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Added value. What is it? How do you do it? Do I need to? Do I want to? These are all questions folks are asking these days. Added value probably has more than one definition, but I like the one I heard from Desmond Jolly at a Small Farm Conference about five or six years ago. I asked Des the same question, and his reply surprised me more than a little. He said, *"We, as farmers and ranchers, add the value to our farms and products. It's all about who we are and how we do it."* This means everything you personally do sets your product apart.

The standard definition refers to adding economic value through the product chain. For instance - organic certification adds a higher premium over conventional milk; making artisan cheese adds more value to the organic milk; producing the organic milk and artisan cheese on-farm as "farmstead" adds yet another layer of value. Selling from the ranch adds value through direct marketing. (Read what's up with the new Artisan Cheese Making Classes at Indian Valley College, reported by Ellie Rilla.) Now, it's no small deal to do all this, and I know ranchers who are happy just where they are, producing fat calves and sheep to ship out without too much hassle. If it works, go with it.

Grass-fed and finished cattle add value to the meat. Organic certification adds another layer. "Locally produced" is an increasingly popular

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## From Hicks Valley Ranch to Oliver's Markets

Bill Barboni from Hicks Valley Ranch raises Angus beef and a few sheep. Bill is fortunate enough to have good pasture and enough grass to keep his 400 mother cows very healthy and producing good-sized calves year after year, an easy sell to buyers seeking quality Angus breed cattle. After selling to Harris Ranch in a certified Angus program for a few years, Bill decided he wanted to develop a grass-fed and finished product that he could market locally.

Cattle ranchers rarely do anything quickly. They deliberate, chew on it, watch the markets, and when they feel like they can make it work, go for it. I asked Bill what convinced him to go local. *"It's the right thing to do. I've always wanted to do this, and it's working out fine."* That's a straightforward answer, but there was a considerable amount of effort that led up to the successful direct-marketing program. *"UC Cooperative Extension helped us get this going,"* Bill stated. *"Stephanie Larson, our local livestock advisor, had us working with the Sonoma Meat Buying Club. That's where we learned that a real marketing possibility existed out there,"* Bill remembers.

Stephanie Larson has been working with the Marin/Sonoma livestock community for fifteen years and pretty much knows what's up. *"We could see that retailers were more open to adapting to a supply chain system differently structured than the conventional model that they were used to. Year-round supply with seasonal emphasis was OK with them, if that's what it took to get fresh and local product into their stores,"* she explained.

The retailer that really came onboard is Oliver's Markets in Sonoma County. With three markets in prime locations, and a reputation for high-quality, local emphasis and great customer awareness, Oliver's and Hicks Valley Ranch became a great match. *"We had a store-wide tasting of Bill's Angus beef, with staff from all of our stores,"* Tom Scott, store manager, recalls. *"The staff was blown away. The flavor, texture and overall quality of Hicks Valley Angus Beef was unlike anything we had tasted."* That pretty much sealed

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## Artisan cheese-making classes coming to Marin

Did you know that Northern California, and Marin and Sonoma specifically, have the largest concentration of artisan and farmstead cheese makers second to Vermont?

Perhaps this is a growing field because it's such a natural fit for the premium milk we produce in the North Bay and all those cheese enthusiasts who want the fabulous handmade artisan cow, sheep, and goat cheeses made right here.

As part of this growth, the California Artisan Cheese Guild (CACG) education committee, fueled by Cowgirl Creamery's Sue Conley, Maureen Cunnie, and Lynn Giacomini Stray pushed for the creation of a College of Marin Artisan Cheese Certificate Program modeled after the Vermont Institute for Artisan Cheese.

The first courses are filling up quickly, so if you or an apprentice or others you know are interested, you need to apply and register soon!

(1) A Full Introduction to Artisan Cheese and Its Traditions with Daphne Zepos - 5 Monday evenings starting 9/13

(2) Milk Types and Quality with Dave Potter - October 28 all day

For main website: <http://www.marin.edu/CommunityEducation/>  
For the application/class procedure: <http://www.marin.edu/CommunityEducation/ce-reginfo.html>

See page 27 of the Community Education fall catalog for a more detailed description of the classes.

If you miss these two, they will be repeated in the winter session in January.

