



EDITOR'S COLUMN

"Buying local farm products promotes a connection within a community, a great binding force that incorporates relationships with each other to relationships with our environment and our culture and lives." - David Evans, rancher

People stroll around the Point Reyes Farmer's Market on Saturday mornings with huge grins on their beaming faces. Some folks stay for hours, buying the week's veggies, cheeses, honey, and cut flowers. I overheard one happy local woman telling her friends, "This is just like church for me!" OK, I know this sounds like an exaggeration, but it's not far off the mark. What's up with this picture?

It's the relationships, as David Evans states in the opening quote and in the adjacent article. The farmer handing the eater fresh lettuce and squash just picked. Cheese crafted of milk from cows that we see in the pastures around town. "Hey, I know those cows!" Pickles and jams made by a local mother and daughter team from family heirloom recipes. Organic strawberries from another family farm with three generations happily dispersing boxes of fruit that were just picked a half an hour ago.

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Buying Local

Five years ago the talk was about how great it would be if we could convince food buyers of the overall health and benefits of buying locally. Well, guess what? It's happening. Dennis Dierks of Paradise Valley Produce, who sells his fine organic vegetables at local farmers' markets says, "The Point Reyes Farmers Market is really strong this year; in fact, all the markets are very strong." Dennis echoes the feelings of most direct market producers today who are seeing a



surge of consumer interest in buying and enjoying locally produced food. David Evans of Marin Sun Farms offers grass-fed beef and pastured hen's eggs at farmers' markets and through his store in Point Reyes. "We have been consistently doubling our sales every year. The demand is very strong for our local products." David is a leader in helping develop a local buying consciousness. "Buying local farm products promotes a connection within a community, a great binding force that incorporates relationships with each other to relationships with our environment and our culture and lives."

It's not just the producers who have been noticing a rise in local buying trends. Brigitte Moran, Executive Director of the Marin County Farmers' Market Association, has launched an ambitious project, the Marin Center for Sustainable Agriculture. Brigitte and a talented board of directors, including Mike Gale of Chileno Valley Ranch, Lynn Giacomini Stray of Original Point Reyes Blue Cheese, Dennis Dierks, and farmer Ed Pearson. The project is to build a permanent home for the Sunday and Thursday markets along with a permanent retail, wholesale, and distribution facility for local farm products. Brigitte and the Board feel that the demand for locally grown is strong enough to support the outlet facility. She notes, "Buying local farm products is a vote for sustainable communities. Every food dollar we spend is an opportunity to add momentum to the revival of real food and invigorate local farming communities. It is a conscious choice to reconnect with the source of our food. Electing to support farmers' markets, Community Supported Agriculture, and local agricultural organizations is an invaluable investment in the future of our food systems and ultimately our ability to nourish ourselves and future generations."



County government is overwhelmingly in support of the buy local ethic. Supervisor Charles McGlashan states, "It's essential to buy more of our farm products locally, both for environmental and economic reasons. The average trip for a food item in the U.S. is over 1,500 miles, with the attendant fossil fuel consumption and CO² emissions. This 'business as usual' agriculture deprives our local farmers and ranchers of a critical local market that values their good land ethic. Marin is now creating an incredible brand of local and organic food items, giving the producers a better financial margin that rewards our own economy and citizens."

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Marin Sonoma Livestock Workgroup

The Marin Sonoma Livestock Workgroup met on August 2 to go over several important topics. The workgroup has expanded and forty people were present.

Dr. Lauren Gwin reported her research on conventional livestock operations in Marin County. Fifteen producers were interviewed with herd sizes of 200 pairs and above. Stephanie Larson, Livestock Advisor, is continuing interviews throughout Sonoma. Extension livestock advisors John Harper, Mendocino, and Morgan Doran, Yolo, are also conducting surveys and eventually the results will be combined into one report to get an overall regional view of production, marketing, and economic trends.

Marin ranchers voiced concerns over the economies of scale and of regional seasonality conflicts for local marketing, since most of the calves are ready at the same time. Ranchers expressed interest in the idea of local processing and marketing if they can be paid a premium for animals.

