

# AGRARIAN ADVOCATE



COMMUNITY ALLIANCE WITH FAMILY FARMERS

## Tortilla Fiesta Shines at Salinas School

BY ILDI CARLISLE-CUMMINS

**P**urple corn tortillas with *acelgas con jitomate* (chard stewed with tomatoes) sound like delicacies you might find at a fancy restaurant. But at MLK Elementary School in Salinas this past April, those were the dishes served up by farmer María Inés Catalán and the Central Coast Farm-to-School Program at an after-school farmers' market. If the line that snaked around the school's front lawn was any indication of interest in the food, a Salinas restaurant would do well to add the item to its menu.

Parents and students alike lined up excitedly to grind the prepared corn kernels (called "nixtamal") into dough ("masa") and then to shape, press and fry the tortillas alongside the farmer who had grown the heirloom Mexican corn. For comparison, Catalán also brought nixtamal from a white variety of corn and those tortillas were gobbled up smoking hot and piled with chard as well. A jovial María Inés



watched as the tortillas disappeared faster than she could make them. She commented that Mexican families like the food because it reminds them of the way they used to eat in Mexico. She sets up her stand of organic vegetables at MLK School twice a month to reach out to fellow immigrants, encouraging them to return to eating the healthy diets that—for a complex array of reasons—they were more able to follow in Mexico.

The tortilla-making event took place as part of a farmers' market designed to educate students and families about the important health benefits of eating fresh local food. The market is coordinated by CAFF's Farm-to-School Program with help from the Monterey County Farm-to-School Partnership as part of a nutrition education program that operates across Alisal District's 11 schools in Salinas. One look at kids' plates piled high with chard would convince anyone that the

See **Tortilla Fiesta** continued on page 4

### Announcing the Slow Food Nation Marketplace

CAFF is launching a collaboration this summer with a new nonprofit organization, Slow Food Nation (SFN). SFN, a subsidiary 501(c)(3) of the Slow Food USA organization, will host a four-day exposition May 1 to 4, 2008, in San Francisco's Fort Mason Center. The event is expected to attract over 50,000 participants, among them hundreds of farmers, producers, and chefs. It will feature discussions, lectures, exhibits, tastings, demonstrations, an international food film festival, and a market of American artisanal foods.

Since January 2006, CAFF's Food Systems Program Director Anya Fernald and President of the CAFF Board of Directors Judith Redmond have been involved in planning Slow Food Nation events, as members of an advisory board convened by visionary restaurateur Alice Waters. CAFF's consultancy in designing and populating the Slow Food Nation marketplace is the culmination of that year of planning.

San Francisco mayor Gavin Newsom, Alice Waters, and CAFF's Anya Fernald presented Slow Food Nation Marketplace to the media at a May 14, 2007 at a press conference at Fort Mason Center.

The Marketplace will include approximately 60 vendors from California, as well as over 200 products from the West Coast. The major themes of the marketplace include diversity, regionality, and new artisan traditions. Any CAFF members interested in attending or being a vendor at the event should contact Food Systems program administrator Kristen Schroer at [kristen@caff.org](mailto:kristen@caff.org). For more information, stay tuned to the Slow Food Nation website at [www.slowfoodnation.org](http://www.slowfoodnation.org).





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food & communities*

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Web site: www.caff.org

**Mission:** CAFF is building a movement of rural and urban people to foster family-scale agriculture that cares for the land, sustains local economies and promotes social justice.

**The Agrarian Advocate/Farmer to Farmer** is the quarterly publication of the Community Alliance with Family Farmers.

**Agrarian:** 1. Relating to land or to the ownership or division of land. 2. Of agriculture or farmers generally. [From the Latin *ager*: a field or country]

CAFF is a nonprofit membership organization. Members are part of an active, effective voice for CAFF's mission. Benefits of membership: subscription to this newsletter, voting privileges and timely updates on CAFF activities. Membership levels are: \$20 Student, \$50 Basic, \$250 Gardener, \$500 Tiller, \$1,000 Steward.

CAFF encourages contributions of any size to support our work. Contributions to CAFF are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by the law.

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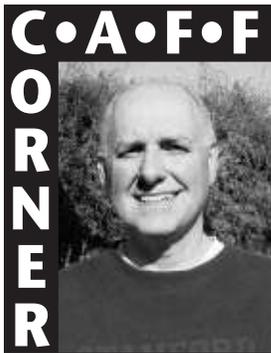
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Design & Production . . . . . Timothy Rice

—Volume 28 Summer—

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## Food Safety?

BY DAVE RUNSTEN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**T**o paraphrase the poet Adrienne Rich, I would have liked to have lived in a world where we could construct local food systems with sustainable family farms and not worry about real estate developers, global warming, or food safety. There are many days where I wonder if what we are building can endure, as we have to devote so much time to defending it.

