Healey
 Contributors: Anita Sauber, Marin County Agricultural Commissioners Office, Leah Smith, Marin Food Systems Project, Barbara Verenis, Marin Organic



William S. Quirt
 Organic & Sustainable
 Agriculture Coordinator



Ellie Rilla
 County Director
 UCCE



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News from Marin County Farms, Ranches and Producers

- ☞ **Point Reyes Original Blue Cheese** has a new product, **Original Blue Dip & Dressing**, which will be found in gourmet grocery stores. It is currently available at **Toby's** and **Nicasio Farm Stand**
- ☞ **Taste of Marin**, by **Marin Organic** and **MALT** took place at the **Marin Art & Garden Center** Sept. 10. **Twenty-eight** Marin providers were on hand to show and talk about their food to a sold-out crowd of 196, followed by a sit-down dinner featuring the bounty of Marin's farmers.
- ☞ **David Evans of Marin Sun Farms** appeared on the **KPIX Morning Show** Saturday, September 13 from his **Ferry Plaza Booth** at the Saturday Market.
- ☞ "**Harvest Day on the Farm**", MALT's annual autumn festival, will be held **Sunday, Oct. 12**, from **10-4** at the **LaFranchi Nicasio Valley Farm**.
- ☞ **West Marin Green Festival**, will be held **Saturday, Oct. 25**, from **10 p.m - 4 p.m.**, at **Lagunitas School District Campus**. Information, local organic food and music. For more information, contact Lauri Sturdivant 663-1427
- ☞ **Point Reyes Vineyards** received a **Silver Medal** for their **Blanc de Noir Sparkling Wine** at the **California State Fair**, along with a **Bronze Medal** for their **Blanc de Blanc**. There were 2800 entries.
- ☞ A panel of **Marin** sustainable and organic farming experts has been chosen to talk about "**Collaborative Programs to Promote Sustainable Farming**" at the **2004 Ecofarm Conference** at Asilomar. Panel presenters include **Warren Weber, Star Route Farms, Stacy Carlsen, Agricultural Commissioner, Ellie Rilla** and **Steve Quirt** from UCCE.

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21

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