

GOING DIGITAL

As part of our effort to conserve paper and other resources, we are in the process of converting our newsletters and workshop flyers to digital format.

Therefore, the next issue of the *Grown in Marin* newsletter will be available only by email. Flyers and information about upcoming events are also sent via email, as well as posted on our GIM website calendar.

If you want to be informed about upcoming events, or to receive an electronic newsletter by e-mail, please send your email address to Frances Healey at fhealey@co.marin.ca.us and we will add you to our growing email list.

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR:

In May of 2002, we mailed out the first *Grown in Marin* newsletter. Seven years later, almost to the day, we have made the decision to move our print newsletter to the world wide web. Although I am sure it will inconvenience some who are not connected to the Internet, the move will benefit us all by reducing resource use and, as an added plus, let us bring you a richer resource base. We will be able to hook you up with a broad range of information through

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Organic Farming Class at Indian Valley College: growing healthy food and good farmers

By Will Hutchinson, student, Indian Valley Farm Organic Farming Class

The overwhelming success of College of Marin's inaugural Organic Farming class is another sign that the local organic food movement is both growing deep roots and blossoming here in our county. The Indian Valley Farm is already producing harvests of delicious, healthy food, but even more importantly, it is yielding a whole new crop of locally trained organic farmers.

The farm is under development at College of Marin's Indian Valley Campus, on five acres of previously unused land behind the school. In the true spirit of community, almost all of the infrastructure components needed to build this world-class organic farm have been donated by various local businesses and organizations.

Indian Valley Farm is focused on producing row crops, such as lettuce, tomatoes, kale, arugula, melons, and herbs. Each successive class in this ongoing course will continue to expand the farm in accordance with the seasons. Eventually, the hillside above the row crops will be covered with fruit trees, and the hard clay soil that is currently being turned and infused with as much organic material as possible will be dark and rich. A native plant environment is planned for the north-facing slope.

Two veteran organic farmers, Wendy Johnson of Green Gulch Farm, and UC Cooperative Extension Organic and Sustainable Agriculture Coordinator Steve Quirt, are leading this class. They are doing a remarkable job of balancing the focus of their teachings on both the big-picture significance of what organic farming means to the planet, while including the technical details of such critical matters as soil chemistry. They emphasize that our efforts are directed towards feeding and nurturing the soil, providing the foundation for a healthy and productive farm.

Indian Valley Farm is a project of College of Marin, Conservation Corps North Bay, and UC Cooperative Extension Marin. Weekly tours are given at 4:00 p.m. every Wednesday. The farm is located on the Indian Valley College campus, next to the baseball field.



Sonoma Artisan Cheese Festival attracts thousands of enthusiasts

My adventurous hobby cheese-maker husband and I hit the cheese tent around 1 p.m. on the last day of the third annual Artisan Cheese Festival, held in Petaluma in the Sheraton parking lot in mid-March.

As soon as we entered the tent the aroma of pungent aged cheeses wafted over me. Never attend an artisan cheese tasting on an empty stomach; I was to emerge several hours later with a cheese-ache, but also with such a strong impression of how far we've come on the north coast, and the Marin-Sonoma artisan and farmstead cheese belt specifically.

It seems like only yesterday, but it was 1999, when we co-hosted the first farmstead cheese-making class for local dairy families inside Cowgirl Creamery. I remarked to Bob Giacomini, who was there with his daughters in tow, that I'd never seen so many dairymen there with their daughters and not sons.



Liam Callahan from Bellwether Farms and Sue Conley from Cowgirl Creamery co-led the cheese-making demo, while Liam's wife, Diana, was pregnant with their first-born.

There in the tent in 2009, only ten years later, was the Giacomini family gleefully helping the hordes of cheese lovers taste their wonderful Point Reyes Farmstead Original Blue, while Diana, from Bellwether, was packing up her booth as tasters had eaten up all her products and she was headed back to the farm to -- two sons.

Much growth and many American Cheese Society awards later, we see and taste what Sue Conley dreamed about when she arrived fresh from the urban outlands of Berkeley with her business partner Peggy Smith. We are literally experiencing it: a Normandy of the North Bay, a place known for its beautiful cows, green lush grasslands, diverse and profitable operations, and outstanding farmstead and artisan cheeses.

We wound our way through 50 producer booths, past the Marin and Sonoma producers who make cheeses from sheep, goat, Jersey, and Holstein cows' milk. We saw cheeses like Pepato Bellwether from Pepato, Mt. Tam triple crème from Cowgirl, the Azores St Jorge cheese rounds from the Mattos family on Illano Road, wonderful soft cheeses from Marin French Cheese, and those gorgeous goat cheeses from Redwood Hill Farm and Creamery.

And I think: all this bounty of cheese in only ten years. I wonder what the next ten will bring us? - *Ellie Rilla*

Farm Day 2009

This year marked the 25th anniversary of Marin County's Farm Day! To celebrate, the theme this year was "*Marin's Farming Roots: Can You Dig It?*" We honored the farmers and exhibitors who have been promoting local agriculture from the event's beginnings. Now, more than ever, we need to bring local agriculture into urban areas of Marin to make the connection to our farming past and a sustainable future.



On March 19th, over 1000 children and 750 adults visited the Marin Center to learn about farming in Marin County through direct contact with farmers, animals, and hands-on activities. Generous donations this year allowed us to provide substantial prizes to the winning contest participants - congratulations to all who participated!

