



EDITORS COLUMN

“For good farming to last, it must occur in a good farming community—that is, a neighborhood of people who know each other, who understand their mutual dependences, and who place a proper value on good farming.” — Wendell Berry

I was driving home along Tomales Bay going north about six o'clock after a day of meetings. I had just received news of another dairyman selling his herd and going out of business. In contrast to that sad event was the news that the Ag Commissioner's office organic certification agency had just signed up another organic farmer. This mix of news got me thinking about our current state of agricultural affairs in Marin. So much to gain, so much to lose. The late sun hit the western hillsides as the everpresent fog spilled over the point. As I rounded a twisty curve I was met with a most intriguing scene; a neatly dressed family had moved onto a highway pullout and was having a tailgate dinner party right next to a neatly grazed pasture full of young heifers! The kids were playing and the young parents were serving dinner and drinking in a most exquisite pastoral experience. I whirred by and around the curve to the next

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1300 Miles from Farm to Table

The food on our tables travels an average of 1300 miles from the farm of origin to our dinner tables. If you shop at the Point Reyes Farmers Market on a Saturday morning chances are the fresh produce, eggs, cheeses, breads, jams and meats you purchase traveled about 13 miles and are being sold direct to you, thus allowing the farmer to make a fair price and come back again next Saturday with more farm fresh products. This energetic market consists exclusively of farmers and producers from Marin County, so the foods that you bring home will be seasonally perfect for our area and exquisitely fresh. Most everything here is certified organic. Peter Martinelli from Paradise Valley Ranch brings in baskets of coastal veggies from his family farm in Bolinas. You can find organic cheeses from Cowgirl Creamery, Farmstead Blue Cheese from the Giacomini Dairy, fresh cut flowers from Gospal Flats Farm, tons of potatoes from David Little, grass-fed natural beef from David Evan's Marin Sun Farms, fresh wild salmon from Don Murch, organic strawberries from the Sartori Ranch, award-winning olive oil from McEvoy, fresh eggs from Amanda Wisbey, lemons and cut flowers from Patti Elliott, sometimes local sparkling wine from Point Reyes Vineyard at the Doughty



Opening day at the Point Reyes Farmers Market.

Ranch, organic skin care products from Moonflowers, and a whole menu of fresh vegetables from Peter Worsley who farms a few miles up the road.

Although this is a tiny market by most standards, it is emblematic of the sustainable farming movement at its best. The emphasis is on local and organic products with enthusiastic support from the buyers. Direct marketing increases the farmers profits and adds security to farm enterprises. Fossil fuel reductions due to short travel distances benefit the planet, and everyone has a great time.

Most of the food grown in Marin, mainly milk, beef and lamb, leaves the county as commodity only to return, if at all, wrapped and packaged in a supermarket. The tiniest fraction of our farm products remain here. Global trade, cheap transportation costs and modern marketing techniques make the farmer invisible. The farmers at the Point Reyes Farmers Market are highly visible! You can catch Russell Sartori at the strawberry stand. Or Dennis and Sandy Dierks from Paradise Valley Farms surrounded by luxurious produce or Peter Worsley at his corner booth and find out what's up on the farm.

The Point Reyes Farmers Market is open from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on Saturdays and is located in front of Toby's Feed Barn. All the farmers listed above and even more will likely be on hand to supply you with fresh local, ecologically friendly food. Support for these farmers will help insure a healthy and prosperous food system.

Organic Strawberry Workshop

Sixty farmers and interested participants showed up for the third in the series of farm diversification workshops, "Organic Strawberry Production." The panel had dubbed themselves the Watsonville Strawberry Mafia, since they were a potent combination of organic growers, USDA researchers and UC sustainable agriculture experts.

Sean Swezey from UC started the session off with an encouraging sketch of the growth of organic farming in California and a confirmation of the potential in Marin for organic strawberry production. Carolee Bull, plant pathologist for the USDA, followed with a look at strawberry cultivars and the importance of selecting the right variety for your area. The new production cultivars are grown as annuals with heavy production the first year. Second year production yields a softer, smaller berry, and the overwintering operations are costly. Vanessa Bogenholm farms thirty acres of berries and has an internet-based value-added operation. She covered labor issues, volume and scale and the role of a value-added component of the farm plan. The Watsonville area is home to thousands of acres of what essentially amounts to a mono-crop, a much different situation than we have in Marin. Pathogen and pest issues are a big concern there, while we are able to farm strawberries in a relatively pest-free environment.



