



EDITOR'S COLUMN

You may have noticed that we have been delinquent in sending out this newsletter. We had just mailed the March newsletter out at the end of April when my vacation to Europe was activated. With help from other contributors, we are back on track. That's the great thing about an agricultural community like ours that is small, diverse, conscientious, and talented. In this issue, Ellie Rilla, extension director, found the "Ten Reasons Why Agriculture Belongs in Natural Systems." Juan Hidalgo of the Marin County Agricultural Commissioner's office gives us a snapshot of the new "Grass-fed Livestock Certification Program." Julie Evans from MALT and "H" Ranch contributed "Taking Charge of the Future." David Lewis, University of California Cooperative Extension advisor for watershed management in Marin, Sonoma, and Mendocino counties, put together an article on the state of our watershed management. Nancy Scolari from the Marin Resource Conservation District wrote a piece on the Marin Coastal Watersheds Permit Coordination Project.

So all I had to do upon my return from Ireland was to write this column! Seriously though, I'm

Ten Reasons Why Agriculture Belongs in Natural Systems



Bobby and David Kimball, Bolinas residents, gave us permission to reprint the following list that they presented at a recent planning commission hearing about the placement of "food and agriculture" in the county-wide plan update, currently in progress.

10. The lives and work of farmers and ranchers are guided and impacted by the seasons, the sun, rainfall, and all elements of Natural Systems to a much higher degree than for most residents of Marin County.
9. Agriculture that minimizes its environmental footprint buffers wetlands and riparian habitat, enhances bio-diversity, and supports native species preservation.
8. Family owned and operated agricultural operations can serve as models of intergenerational teamwork, stewardship, and fortitude.
7. Ecologically managed agriculture operations on federal parklands can show, over time, the value of mutually beneficial relationships and goals.
6. The loss or conversion of agricultural lands to development will almost certainly result in a less desirable environment and threaten natural communities.
5. Local agricultural operations that provide fresh and healthy food to county residents through markets, public agencies, and eating establishments nourish human beings and offer increased security, awareness, and pride.
4. Increased quantities of protected and interconnected lands (agriculture, parks, open space) will ensure biologic diversity and sustain healthy rural landscapes.
3. Agricultural lands provide "visual open space" for our enjoyment and well being.
2. Environmentally sensitive farmers and ranchers may risk becoming an endangered species without tangible support and recognition.
1. We must structurally strengthen the mutually interdependent relationship between agriculture and the environment and create a sustainable partnership for the future.

Marin County Launches Grass-Fed Livestock Certification Program



Stephanie Larson, UCCE livestock and range advisor, begins the grass-fed livestock workshop for two dozen producers.

The Marin County Agriculture Department launched its Grass-Fed Livestock Certification Program this past April 22 with a presentation to local producers regarding the outlook of the beef industry, niche marketing opportunities, and the health benefits of grass-fed livestock.

The presentation was put together by Stephanie Larson of the University of California Cooperative Extension. Guest speakers Glenn Nader, UCCE farm advisor, and Dr. Steven Blank, extension economist for U.C. Davis, addressed the marketing trends, opportunities and options in niche meat markets. Their conclusions can be summarized by saying that the grass-fed livestock market is small but rapidly growing, and this is the best time to enter this market. Dr. Blank mentioned that the establishment of standards for a grass-fed livestock program could further increase profitability. Dr. Cindy Daley, CSU Chico, addressed the health attributes of eating grass-fed meat. Dr. Daley spoke of research which has shown grass-fed meat to contain a more desirable ratio of Omega 6: Omega 3 fatty acids, higher levels of CLA (Conjugated Linoleic Acid, an anti-oxidant and anti-carcinogenic), lower saturated fats, and higher concentrations of Vitamins A and E. Stacy Carlsen, Marin County Agricultural Commissioner, and Anita Sauber of the Marin County Agricultural Commissioner's office discussed the purpose of the program and participation requirements.