Sam Goldberger reported that he, Phyllis Faber, and John Harper, livestock advisor for Mendocino County, are working on plans for a regional slaughter and processing facility in Ukiah, to fill the needs of the livestock community when the local facility in Petaluma closes in 2009. The project is in the planning phase and next up is a feasibility study. The project now has incorporated a possible biofuel component to render parts. A facility like this generates a lot of fat and waste that could be used to produce biofuel. The plant would also incorporate services like transport, branding for private labeling and marketing services.

The Livestock Workgroup brings together producers and those interested in promoting the growth of local agriculture to a forum which explores production, processing, and marketing trends. Those interested in attending a workgroup meeting may visit our website, www.growninmarin.org for announcements and meeting dates.

Copies of Dr. Gwin's survey can be downloaded from our Grown in Marin website under Reports.

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Marin County Agricultural Commissioner Stacy Carlsen has obviously thought long and hard about this issue. *"Food used to be grown and eaten by communities for communities: to enjoy, relax, compose, exchange, discuss, engage, celebrate, rejoice, and embrace a meal rather than just cooking a meal. Where are our food heroes? Are they the ones that grow the food, are they the ones that eat it? We need to retrain society to understand that food is not just available for purposes of efficiency. It is available to be enjoyed and celebrated. If that were the case, people would not attend an annual food celebration for celebrity purposes, but would be knocking on our farmers' doors to place an order to experience life as it once was respected."*



Knocking on farmers' doors to get your food may sound like a thing of the past, but there are indicators that it may also be a thing of the future. Dropping by Liz Cunningham's Clark Summit Farm to pick up your free range (these are authentic!) eggs or grass-fed beef offers an opportunity to connect with the land through the farmer. Liz says, *"Buying fresh farm products locally means supporting farms that provide the good old-fashioned attention to raising and growing products people feel confident and privileged to enjoy and consume here in Marin and Sonoma counties. We are fortunate to have such variety and quality available, which makes it a desirable cause for everyone involved."*



There are some caveats however. We can now say that the demand side outweighs the supply side for local farmstead products. The kind of food described above, with the farmer and land connection ethic, needs to be expanded. And for that, we need to grow more than food; we need to grow farmers! Deborah Walton from Canvas Ranch states, *"As we grow and enlarge as a society, it becomes increasingly important to reconnect on a soul level with those people and things that form the core of our beings. Food is one of those things. To know where that food comes from -- the hands that touch it, the water and nutrients that feed it, even the familiar look of the farmer that delivers it -- is so basic, so important. All over the world, fathers and mothers grow food for their families, neighbors for their neighbors, small villages for fellow villagers. Why can't we do that here? Because we desperately need to grow more farmers, and grow the land that farmers are working now."*



Some families are taking up that challenge. The Lunnys, all three generations of them, have been expanding their farm operations on the Point Reyes Seashore. Their grass and pasture-based beef, organic artichokes and sustainably farmed oysters have indeed become part of our local food chain. Kevin Lunny states, "Our local food consumer is committed to protecting the environment, both by understanding the benefits of sustainable and organic food production, and by realizing the reduction in food transportation associated with buying locally. This person also values the freshness, quality, and health benefits of locally grown products. A local food buyer treasures the opportunity to form important relationships with the local rancher or farmer that grew their food, supports restaurants that feature local food, and shops at stores and markets that are committed to selling locally grown products. The local food consumer is not only conserving the environment, but is also helping keep community family farms profitable. To increase the number of people buying local, we, as food producers, must prioritize organic certification and food diversity in our farm plans, so that we can provide the highest quality and widest variety of products possible to this very insightful consumer."

Warren Weber of Star Route Farms emphasizes the connection between the environmentally friendly side of organic farming and how our purchasing habits encourage farmers to switch to ecologically sustainable farming practices. "I have always thought that the importance of buying locally is to encourage organic practices as the basis for sustainable agriculture. Supporting these local organic farms and ranches protects diversity: the diversity of our food supply, of our productive natural resources, of our landscape, and of our communities. It is just plain good sense for the planet and good sense for ourselves."

It is just plain good sense. We have nurtured and matured our ideas and are putting into practice much of what is so eloquently described above. The road to local and planetary sustainability stretches out before us. We have taken the first few steps, with the efforts, risks, and vision of our local pioneers. Let's keep walking the path.