Save the date for next year's Farm Day at the Marin Center in San Rafael: Thursday, March 18, 2010. Stay tuned for more information at the Farm Day page on the Grown In Marin website:

http://groups.ucanr.org/GIM/Resources_for_Educators/Marin_County_Farm_Day.htm. - *Janice Alexander, UCCE Marin.*



Seven years later - Sartori Strawberry Farm has ripened

In May of 2002, we inaugurated Grown in Marin with our first newsletter article, featuring Russell Sartori with his now famous "Russelberries." Russell was a little hesitant to claim any kind of success as we stood in the middle of his fresh, virgin field. This May, exactly seven years later, Kat Marando of UCCE interviewed Russell at the Tomales Bakery. Here is what he said:

Q - Thinking back, what was the most challenging aspect of entering the strawberry farming business?

A - The hardest thing was establishing my customer base and then discovering along the way to do business with those who pay you on time.

Q - What is your delivery range?

A - Mill Valley is the farthest. People have asked why I don't do restaurants in the city and the Ferry Building Farmers' Market. It's just me doing the selling; also, I don't have a cooler. We pick twice a day; June - October is the busy time. I currently work five farmers' markets, thanks to Ellie and Steve helping me enter the Marin Farmers Market Association. Markets: Tuesday - Novato, Wednesday - Fairfax, Thursday - Civic Center, Sunday - Civic Center. I may also start doing a Friday night Mill Valley Farmers' Market, along with Whole Foods. I love the selling and growing aspect - don't care for weeding.

Q - How many varieties did you start out with, and what do you grow today?

A - I started with Seascape, Diamonte, and Aroma. Myself and my customers found the Aromas to be too waxy,

Diamontes were white on the inside, and I found that my customers like the Seascape variety the best. The Seascape is the sweetest, reddest, and also the most fragile.

Q - How many starters do you begin with?

A - I plant 40,000 plants every season. I look at the hardiest plants and will hold over approximately 18,000 - 22,000 plants for a second season.

Q - What is the total number of cases you sell per season?

A - 3,500 cases and I sell out every time.

Q - What are other things to contend with when farming strawberries?

A - Well, I'm in my 8th year of farming and have had no disasters yet. There is always a problem with yellow jackets - you have to pick the berry nice and clean, leave no rot to keep the yellow jackets down; deer and raccoons are a problem, too.

Kat - Coming home late at night I see Raphael patrolling on the ATV keeping the critters at bay.

Q - How much water do your strawberries take?

A - We have a 5,000 gallon tank, gravity-fed drip line irrigation, no pumps. Our cover crop came up nice this year, had a mixture of oats, beans, rye grass. When the grass decays, we just disc it in, great for the soil. I also do a three-year crop rotation, to keep growing conditions the best for the soil and the berry.

Q - Do you know of any products that are made with your strawberries?

A - "Fairfax Scoop," an organic ice cream shop, buys from the start to finish of the season.

Q - Any plans to expand current operations or diversify?

A - I've thought about flowers, but thinking about something else I could plant, leave 20-plus years, maintain, and just reap the fruit.

Q - Any challenges this year with the current economy and no rain?

A - I'll tell you in June.

Q - Does the name "Russelberries" travel into the selling/marketing aspect?

A - Russelberries are a local Tomales thing.

Kat - It is with much fondness that I buy Sartori Ranch Russelberries. I throw a towel down on the front seat of my car and munch while driving. Can't wait till June..

- Kat Marando, UCCE Marin

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links and references. We will be able to provide longer in-depth articles and more pictures! All in all, the information will be easier to use and more available.

We would like to thank our readers of the last seven years for all you do and the contributions you give to



our local agriculture. Here, at the Marin University of California Cooperative Extension office, we feel that this publication is valuable, whether paper or electronic, and look forward to its continuation in its new digital format. - *Steve Quirt, Editor*

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Workshops & Marin Farm News

- ☞ **Backyard Chicken Workshop. Thursday, May 28, 2009, 1:30 to 4:30 pm, Toby's Feed Barn, 1125 Highway One, Pt. Reyes Station. Liz Cunninghame of Clark Summit Farm, James Pellum of Western Farm Center, Bobby Foer, a local chicken enthusiast, and Cindy Jensen, 4-H Classroom Embryology Projects leader, will discuss chicken breeds, coop designs, and care of your flock. The workshop focuses on egg production. Cost: \$10 at the door. Register online at www.growninmarin.org.**
- ☞ **The Hidden Bounty of Marin** documentary won 2009 **Best Documentary** at the **Marin County Festival of Short Film and Video**. *Hidden Bounty* has also received a **2008 WAVE award for Best Documentary Profile** from the **Alliance for Community Media** at their Denver event.
- ☞ **The Sonoma County Fair** will present the **Kehoe Brothers' Dairy** with the "**Outstanding Dairy of the Year**" award later this summer. The organic dairy, situated within the Point Reyes National Seashore on land leased from the National Park Service, has been in operation since the 1920s. The county fair in Santa Rosa is scheduled for **July 28 through August 9**.
- ☞ **Three Peaks Hike: Panfiglio Ranch, Bivalve Dairy & Point Reyes Vineyards, Saturday, June 27, 2009, 10 am to 3 pm.** Meet at **Point Reyes Vineyard Inn, 12700 Hwy. 1, two miles north of Point Reyes Station.** Hike over historic landscape at Three Peaks. \$35 / \$40 non-members. Bring water, hiking boots, and lunch. Pre-registration required. For more information, go to <http://malt.org/programs/index.php#june> or call MALT at 415-663-1158.

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