This local program is open to livestock producers in Marin and Sonoma counties only and may provide local producers with new market opportunities. Local producers Joe Pozzi and Mike Gale shared their experiences in the niche meat market and how they have developed their customer base.

Livestock producers interested in the Grass-Fed Livestock Certification Program can contact the Marin County Department of Agriculture at 415-499-6700. - By Juan Hidalgo, Marin Agricultural Commissioner's office.

Calling All Young Farmers & Ranchers!

Young agriculturalists, take note: *Taking Charge of the Future*, a one-day event for Marin and Sonoma counties' young farmers and ranchers, will take place on October 9 at Walker Creek Ranch in beautiful West Marin. This gathering will offer our next generation of agricultural landowners and leaders a chance to gather ideas and materials about the challenges and opportunities agriculture offers, while spending time together building partnerships that will last throughout their futures in the agricultural industry.

The day kicks off with keynote speaker Neil Koenig, author of *You Can't Fire Me, I'm Your Father*, speaking about the challenges and opportunities of inheriting agricultural operations and businesses. The day continues with a fast-paced mix of concurrent workshops in dairy and livestock opportunities, along with breakout sessions on specialty crops, organic opportunities, vertically integrated processing, and added value. Next comes a panel discussion featuring local and national leaders in agriculture and an agricultural tradeshow that will be open throughout the day. The event will be concluded with a social dinner featuring speaker Neil Koenig for the entire agricultural community.

Taking Charge of the Future will offer participants a venue to stay connected to their heritage while offering ideas and options for expanding their interests and horizons in agriculture. - By Julie Evans, Project Coordinator.

If you or someone you know is interested in attending this event or would like more information, please email your name and address to Julie Evans, Project Coordinator, University of California Cooperative Extension - jevans@malt.org, or call 415-499-4204.



Jolynn Mendoza with her calves. Jolynn is a fourth generation dairy rancher.

Water Quality Improvements: a Continuing Work in Progress

Managing water to meet multiple needs is a complex task for rural communities across the United States, and the Tomales Bay Watershed community knows this well. These agricultural producers, homeowners, and interest groups have worked four decades with local, state, and federal groups to improve water quality.

An example of this was the installation of wastewater storage systems on dairies, eliminating direct delivery of dairy wash water to streams. With help from Marin County and the State Water Resources Control Board, ponds were built on most dairies by the early 1970s. Comparisons of water quality in these upland streams before and after this project show that the systems reduced the amounts of bacteria and nutrients delivered from dairies to streams.

Throughout the 1990s, dairy farmers and livestock producers participated statewide in Ranch Water Quality Planning courses offered by the University of California Cooperative Extension. Stephanie Larson, livestock and range advisor, gave courses to 80 producers, offering assessment tools to identify sources of on-farm water pollution. A recent statewide survey of participants found that of 685 participants, 248 completed pollution assessments, and 256 implemented corrective measures.

Efforts to improve water quality continue. Currently, the Marin Resource Conservation District (RCD), in partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), is implementing 40 projects on 12 operations within the watershed. Projects include fencing along creeks to control livestock damage and implementing practices to slow and filter runoff before it gets into waterways. The funds are grant awards from the State Water Resources Control Board and the NRCS's Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

These projects will be completed by March 2006, but there is still more to do. The Marin RCD identified over three and a half million dollars needed for water quality projects in the Walker Creek Watershed alone. In Marshall, a recent risk assessment of home septic systems indicated that 32 percent are marginal or failing, with about 500 systems needing repair or replacement. Creative financial partnerships will be needed to make this happen. Continued support for water quality improvements will have to be a team effort. The team today is small, but dedicated. With some luck, we can add more financial players to the team to meet both near-term and long-term goals. - By David J. Lewis, University of California Cooperative Extension advisor for watershed management in Marin, Sonoma, and Mendocino counties, 707-565-2621.



