

# Grown in Marin

FARM & CROP DIVERSIFICATION NEWSLETTER

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## EDITORS COLUMN

*"Today, farm and ranch families come in all shapes and sizes." - Bob Stallman, American Farm Bureau President*

Before inexpensive transportation, cold storage and advanced shipping technologies made the global food trade possible, a majority of Americans had an everyday working connection to agriculture. Food production was a local enterprise that employed not only the farmers, but the rest of the food system infrastructure. Transportation, storage, processing, distribution and harvest celebrations were all part of American culture. Farm families shared the same world as blacksmith families, general store families and cider makers. A farm event affected everyone and vice-versa.

Much has changed for modern farmers, and yet much remains the same. If you take a look at some of our Marin farmers and ranchers, you can find a modern diversified version of agrarian involvement with our local community. Farm families ebb and flow in and out of different services of the food system chain. A cattle rancher hauls hay for neighbors and ends up with a feed transport company. A dairy family kid starts hauling milk cans, sells

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## Toby's Feed Barn Feeds the Community



*Nick, Chris, and Toby Giacomini at Toby's Feed Barn. The oranges are from the same family farm that Toby first hauled for in 1942.*

*"If you're good to people, then they're good to you, and that pays off in the long run,"* says Toby Giacomini, who started Toby's Feed Barn in 1942. Both his son, Chris, and grandson, Nick, continue Toby's tradition in Point Reyes by servicing not only the agricultural community, but also everyone else in the area.

The Feed Barn continues to specialize in high quality feed and pet supplies. But that is only the start. Chris goes out of his way to include local organic food, high quality garden supplies, local, handmade children's clothing, local jams, pickles and grass-pastured eggs in his inventory, along with a rich offering of community involvement and support.

Each Saturday during the summer, Chris opens up Toby's to host the Point Reyes Farmers Market, providing space, facilities and resources to create one of Marin's most compelling market experiences. Toby's is also the site for a thriving community garden, a recycling center, an art gallery, a garden shop, a kids' room and Yoga Toes Studio run by Nick and his wife, Amanda. Toby's also hosts a number of community events and fundraisers like the Festival of Lights and Cinco de Mayo.

Both Nick and Chris grew up at the Feed Store and have nurtured deep roots in the community. They have passed this dedication and loyalty on to a faithful crew of 15 years: Oscar, Salvador, Laura and Greta.

Farm families here in Marin can be large and sprawling. The Giacomini family has produced historic farms in West Marin as well as a county supervisor, Toby's Feed Barn, and Toby's Hay and Feed. The farm and community connections that are kept vigorous through Toby's Feed Barn are priceless and an example of what the preservation of local agriculture means to us and everyone who comes after us.

## *Your Feedback is Important and Needed to Support UCCE!*

Despite efforts from many in the agricultural community, last year's state budget included a 25% budget reduction to UC Cooperative Extension. Also, a 10% cut to the Agricultural Experiment Station has already led to significant cutbacks to UC Cooperative Extension:

- ☞ 32 Advisor positions have been eliminated. This includes the loss of all vacant positions, as well as recent retirements and resignations.
- ☞ 22 layoffs in our administrative unit in Oakland.
- ☞ The Forest Products Laboratory in Richmond was closed and 14 positions eliminated.
- ☞ Significant program support funds have been lost.

In Marin, our vacant Waste Management Advisor position and our 4-H Program Assistant positions are gone. All of you in Marin have been key supporters of UC Cooperative Extension during this budget crisis and your support is greatly appreciated.

At UC, endowment funds are being used for direct payment of salaries previously covered by state funds. Also, we are "borrowing" salary savings from anticipated retirements in order to fund ongoing programs and personnel.

By taking these drastic steps, UC has been able to absorb the 25% budget cut without having to lay off any county-based Advisors. This was the goal of UC Vice President W.R. Gomes. *"Our top priority is to maintain programs that directly serve local communities and local needs,"* said Gomes recently. The most recent word is that we are safe for FY '04-05 and that all of your lobbying on behalf of local programs worked!