Stay tuned for an Artisan & Farmstead Cheese Survey/Report I am preparing about this exciting new field and certificate program. -- *Ellie Rilla, UCCE Marin*



## Farm diversification sheets are now available at Grown in Marin website

Thinking about diversifying your ranch or farm? We all have at least six dozen questions that come to mind: what permits do I need? What do I need to turn my milk to cheese or ice cream? How do I get Organic Certification? Can I do a farm stay? Where can I process my lambs? On the ranch? . . . and all the other information needed to make the added-value jump.

For the last few years UCCE Marin and Sonoma have been putting together eight "Fact Sheets" to help get you going on the right track. These mini-guides will save you many hours of research, phone calls and desk visits. The eight fact sheets are as follows:

- **How to Permit your Diversification Project in Marin County**
- **Agricultural Homestays in Marin County**
- **Establishing a Cheese-Making Facility in Marin County**
- **Getting Started with Organic Certification**
- **Marin County Planning and Agriculture**
- **Poultry Slaughter and Processing in Marin County**
- **Small-scale On-farm Food Processing in Marin County**
- **Getting Started with Farm Leases in Marin County**
- **Livestock Slaughter and Meat Processing Requirements in California**

We are also working on two more fact sheets: "Agricultural Tours" and "Rainfall Capture and Storage for Marin Agriculture," which should be available soon. You can find all the fact sheets at [www.growninmarin.org](http://www.growninmarin.org). Click on "Resources for Farmers" located in the menu side bar, and you will find the materials. You can read them online, or download the PDF files.

The Grown in Marin website is very rich in resources for farmers, ranchers, educators, and anyone interested in Marin County agriculture. Take a few minutes to explore our site, and be sure to give us feedback.







## Incubating the business of the family farm – farmers’ markets play a critical role

Agricultural Institute of Marin (AIM), a 501(c)3 non-profit, formerly known as Marin Farmers Markets, has been incubating the businesses of small family farms for 27 years. By operating vibrant farmers’ markets, providing organizational support, and spearheading public outreach and education, AIM enables about 200 regional farmers and ranchers to successfully market their products directly to the public.

On June 21st, the *Marin Independent Journal* ran a front-page story featuring the Nicasio Valley Cheese Co. and Rossotti Ranch, two new farm businesses launched by the LaFranchi brothers, Rick & Randy, and Julie & Anthony Rossotti, respectively. Given their previous on-farm experience running dairies and raising livestock in Marin County, and encouraged by the growing demand for niche food products, the entrepreneurs set out to market their fresh artisanal cheeses and goat meat directly to their local community, starting at the Marin Farmers Markets. Both the LaFranchis and Rossottis have named AIM’s farmers’ markets as instrumental in launching their businesses.

AIM’s mission, to bring farmers and communities together, supports local family farms by sending home the full retail dollar and providing farmers an opportunity to build relationships with consumers. The direct relationships help foster loyalty and provide an immediate feedback loop, two integral elements in building a business from the ground up.

While there are many factors that contribute to the success of the farm or ranch, AIM is proud to support 19 Marin producers by providing a direct marketing opportunity through its nine Bay Area farmers’ markets. Participating Marin County farms, ranches, and cheese makers include: Sartori Farms, County Line Harvest, Marin Sun Farms, Allstar Organic, Cowgirl Creamery, Devil’s Gulch Ranch,

Woodside Farms, Little Organic, Drake’s Bay Oysters, Paradise Valley Produce, McEvoy Ranch and McClelland Dairy, to name a few. Just this June, Indian Valley Organic Farm and Garden joined AIM’s Novato Farmers Market, offering its students the valuable opportunity to learn how to market the fruits (and vegetables) of their labor.

The diversification of Marin’s farms and ranches brings Marin hot on the heels of its neighbor to the north, Sonoma County, which has more than 32 producers in AIM’s farmers’ markets who offer items like apples and pears, and produce that thrives in a warmer climate. The diversity of AIM’s farmers markets illustrates the fact that Marin is part of a food community that is not defined by county boundaries – at least not naturally. “Food-shed” neighbors in the greater Bay Area play a critical and complementary role in AIM’s farmers’ markets by providing products that don’t grow in Marin County. Although Marin’s row crop production has increased, the number of acres in fruit and vegetable production still numbers about 384 acres, according to the 2009 Marin County Livestock and Agricultural Crop Report, and we are naturally limited by climate and water. With 250,000 eaters in Marin, we depend on the seasonal diversity of our regional farms to maintain strong and vibrant farmers’ markets that can feed our loyal customer base year-round, which in turn benefits our Marin farmers when they are ready for market. -- Leah Smith, *Agricultural Institute of Marin*