Sixty people attended the organic strawberry farming workshop in the homey church room at the Dance Palace Community Center in Point Reyes Station on July 18. Organic Strawberries and Point Reyes Blue Cheese were enjoyed afterwards.

Brandon Ross farms thirty acres of mixed berries and vegetables in the Corritas region of Watsonville, and talked about the advantages of high-value, high-quality strawberries marketed directly to the consumers.

The next day, several panel members toured Marin and visited a local strawberry farm. Sean Swezey inspected the field, tasted a Seascape and a Diamonte berry, and said "It doesn't get any better than this anywhere in California." That sounds like a go-ahead to plant more organic strawberries to me.

Marin Food Systems Project: Growing Healthy Students while Supporting Marin Farms

The Marin Food Systems Project is a project of the Environmental Education Council of Marin, which grew out of the realization that many of our school children are lacking fresh, healthy food in their school lunch programs. Most Marin children are unaware of the agricultural heritage of their own county.

We recognize that Marin farms could benefit with an increased support from the local community. The Marin Food Systems Project's mission is to link local schools with farms through curriculum, local food in school food service programs, and through the garden and farm experiences of students.

The Marin Food Systems Project has become a leading force in Marin's Farm to School connections, with an email list-serve of over 150 subscribers including school nurses, teachers, parents, food service directors, principals, farmers, administrators, non-profit coordinators, gardeners, health practitioners and more.

The Marin Food Systems Project supports local farm to school connections county-wide. They:

- ☞ Host an annual event in November called Healthy Food For Growing Kids
- ☞ Organize monthly educational meetings that address the following topics: Why Buy Local Foods? What are the connections between cognition and nutrition? How can school gardens be used in creative ways to teach nutrition, physical education, and cooking?
- ☞ Connect schools with local sources of food, curriculum, and food-related workshops
- ☞ Offer professional development training for teachers
- ☞ Partner with Marin Agriculture and Education Alliance/MALT to facilitate the Farm Field Studies Program
- ☞ Help schools to develop a school food policy
- ☞ Provide school garden consultation
- ☞ Assist with grant resources and letters of support
- ☞ Offer an action guide for starting a Food Systems Project at your school

All members of the community are welcome to join our meetings on the third Tuesday of each month. We welcome farmers and ranchers to join with us in providing Marin's fresh foods to our schools and community. Please contact Leah Smith at 415-663-1338 or lsmith@malt.org for more information. See the Marin Food Systems Project website at www.ecom.net.

Coast Cafe Goes for Local Food



David Cook serving up fresh local plates at the Point Reyes Farmers Market. David spent the morning cooking veggies from the stands.

The folks at the Coast Cafe in Bolinas have taken to heart the ecologically sound credo of local and sustainable living in their insistence in buying from organic producers within a radius of twenty-five miles. "Our customers are mostly Bolinas locals who know quality and have deeply held feelings about organic and sustainable issues. They know what we are putting on their plates." David Lieberstein, owner of the restaurant told us. "It's like serving your friends in a home kitchen, you want to give them the best."

Eighty per cent of the produce, fruit, meats, fish and dairy products are organic and locally produced from growers like Peter Martinelli at Paradise Valley Ranch, Dennis and Sandy Dierks at Paradise Valley Farm, Star Route Farm, David Little with his potato operation and a number of local fishermen.

David Cook is the energetic and passionate chef at Coast Cafe. A graduate of the Culinary Institute in San Francisco, David has a unique perspective on his Bolinas customers, "They want to know what they are getting, how it was grown and who is growing it. So I go out of my way to find the freshest and highest quality ingredients. That always will be the food grown closest by the best farmers." David gets to know the farmers and passes that connection on to delighted diners.

Both David Lieberstein and David Cook want to keep spreading out to find more local organic food producers and widen the variety of fine cuisine that they provide. This "sustainable restaurant" model blends perfectly with our local sustainable farming movement. The Coast Cafe is another example of dedicated people developing a localized food production system which benefits the farmers, reduces damage to the environment, keeps us healthy, and provides us with an organic dining experience.

Direct Marketing from the Nicasio Valley Farm Stand

Randy LaFranchi's Nicasio Valley Farm Stand is fun to visit. Stopping by the farm to pick up the first of the seasons Early Girl tomatoes and a pound of Blue Lake green beans allows you also a chance to walk around the farm. In fact, you can stroll out to four acres of incredible organic strawberries and pick all that you can eat. You might also meet Jorge, the energetic farm manager, and most certainly will meet Lynette Pareglio, Randy's partner in the enterprise. On the way out you might meet your neighbor or a friend stopping by for farm-fresh produce.