Lately we have been cast into the perplexing role of defending organic farming practices, having animals on farms, conservation plantings, and a whole host of historic and natural farming practices, in the face of food safety mania. The most recent causes are the spinach and lettuce incidents with *E. coli* 0157:H7 contamination of the past year.

The fresh-cut salad industry—which produces those bags of greens you see in the supermarket—has formed a state marketing agreement for handlers of “leafy green vegetables,” which they define broadly to include kale, chard and vegetables that usually are not sold in plastic bags, and are often cooked. Leafy greens handlers can sign up and pledge to enforce food safety standards (“metrics” produced by Western Growers) on farms supplying them. Handlers who don’t want to sign the market agreement are threatened with being cut off by retailers.

There is talk of moving from a marketing agreement to a marketing order, which would make participation mandatory. Every farmer who sold leafy greens to a “handler” of produce (i.e. not directly to a consumer, retailer, or restaurant) would become subject to these metrics and to audits, even though no consideration has been given to the negative impacts such metrics and audits would have on small or organic farmers. The record-keeping requirements alone would be virtually impossible for a small organic farm producing multiple crops in sequence.

I have no doubt that the fresh-cut salad industry has a food safety problem, because the retailers, attorneys, and insurance companies are telling them they do. The majority of recent incidents were linked to bagged produce. The chlorine wash water they are using may be ineffective at removing *E. coli* 0157:H7. They ship bags with a 17-day shelf life, labeled “ready to eat.” But rather than focusing on their problems, they seek to mount a public relations campaign that focuses on farmers and wildlife, blaming birds and pigs and deer.

Food safety rules written by the industry for the industry should not be applied to every farmer in California until someone demonstrates that there is a real problem with production outside the industrial system. We support the creation of appropriate food safety measures for small and organic farms, not a one-size-fits-all approach.

My idea of safe food is food grown on bio-diverse farms, places where there are a plethora of micro-organisms to control pathogenic bacteria, and I believe that research will eventually demonstrate that natural, balanced processes are the correct way to deal with this problem. Just as the “sterile” environment of a hospital gives rise to the most deadly bacteria, so the sterile fields of the industrial food system provide nothing to control the pathogens.

If this industrial approach to food safety in leafy greens succeeds, it could be applied to tomatoes, melons and other crops in California. The food safety auditors will demand such things as fences for wildlife, when there is no scientific evidence that wildlife is a problem. If you don’t want to farm under these conditions—or if you are a consumer who would like to see sustainable local produce continue to appear in stores and restaurants—then I suggest you contact your local Farm Bureau and Governor Schwarzenegger and let them know that you do not think they are on the right track. You can find more information on our web site, [www.caff.org](http://www.caff.org), by hitting the food safety button on the home page. 🍌

FARMER<sup>TO</sup>FARMER

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

SUMMER 2007

**Farming for the Future on the Eel**

BY SHANNON TRACEY

"I don't think I'm the best farmer in Humboldt County, I'm just the most politically active," says John LaBoyteaux, owner of Eel Canyon Farm. He can easily name a half-dozen other local farmers whose work he deeply respects. The names are familiar to anyone who frequents the Humboldt County farmers' markets, and LaBoyteaux is not shy about lauding their efforts.

LaBoyteaux has served on the Boards of a half-dozen organizations, including CAFF. His involvement in national, state, and local agricultural issues has earned him the respect of many of his colleagues over the years.

**From Adventure to Agriculture**

Once a river guide, LaBoyteaux moved to southern Humboldt County in 1980 and traded the paddle for the plough. He felt it was time to settle into a place and make a deeper contribution to society. Having spent over a decade chasing rapids and leading rafting trips, he was attracted to the "Six Rivers" region of California's North Coast. There, he began organic farming, first in Shively and then at Camp Grant where he farms today.

"But farming doesn't allow much whitewater," he reflects. "I still get on the river every chance I get—day trips here and there, at most a quick overnight."

Luckily, moving water flows close by. Eel Canyon Farm is named for the Eel River, on whose floodplain LaBoyteaux farms. The Eel cuts a dramatic canyon through the forested Coast Range, offering a great place to float—or to farm.

**River Soils Make Fine Melons**

LaBoyteaux owns 25 acres and usually leases 25 more for the growing season. With the help of about six seasonal employees and a year-round crew leader, he grows everything from melons to hay in order to meet the needs of the farmers' market, local dairies, and even regional buyers.

