



## EDITORS COLUMN

*"It used to be that everybody grew a little of everything. A ranch could have cows of course, and chickens, peaches and even a few hogs." - Boyd Stewart, January 21, 2003*

Talking to Boyd is an adventure in itself. His perspective is wide ranging, philosophical, rich in ranching wisdom with a no-nonsense panoramic view of West Marin agricultural history, which reveals both the past, present and future for farming and ranching for us. He doesn't coat the pill. "Young man, I want you to listen to what I am telling you." (I am roughly half Boyd's age. On March 16th he will be 100.) What he is telling me, on this rainy Wednesday in January at his kitchen table, is that changes will be difficult. He's seen it all; Parkland acquisition, water quality regulations, falling commodity prices and ranching transitions. But the Stewart Ranch has not only survived, but thrived with Boyd's daughter JoAnn Stewart, and granddaughter Amanda Wisby now running the diversified operation. The two women just won a California Excellence in Range Management Award from the Society for Range Management.

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## Who We Are Today Agricultural Producers Survey is Completed

Last summer Charisse Corda, our fifth generation Marin farm family member and summer intern, Ellie Rilla and I (Steve Quirt) began work on a survey. We wanted to find out what was really happening with the agricultural producers in Marin County. What do we produce? Where does the food go? How is everyone doing? We set out mailing, calling and emailing all of our agricultural producers to see what we could find out. Charisse worked steadily to format the survey and sent it out to 186 producers gleaned from four mailing lists. These 186 farmers and ranchers farm and ranch the 169,000 acres of ag land in Marin. Charisse called everyone and we both visited ranches to help get the surveys filled out.

Eventually we received 95 completed surveys for a very respectable response rate of 51%. We dove into the data and have been able to identify a profile of current practices, needs and trends.

The survey results confirm many positive aspects of Marin County agriculture - from the variety of products being grown here, to the increasing interest in organic production.

Family farming is very much alive, with 78% of farmers owning their own land and farming or ranching it with other family members. Marin ranchers want to keep their land, keep it in agriculture and continue farming themselves. Conservation easements protect many farms from development. There is a strong interest in the adoption of organic practices and the integration of added-value products into the farm plan. Our farmers and ranchers show a remarkable commitment to the land and agriculture. That's the good news.

The not-so-good news is that 63% of the agricultural operations were marginally profitable or unprofitable, a third of the respondents do not consider farming or ranching their principal occupation and many work off the farm. Falling commodity profits, increasing operating expenses and stricter environmental regulations are real threats. It goes without saying that a majority of operators are very concerned about their chances of surviving in today's agricultural marketplace.

We asked everyone what we could do to help, and found out that 62% of operators wanted consistent help with the permit and regulations process. In answer to that



*Classic split redwood fences from the past, green pastures of today.*

## Workshops on Artisan Cheese, New Farmers & Small Animal Agriculture



Kate Arding from Cowgirl Creamery talks about fine farmstead cheese-making (and passes out samples!).

February was packed with workshops for us here at UCCE as we offer up the latest in opportunities for farm and ranch diversification strategies. Through our partners at the Marin Agricultural Land Trust (MALT), Marin Organic, the Food Systems Project and others, we feel that we have our fingers on the pulse, so to speak. The pulse this month has been artisan cheese-making, beginning farming and opportunities for small animal agriculture.

### Artisan Cheesemaking Opportunities for Marin

Northern California seems to be the hotbed for artisan cheese making. Green grass, healthy cows, cool weather and an abundance of savvy consumers make this a great place for start-up cheese operations, according to Nancy Fletcher of the California Milk Advisory Board.

We gathered a dozen dairy ranchers at the Giacomini Dairy and Point Reyes Original Blue Cheese operation for a tour and workshop that featured Bob Giacomini, Sue Conley, Albert Straus and Liam Callahan from Bellwether Farms. This rich mix of experience covered just about every niche and cranny of the emerging farmstead cheese industry. We finished off with an incredible cheese tasting orchestrated by Kate Arding from Cowgirl Creamery.

The consensus was that Marin is indeed the right place to be for this new developing industry. It can demand a costly start-up pricetag, or can be developed more slowly, as the Callahans have done. Liam reminded us, *"You don't have to overinvest or go deep in debt. We started out slowly, learned from our mistakes then moved on until we reached where we are today."*

### Beginning Farmers Workshop

Just a week later we rounded up 13 new and prospective farmers who are serious about starting some kind of agricultural operation. This group of folks represents approximately 4,000 acres of Marin County farm and rangeland. Our speakers were Warren

Weber, Star Route Farms, Paul Vossen, UCCE, Anita Sauber, MOCA, Barbara Verenis, Marin Organic, and Peggy Schafer from the Sonoma County Herb Exchange. They covered marketing opportunities for organic farming, county certification (MOCA), profitable niche farming, basic farming techniques, and specialty crops like winegrapes, olives and cut flowers.