Lynette and Randy with boxes of freshly picked organic strawberries.

Seven years ago Randy decided to spread out from the long established LaFranchi family dairy business and take advantage of his central roadside location, his eighteen acres of premier flat farmland, and all the dairy compost that he could use. The first year was all pumpkins which has established a flourishing tradition. Nicasio Valley Farm Pumpkins are everywhere come Halloween, glowing and shining with strange expressions. The next year organic strawberries were added along with a growing list of organic vegetables. The strawberries have become the trademark of the farm, and more acreage has been added to fill the demand.

Lynette Pareglio joined up with the farm the next year and is responsible for the homey and richly stocked farmstand. In the next few years, Lynette and Randy continued to expand and even opened up the farm with a U-pick program.

Finding our food on the farm is not a new idea. The LaFranchi operation has brought us back to this truly "traditional" experience of knowing the farmers who grow our food which provides us with a personal relationship that makes a visit to the farm so special. Supporting farmers in this way helps to insure that authentic agriculture will continue to flourish and nourish us in the future.

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bend. What makes this place so special? What values would bring these people out of the house into our agrarian backyard? It struck me then just how much our farmers and ranchers provide us. Without their generations of quiet labor, the young family would miss this pastoral experience. Fifty percent of Marin county is under agricultural zoning and practices where farmers and ranchers act as land stewards, many with marginally profitable operations shouldering ever increasing regulatory and economic loads.

We all share a very special place here in Marin County. We have tackled and solved many of the problems that beset other counties. It is time to find new ways to support and rebuild our agricultural heritage by not only recognizing the contributions of generations of hard working farmers, but by supporting the *“culture of agriculture.”* The details of this herculean task are yet to be worked out! But in it’s simplest formula, buying from Marin producers at your local farmers market, subscribing to the San Geronimo CSA, buying your meat direct from Mike and Sally Gale or David Evans or enjoying the Straus Milk products will keep our food dollars at home and support those green hills and happy heifers.

Today, the *“culture of agriculture”* is a rare gift and most urban areas have lost it. To keep our agrarian heritage green, we need to begin today. On the personal level, we can remain vigilant and informed. We need to be aware where our food dollars go, and direct them towards farmers here at home. We need to educate our children about our farms, and the work that our farmers do. We have fine agricultural support groups: MALT, Marin Organic, the Marin Resource Conservation District, the National Resource Conservation Service, the Food Systems Projects and all the others. We can learn from them and support them.

The foundation for this future is the farmers, and we all need to recognize and act in ways that restore the well-deserved prosperity that once existed on the family farm.

Upcoming Farm Diversification Workshops

Fall and Winter, 2002 ~ 4:30 - 7:30 PM

Dance Palace Community Center, Point Reyes Station

The UC Cooperative Extension, the Marin Agricultural Land Trust and Marin Organic will continue to offer farm and crop diversification workshops through the fall and winter of 2002, and into the spring of 2003. Look for topics such as *“Organic Specialty and Row Crop Practices,”* *“Value Added Processing”* and *“Artisan Cheesemaking”* to be featured.

News from Marin County Farms, Ranches and Producers

- ☞ **Straus Family Creamery** was awarded gold medals for it’s organic Jalapeno Jack and Monterey Jack Cheeses in the 2002 California State Fair, and silver and bronze awards for it’s Sharp and Medium Cheddar cheeses.
- ☞ **Al Poncia** received the **USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service “Excellence in Conservation” Award** for his efforts to conserve, maintain and improve natural resources on America’s private lands.
- ☞ **UC Cooperative Extension** was awarded a \$37,000 grant by the **Marin Community Foundation** to conduct an agricultural trends survey, promote the diversification workshops and to produce a newsletter.
- ☞ **Charisse Corda** of the **Corda Dairy** just completed a successful internship with **UC Cooperative Extension** working on the agricultural trends survey, and is back in school at **Chico State**.
- ☞ **Point Reyes Blue Cheese** has a new product, an **Original Blue Cheese Salad Dressing** which is only available locally at **Nicasio Valley Farms** and the **Point Reyes Farmers Market**.
- ☞ **Amanda Wisbey of the Stewart Ranch** has had her hens certified by the **Marin Organic Certification Agency** for organic eggs in the spring of next year.
- ☞ **Gourmet Magazine** ran an article, *“In Land We Trust”* in the September issue which featured **Marin County’s** farming and land use policies.

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