Taste of Marin - Celebrating Marin County Agriculture



Taste of Marin is a feast for the senses - Vietnamese-style seared beef salad with Allstar Organic basil and tomatoes; Drakes Bay smoked oysters on homemade potato chips; Clark Summit pork, Chileno Valley Ranch pears, and Point Reyes Original Blue cheese on a crustini of Brickmaiden bread. Marin has a lot to offer when it comes to fine food and Taste of Marin celebrates it all. Presented by Marin Organic and Marin Agricultural Land Trust, the evening is a celebration of Marin's agriculture and restaurants.

"The event is a celebration of local food," Marin Organic Executive Director Helge Hellberg said. The music and fine food draws in the crowds, but the goal is to highlight what is possible when local agriculture is supported.

From Peter Martinelli's winter squash to Jessie Kuhn's fabulous carrots, guests spend a Sunday late afternoon immersed in the rich agricultural bounty of Marin along with the chefs and restaurants that support them. Guests will have a chance to talk and share dinner with the farmers who grow their food, listen to fantastic music, and enjoy an exciting live auction. "We are showing everyone new opportunities and possibilities to support local agriculture and help keep family farming economically viable in Marin," Hellberg said.

Held at Saint Vincent's in San Rafael on Sunday, September 17th, from 4-9 p.m., Taste of Marin will feature guest speaker Paul Hawken. An environmentalist and advocate for sustainable living, Hawken is the author of *Natural Capitalism* and numerous other books and articles that express the need to bring business and the environment closer together. The event is sure to sell out. Support local agriculture and purchase your tickets now, visit the Marin Organic website at www.MarinOrganic.org or call (415)663-9667. Tickets are \$150 each, \$125 for Marin Organic and MALT members. - Sheila Foster, Marin Organic

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The farmer cultivates the relationship with the land, through good times and not so good. They are part of the landscape, no more or less important than the rain, the topsoil or the light from the sun. This relationship is lovingly transformed into bounty, and the farmer brings it to the marketplace on Saturday, and lays it out for all of us to enjoy. It's a lot of work to prepare for market: the harvesting, the sorting and grading, the washing and packing, and all the unloading and set-up.

We anticipate and look forward to the morning. Folks always come early and wander through the aisles waiting for the market manager to ring the bell, when the fun begins. Here is where all the relationships converge, the land, the farmer, the rain and sun, the bounties, the farm families, the laborers, and us, the happy eaters. All morning the activity ebbs and flows with exchanges, with news about the farm and what's coming into season, with a little good-natured haggling, with trade and bustle, but most importantly with relationships.

Ah, there's nothing like buying local!

- Steve Quirt, Editor

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Editors: Steve Quirt & Ellie Rilla
 Production: Frances Healey
 Contributors: Sheila Foster, Marin Organic



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News from Marin County Farms, Ranches, and Producers

- ☞ **The Santa Rosa Junior College Sustainable Agriculture** program is offering classes on sustainable agriculture, composting, organic gardening, olive oil production and direct farm marketing for the fall semester. Go to www.santarosa.edu/ag for info.
- ☞ On **Sunday, September 17th**, from 4-9pm, **Marin Organic** and **Marin Agricultural Land Trust** bring us **Taste of Marin 2006** - a celebration of the Marin's agricultural bounty and the people who bring it from the field to the table. **Paul Hawken** is one of the evening's special highlights. Call **415 663-9667** for information.
- ☞ On **August 23, 2006**, 40 food service workers from the Novato and San Rafael school districts met at **Star Route Farms** to learn how local produce is grown and packed for delivery. A delicious local lunch was prepared by **Indian Peach Catering** and provided through **Marin Organic**. The program was a team effort from **UC Cooperative Extension, Marin Food Systems Project** and **Marin Organic**.
- ☞ **Dr. Lauren Gwin**, who has been working with **UC Cooperative Extension** for the past few years with **alternative livestock** surveys and the **Marin Sonoma Livestock Workgroup**, is now working in **East Africa** monitoring the movements of large mammals.
- ☞ **Mike and Sally Gale** from **Chileno Valley Ranch** report a record harvest of organic apples this year. You can find the apples, and the **Gales**, at the **Point Reyes Farmers' Market on Saturdays**, or you can schedule a **U-pick** session by calling **707 765-6664**.

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 COOPERATIVE EXTENSION - MARIN COUNTY
 1682 NOVATO BLVD., SUITE 150B
 NOVATO, CALIFORNIA 94947

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