Further downsizing may occur through reorganization of our statewide unit, the Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR). This may involve consolidation or loss of some of the most valuable statewide programs such as Integrated Pest Management, Sustainable Agriculture, Small Farms and others. Vice President Gomes and the Executive Council conducted "listening sessions" in January and February to receive input from the agricultural community and other external stakeholders regarding some of these possible changes. - *Ellie Rilla, UCCE Director-Marin*

**If you didn't make the sessions but want to send a simple email to our leaders telling them what you think is most important to retain in UCCE (not people but programs and services you find essential), please direct your thoughts and comments to:**  
<http://groups.ucanr.org/directions/>  
**Thanks for all your support!**

## *Fresh Preserves, Pickles and Relishes from West Marin*



*Julie Evans with her full line of home-style relishes, pickles and jams on display at Toby's Feed Barn in Point Reyes Station.*

Julie Evans is a fourth generation farmer on her mother's side, the Grossi family, and is part of the Evans operation at H Ranch out on the Point. She divides her time between ranch work, her position as Membership Director for the Marin Agricultural Land Trust (MALT) and her new enterprise, Point Reyes Preserves. Like all the Evans family, Julie works hard. *"We all have our roots in the ranch and like the work we do"* she says matter-of-factly. Her first-hand experience with ranching makes her position at MALT all the more effective. *"MALT is here because of us, the ranchers. I have first-hand knowledge of what it is like to operate a cattle ranch."* She has the Evans touch for cattle, and has grown up and participated in the breeding, showing and managing of the herd.

Now she has taken on growing her new enterprise, Point Reyes Preserves. This delicious line of pickles, relishes and jams comes from past summers of kitchen research with her grandmother and mother. The family recipes like corn relish, pickled beets and jams are beautifully packaged with a simple blue label depicting the lighthouse. Most of the fruits and vegetables come from local farms, including her own.

Julie is a little surprised at the immediate success of her products. *"I started out making a little of everything. Now it is so popular that I need to narrow the line so that I can spend the time producing more."*

Julie is a good example of the diversified farmer. She works the family home ranch, is involved in the wider agricultural scene through her MALT work, and is filling a niche market with a new and exciting product line. She is pleased with the quick success of the newest experiment, *"I just kept incubating the idea. At first my mother thought I was crazy, but she finally said, 'Just do it.'"*

## Local, Farm-fresh and all Organic Lunch Served at Lynwood School

Two hundred kids lined up for Lynwood School's first all-organic, locally grown lunch on December 12.

Complementary plates were served to two dozen or so guests and supporters of the new program, a project of the Marin Food Systems Project, Marin Organic and Novato School District. Along with the kids, school board members, teachers, the press and food systems activists were all treated to a fresh and tasty local organic lunch as well as an informative and high-spirited presentation by Miguel Villareal.



*Kids gobbling down an all organic and local school lunch at Lynwood School, Novato, on January 12.*

Miguel is planning to serve one organic lunch per week at Lynwood, and then expand the program to other schools within his district.

The lunch program is the brain-child and result of a remarkable combination of talent and hard work from local Marin food activists, school personnel and local farmers. Margot Walker, on contract from Marin Organic,

foraged fresh produce and products from the farmers and coordinated with the school kitchen. Marin Organic also consolidated the orders and invoicing into one package, eliminating multiple billing hassles for the school. UC Cooperative Extension helped with coordinating the project. Farmers and producers came up with the fantastic organic products. The meal included: salad greens and veggies from Paradise Valley Produce, potatoes from David Little, carrots and beets from County Line Harvest, grass-fed ground beef from Chileno Valley Ranch, romaine lettuce from Star Route Farms, milk and yogurt from Clover (along with a visit from Clo), buttermilk bread from Skully's bakery and crunchy organic apples from Ripple Riley Farms.

The ongoing work of the Marin Food Systems Project has born fruit in Novato, and has been put into action by a visionary Food Service Director. The challenges to bringing a program like this to public schools are daunting. But the results are proving to be healthy and tasty. As a visiting teacher commented at the reception luncheon, *"This is a fantastic idea, and this cooking beats the best restaurant I have been to in a year!"*



*Gil Carandang mixing microorganisms at the Dierks farm. Gil makes his beneficial microorganism populations from farm sources and common kitchen ingredients.*

## Beneficial Indigenous Microorganisms

Marin Organic managed to bring Gil Carandang over from the Philippines to conduct a dynamic workshop on his methods of cultivating and utilizing the beneficial indigenous microorganisms that are on all our farms and surrounding wildlands. Gil and about 40 farmers spent the entire day at the Paradise Valley Farm of Sandy and Dennis Dierks making up potions and delving into the art of Asian-based natural farming techniques.