The audience was enthusiastic. Perhaps one of the most significant results was the mixing and networking that went on with this emerging farming population.

We reviewed the potential markets for both row crops and medicinal herbs, using the San Geronimo CSA program and pre-existing orders for medicinal herbs from the herb exchange. The San Geronimo CSA program plans an expansion from 70 to 200 boxes, and needs product. Essentially, this represents a built-in market.

For the future, we will support these new farmers with education and field visits, as well as keeping them in the loop for emerging market opportunities. This group seems very open to diversification and new ideas.

### Opportunities for Small Animal Agriculture

Eighty small livestock enthusiasts gathered at the Dance Palace Community Center in Point Reyes Station to learn about emerging opportunities in the goat and sheep world. Our speakers covered most aspects of food, forage and fibre production.

Stephanie Larson, the UCCE Livestock and Range Advisor, led off with an overview of marketing opportunities and also talked about rare breeds.

Lisa Richardson gave a fascinating presentation of how she and her husband, Charles, use their sheep and goats for contract range and brush management.

Jennifer Bice from Redwood Hill Dairy has a vertically integrated farmstead dairy and cheese operation in Sebastopol. She talked about breeding, dairying and of course farmstead cheesemaking. She has a remarkable farm and uses interns from around the world.

Talibah Al-Rafiq owns and operates California Cashmere and Al-Rafiq Farms in Calaveras County where she keeps 400 cashmere goats on about 240 acres. Talibah related a fascinating history of her operation which included trips to China to purchase a dehairing machine for separating the cashmere from the goat hair.

This was a rich, informative and entertaining event that opened up new doors of opportunity for both goat and sheep raisers.



Small animal at Redwood Hill Farm.

## Farming Intern Programs



Interns Tanapong from Thailand, and Gorkem from Turkey at the Redwood Hill Farm

The new season is here and that means it's time to figure out how to get the work done on your farm or ranch. Help is available through a varied range of intern programs, such as the Ohio International Agriculture and Horticultural Intern Program (Ohio Program), Experience International, Willing Workers on Organic Farms (WWOOF), Multinational Exchange for Sustainable Agriculture (MESA) and Organic Volunteers.

By qualifying and signing up with these organizations, your operation gets a listing as a "host" site. Prospective interns, apprentices or workers can then find you, and apply for a position, or in some cases as in the Ohio Program, Experience International and MESA, the organization does some of the matchmaking internally.

**WWOOF** offers exchange of work for food and accommodations on organic farms. WWOOF puts volunteer helpers ("WWOOFers") in contact with organic farms ("WWOOF Hosts"), world-wide. Host farms register with the organization and are contacted directly by the volunteers and make arrangements.

**MESA** is a not-for-profit organization and Exchange Visitor Training Program designated by the U.S. Department of State. MESA coordinates farmer-to-farmer exchanges between participating countries and the United States. Host farms must meet MESA's high standards for participation, which serves small-scale organic growers as well as larger sustainable operations.

**Organic Volunteers** lists farms and ranches as hosts. Aspiring workers contact the host directly and arrangements are worked out through this simple matchmaking service. Host farms are featured on the extensive national website.

The **Ohio International Agriculture and Horticultural Intern Program (Ohio Program)** offers an eighteen month

commitment as a work and cultural exchange program. "A program of The Ohio State University to provide on a reciprocal basis opportunities for study and on-the-job training for specially selected foreign and American agricultural students to promote the general interest of international exchange in the field of agriculture." Host farms contact the organization and an extensive matchmaking process is initiated. Interns come from established agricultural backgrounds, many from farms in both Eastern and Western Europe.

At **Experience International**, as a host, you can offer 6-18 months of practical work experience and on-the-job training to an international trainee. Trainees become productive team members and make significant contributions to day-to-day activities and longer term projects.

These programs offer a wide range of resources if you are looking for help. The international programs are well run, and the cultural exchange benefits offered can enrich the experience. Jennifer Bice of Redwood Hill Dairy in Sebastopol uses interns from Bulgaria, Germany, France and Thailand. "We always wanted to travel, but the dairy business won't allow it. So we decided to bring the world to our farm!" Jennifer works with MESA, the Ohio Program and Experience International.