Marin Coastal Watersheds Permit Coordination Project

The Marin Coastal Watersheds Permit Coordination Project is a collaborative effort of Marin Resource Conservation District (RCD), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Sustainable Conservation (a non-profit environmental group), and multiple regulatory agencies. The project encourages and supports local farmers, ranchers, and landowners who are improving water quality and wildlife habitat on and near their lands. Coordinating the complex regulatory review process allows restoration and erosion control projects funded and overseen by the Marin RCD and NRCS to proceed in a more cost-efficient and expedient manner.

Under this project, 16 federally-standardized conservation practices may be carried out in the project area, which includes Stemple, Lagunitas, and Walker Creeks and several smaller drainages feeding Tomales Bay, and the Pacific Ocean from the Point Reyes Peninsula. These practices are designed to control erosion and sedimentation, to increase aquatic, riparian, and upland habitat values, and to stabilize eroding stream channels. Special precautions are taken, in consultation with regulatory agencies, to help protect local endangered or threatened species, such as coho salmon and steelhead trout.

The need for assistance with the challenges of permitting conservation work was identified specifically during the community planning process that produced the Marin Coastal Watershed Enhancement Project. The permit coordination program helps these existing conservation projects reach their full potential and helps to forge positive and supportive relationships between landowners and state and federal regulatory agencies. The California State Coastal Conservancy and the San Francisco Foundation funded Sustainable Conservation's work on the permit coordination project. - By Nancy Scolari, Marin Resource Conservation District, 415-663-1170.

FARMING NEWS FROM AROUND MARIN

"Editor," continued from page 1

so lucky to be collaborating with such a great group of folks. Sharing the common goal of building a local and flourishing food system and a healthy and happy farming community grounded in sound, responsible environmental practices creates a team atmosphere that makes our work fun and rewarding. I could have just as easily called on any of our colleagues in the agricultural community for help or contributions:

Marin Organic, Marin County Farm Bureau, Marin Agricultural Land Trust, numerous farmers, ranchers or processors, county staff or community organizations like Slide Ranch, the Marin Food Systems Project, and Environmental Education Council of Marin.

I just returned from three weeks in a tiny village in southwest Ireland where everybody helps each other. That homey, country hospitality and mutual support are as rare as they are refreshing, but I can't help feeling the same way about our sustainable agricultural village in Marin County.

- Steve Quirt, Editor

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News from Marin County Farms, Ranches, and Producers

❖ Straus Creamery kicks off new methane generator.

Completing a five-year process, this cutting-edge organic dairy has created electricity from its new methane digester. The digester captures naturally occurring gas from manure and converts it into electricity. For details go to www.strausmilk.com/pages/news/methane.html.

❖ Organic acreage in Marin County is at an all-time high, according to **Anita Sauber**, agricultural inspector with the Marin County Agricultural Commissioner's office. Organic acreage has increased from 1,400 in 2003 to 2,568 this year.

❖ **Cow Track Ranch** is producing and marketing certified organic zinfandel vinegar. You can buy it now at **Indian Peach Food Company**, Point Reyes, or online at www.cowtrack.net.

❖ **McEvoy Ranch**, the largest US producer of estate-grown, certified organic extra virgin olive oil, has announced 2004 public tour dates. Advance reservations are required, and the tour costs \$20. For dates and more information about McEvoy Ranch tours, visit www.mcevoyranch.com.

❖ Jonathon and Susan Pey, Proprietors of **Mt. Tamalpais Vineyards** and **Pey-Marin Vineyards**, announce the release of the newest vintages of their three Marin County wines: Mt. Tamalpais Vineyards' Vintage 2002 Merlot and Vintage 2003 "Vin Gris de Marin," and Pey-Marin Vineyards' Vintage 2002 Pinot Noir. For more details, visit their website www.marinwines.com.

❖ **Renewable Energy Generation** for agriculture and rural businesses: get up to 75% off the total project cost with current federal and state incentives. For more information, visit www.marinsolar.org or contact **Gwen Johnson** at the County of Marin Community Development Agency at (415)499-7309 or gjohnson@co.marin.ca.us.

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