## INDIAN VALLEY ORGANIC FARM GOES TO MARKET

The Indian Valley Organic Farm & Garden at College of Marin spends every Tuesday evening at the downtown Novato Farmers Market. Right from the start, delighted customers have arrived at the stand exclaiming, “I’m so glad you finally made it here!” and “I’ve walked by your farm many times!” and “This is as local as it gets!” It is wonderful for consumers to be familiar with the farm where their food comes from and the farmers who cultivate the land.

On Tuesdays at market, you’ll find the farm’s abundant stand offering basil, beans, beets, chard, fennel, vibrant flowers, garlic, kale, lettuce, melons, parsley, potatoes, heirloom tomatoes, and zucchini, with peppers and cucumbers coming soon.

Support your local organic teaching farm, and its students by visiting the Indian Valley Organic Farm & Garden at the Novato Farmers Market on Tuesdays, 4-8pm and at the farm stand at College of Marin in Novato on Wednesdays, 10am-3pm. All proceeds support the farm’s instructional mission. -- Jenna Brager, *Indian Valley Farm*

*"Hicks Valley Ranch," continued from page 4*

the deal, and today you can buy Hicks Valley grass-fed beef in all of the Oliver's Markets locations throughout Sonoma County.

This model is not without risk and hard work, though. *"I have to be on my toes to make sure I have enough pasture and feed to support these cattle. Leases are getting hard to find. This was a good grass year, and everything worked out, but there is always next year,"* Bill said.

Moving from a well-run and profitable commodity cattle operation to a local, year-round direct marketing program may not be right for many operators, but for those who are positioned to take advantage of the increased enthusiasm and demand for local product, the Hicks Valley Beef and Oliver's Market deal can serve as a working example. Here, willing retailers who can find ways to collaborate with willing ranchers can combine to reach a growing and hungry market for local products.

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and in-demand added value. This issue's feature is on Hicks Valley Ranch, owned and run by Bill Barboni. Bill, with a little help from his friends, has moved into a year-round added-value program with Oliver's Market.

Another challenge to an added-value diversification is "how do you do it?", which is why UCCE Marin and Sonoma produced eight fact sheets, from "Starting a Cheese Plant" to figuring out how to construct an agricultural lease. These simple resource pages can save farmers, ranchers and entrepreneurs hours of time by outlining what needs to be done, legally and efficiently.

Finally, most added-value start-ups learn the ropes by test marketing products at the farmers' market. Leah Smith, from Agricultural Institute of Marin, reports on how they provide the space and environment for producers to learn and grow, just like our own Indian Valley Farm and Garden is doing at the Tuesday Novato Farmers Market. Read on!

-- Steve Quirt, editor

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

∞ After over a year of development, **Cowgirl Creamery** has officially released Wagon Wheel, its first aged cheese. Made with **Straus** organic milk, in 25-pound wheels, it's a firm cheese aged for three months. With its nutty, milky flavor, it is a great cheese for the table.

∞ **U Pick** at the **Chileno Valley Ranch**, 5150 Chileno Valley Rd., will open in September and will remain open each Sunday until the apples are all picked. Visitors are requested to call 707-765-6664 to let Sally and Mike Gale know you are coming. For more information go to [www.chilenobeef.com](http://www.chilenobeef.com).

∞ **Rossotti Ranch** will start selling its goat meat in local **Whole Foods** stores in September, an outcome of the symposium Whole Foods hosted in February for local producers. Also, **Lunny Ranch Organic Grassfed Beef** is now being featured in the new Mill Valley Whole Foods store.

∞ **Cow Track Ranch's** all-organic Easter egg potatoes and cut flowers won first place prizes and their California garlic won a second place prize at the **Marin County Fair**.

∞ There will be a **Williamson Act and Rangeland Conservation in California workshop** on September 14, 9am-4pm at UC Davis. For information or to register: <http://reach.ucdavis.edu/programs/williamsonact.html>.

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Editors: Steve Quirt, David Lewis, & Deborah Skaar  
Production: Frances Healey  
Contributors: Ellie Rilla, Leah Smith, and Jenna Brager

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