☞ **MESA** - [www.mesaprogram.org](http://www.mesaprogram.org)

☞ **Ohio Program and Experience International**

<http://www.ag.ohio-state.edu/~ipa/internship.php>

☞ **Experience International** - [www.expint.org](http://www.expint.org)

☞ **Willing Workers on Organic Farms** - [www.wwoof.org](http://www.wwoof.org)

☞ **Organic Volunteers** - [www.organicvolunteers.com](http://www.organicvolunteers.com)

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Here is a family that has adapted to change with four generations on the farm and a diversified plan. Just like Boyd said, there is "a little of everything" going on. They are experimenting with rotational grazing practices and looking at certified Angus beef. They have agritourism in the form of their summer riding operation, and provide food and lodging for 60 horses. Amanda is experimenting with certified organic eggs, poultry and a large organic garden. Again, "a little of everything."

Boyd was telling us how they used to clean up after milking. "We didn't have ponds, we shoveled everything out and spread it on the pasture. We had to give it up eventually though, we were too close to the creek." So they changed the operation. Throughout the history of the ranch the Stewarts rolled with punches and found new ways to keep going, new ways to adapt. You can see it in Boyd, even in his late nineties, and in JoAnn and Amanda: a generational strength that keeps them and all of our farm and ranch population on the land. I guess that's what makes them so darned independent and resilient.

*"Who We Are" Continued from page 1*

specific concern, the Marin County Board of Supervisors has funded a consultant to help farmers and ranchers with the county level permitting process. This position will begin in mid-April and is funded for two years. Operating on a case-to-case, person-to-person basis, our new team member could help farmers save valuable time and expense, and increase their chances for success.

So, thank you! It was your responses to the survey that not only revealed valuable statistics, but helped to fund this exciting new addition to our agricultural support team.

**You can access the report in PDF form from our website:**  
[http://cemarin.ucdavis.edu/Agriculture\\_and\\_Natural\\_Resources123/](http://cemarin.ucdavis.edu/Agriculture_and_Natural_Resources123/)

**From the Executive Summary of "The Status of Marin County Agriculture: A Profile of Current Practices and Needs"**

- A majority of Marin County agricultural operations are family-owned
- The average age of producers was 54 years
- 27% have protected their ranches with agricultural conservation easements and another 19% are considering a conservation easement for their property
- Only 2% do not intend to keep farming
- 63% of agricultural operations were unprofitable or marginally profitable
- 44% rely on land leased from other owners
- 64% consider farming to be their principal occupation
- 78% own their own land
- 86% had between one and four family members involved in their operation
- 71% have a family member who is interested in continuing ranching or farming
- 60% are working on farm succession plans
- 90% have no plans to sell all or part of their property within the next five years
- 29% have added new productions or enterprises to their farm or ranch over the past five years
- 46% indicated that they farmed all or part of their operation organically
- 24% are making value-added products

**Organic Certification Workshop**

March 27, 2003 ☞ 4:30 - 7:30 PM  
 Dance Palace Community Center, Point Reyes Station

**News from Marin County Farms, Ranches and Producers**

☞ The **Stewart family of Olema** were guests of honor in Sacramento to receive the prestigious **California Excellence in Range Management Award** for their contributions toward rangeland advancements and creative improvements to managing rangeland challenges.

☞ The **Straus Family, Albert, Viviene and Michael** received the yearly **Sustie Award** at the **Ecological Farming Conference** in Asilomar, for consistent efforts and successes in sustainable farming practices.

☞ **Steve and Sharon Doughty** of **Point Reyes Vineyards** have received three awards for their wines: a Silver Medal from the California State Fair for their 1996 Blanc de Noir Sparkling Wine, and Bronze Medals for their 1997 Blanc de Noir and Late Harvest Viogner.

☞ The current UCCE "**Grown in Marin**" Newsletter and the archive of back issues are now available online at <http://cemarin.ucdavis.edu/newsletterfiles/newsletter521.htm>


☞ **Marin Organic** welcomes **McEvoy Ranch** and the **Liz Daniel Farm in Nicasio** as new grower members, bringing the current membership to 19, from 4 as of a year ago.

☞ The **Point Reyes Farmers' Market** will expand to 19 weeks and opens on June 21, this year.

☞ The **San Geronimo CSA & Farm** stand will extend its season from 14 weeks to 26, and go from 70 boxes to 200 this year.

☞ **Great news!** The USDA livestock compensation program for weather related losses will begin April 1, 2003. Contact the **Farm Service Agency** or the **Marin County Agricultural Commissioner's Office** (415 499-3700) for details.

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