Gil himself is a farmer of both row crops and livestock, and has developed a fascinating program for increasing the soil microbial populations on his farm. For instance, he inoculates his chicken feed with microbes and accelerates a fermentation process that makes the feed 60% more digestible for the birds, thus saving a bundle on feed costs. The cultivation of lacto bacilli, and the subsequent application to source point manure areas and also compost operations reduces odor. Gil also shared with the attendees simple methods to capture and grow out beneficial microorganisms from even wild areas of the farm.

This is all a part of a "wild farming" tradition that is an ancient part of the farming culture of the far east. Optimizing nature as a technology has always been a major part of traditional farming. Gil also challenged the audience to become much more observant of the plants and animals on the farm. *"Give it a try and then pay very close attention to the results. Observe carefully and learn for yourself if it works!"* Gil repeated more than once.

The workshop was fueled by a home-cooked style lunch from Coast Cafe with David Cook as chef. Dave served up fresh local pumpkin soup, farm fresh greens with Original Point Reyes Blue Cheese and Marin Sun beef sandwiches around a campfire to happy workshop attendees.

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hay and oranges, and ends up passing down a feed retail business three generations. A fourth generation cattle rancher works for an agricultural land trust, feeds cows on the family ranch and launches a local, home-made jam and pickle enterprise. Another dairy farmer milks 450 cows, organically farms 10 acres and provides an agritourism event.

Over half of all American farmers work off farm in our communities, often in agricultural related professions. In a sense it brings the farming and ranching world to us, in what Bob Stallman, American Farm Bureau President says, "is another example of the growing diversification in family farming."

In this issue of Grown in Marin we touch on the stories of some of our local farm families. Toby, Chris and Nick Giacomini and Julie Evans are just a few of the many farmers and ranchers that make up our greater farm community. Their hard work in ranching, trucking, retail business, public service, and community relations bring a ranching and farming link to many lives. Thanks to them and all the farmers and ranchers in Marin for keeping these traditions alive.

- Steve Quirt, Editor

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Editors: Steve Quirt & Ellie Rilla

Production: Frances Healey

Contributors: Anita Sauber, Marin County Agricultural Commissioners Office, Leah Smith, Marin Food Systems Project, Wendy McLaughlin, Marin Organic



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## News from Marin County Farms, Ranches and Producers

- ☞ A new website outlines the health benefits of grass-fed beef: <http://www.csuchico.edu/agr/grsfdbef/>
- ☞ Marin Sun Farms has opened up a retail outlet for their grass-fed beef and pastured eggs in **Point Reyes Station**. The address is 11101 B State Route One. 415 663-8997.
- ☞ Warren Weber from Star Route Farms and Marin Organic, Stacy Carlsen, Agricultural Commissioner, Ellie Rilla, Farm Advisor, and Steve Quirt of UCCE gave a presentation on "Alliances for Sustainable Farming" at the 2004 EcoFarm Conference, with over 100 attending.
- ☞ Point Reyes Original Blue won a Bronze in the blue vein category for its Monte's Reserve at the World Cheese Awards 2003. Monte's Reserve is Original Blue cheese that was aged 24 months rather than the usual 6 months.
- ☞ The Young and the Brave: Sustaining Agriculture in Marin County. A panel of young farmers and food activists are trying new and innovative approaches to sustaining farming in Marin. Join them on Thursday, March 25, 7 P.M. at College of Marin, Olney Hall. Call Constance at 415 663-1338 for more info.
- ☞ Juan Hidalgo has joined the Agricultural Commissioner's Office as an organic certification assistant, through funding provided from Marin Organic.
- ☞ UC Cooperative Extension is putting on a conference, "Marketing Specialty Meats" March 31 at the Davis campus. Call Roger Ingram, 530 889-7385 for details.

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