Melons—particularly cantaloupe—are the biggest cash crop of Eel Canyon Farm. Late-season organic melons fill a niche that even the conventional farms can't undersell during the peak production time. Within a three- to four-week window, LaBoyteaux can meet or beat the imported price and, he says, "Mine are just down the street—and mine are better!"

That's because certain soils in the Eel River floodplains have a high enough moisture retention rate that LaBoyteaux doesn't have to irrigate. Melons, originally desert plants, just get sweeter when

they're stressed at the end of the season. So LaBoyteaux's cantaloupes and watermelons delight customers from around the region with their juicy flavor.

**Growing A Diverse Bounty**

Beyond melons, Eel Canyon Farm supplies plenty of produce for Southern Humboldt County. During the summer, LaBoyteaux hits the Garberville and Ferndale farmers' markets each week by himself, while one of his crew staffs the stand at the Miranda market. There, vegetables, apples and fresh cider are the main attractions.

"We used to have a fairly large cider-making operation," LaBoyteaux recalls. But when contaminated Odwalla apple juice killed a few people in the early 1990s, the FDA required pasteurization for all apple juices sold in stores.

However, the rules didn't apply to juice sold at farmers' markets or roadside stands. "We chose not to pasteurize, because fresh juice is a different product," he notes. They did institute safety changes—primarily making juice only from tree-picked fruit—and continue to sell fresh-pressed cider at the farmers' markets.

As if all these edibles weren't enough, LaBoyteaux also raises organic hay that local dairies purchase at the end of the season. All

the organic dairies need it, so selling it isn't a problem—in fact, usually one or two dairies will take the whole crop.

**Advocating for Sustainable Agriculture**

But LaBoyteaux doesn't just run the Eel Canyon Farm—he also works tirelessly to support family farming for generations to come. Just after the acronym "CAFF" came to stand for Community Alliance with Family Farmers in 1993 (it used to be the California Association of Family Farmers), LaBoyteaux served on the state board of directors.

And when local folks organized a Humboldt County chapter of CAFF last December, LaBoyteaux stepped up to serve on that board, too. Right now he has taken leadership in helping get the new board up to speed on the county's General Plan Update, a critical process that will shape the future of land use—and agriculture—in Humboldt.

"There's never been any doubt whatsoever that CAFF is there for the family farmer," LaBoyteaux said, when I asked him why he has put so much time into this organization. "It always looks to the interest of family farmers."

In addition to CAFF, LaBoyteaux has found numerous other opportunities to advance local farming. He currently serves on the board of the North Coast Regional Land Trust, a local land

**FARMER PROFILE**

conservancy that utilizes conservation easements to keep farmland in working use. He is currently the local chapter president of California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF). He's a key member of the South (Humboldt) County Farmers' Market League. And in the past, he also served on the county's Resource Conservation District.

### Bridging to the Bureau

LaBoyteaux has also been involved with the Humboldt County Farm Bureau for over ten years, and served as president from 2004 to 2006. As an organic produce farmer, he is something of an anomaly in the Farm Bureau's leadership. However, his commitment to protecting agricultural lands led him to ally with dairymen and cattle ranchers in their efforts to prevent the loss of soil to subdivisions.

Humboldt County has about 50,000 to 60,000 acres of farmable land, as compared to approximately 500,000 acres in a typical Central Valley county. While suburban sprawl fed by population growth is gobbling up farmland all over, in LaBoyteaux's opinion, it really affects the coastal counties.

Through the Farm Bureau's Land Use Committee, LaBoyteaux has helped to shift the mindset of the county government when considering development on prime agricultural lands. The Committee reviews all land-use permits on agricultural lands and provides comments to the county.

"Ten years ago, splitting up ag land was pretty automatic," LaBoyteaux says. "Definitely they're much more reluctant to do that now."

### Family Farming for the Future

LaBoyteaux regularly travels north to Eureka, the county seat, to attend meetings and testify at public hearings. The trip is at least an hour each way and during the growing season, his days are long.

Thanks to great employees, the farm keeps running smoothly.

"I've been very fortunate to have a small crew of local people who come back to me each summer," LaBoyteaux observes. Together, they are the family at Eel Canyon Farm. "I am utterly blessed to have such great folks."

"Farming is a way of life, there's no question about it," LaBoyteaux said. "It's not just about making a living. It's about the social, educational, and environmental values. We want agriculture to be part of all the communities we live in."

And thanks to the efforts of farmers like John LaBoyteaux, family farming will continue to be a part of our communities for a long time to come. ■

## Humboldt County Chapter Activities

### Busy Season Ahead for Humboldt CAFF

The Humboldt County CAFF chapter is ramping up for a busy season full of fun educational activities. We had such an amazing response to our first *Farm to Table* calendar that we're making it an annual publication. This year, in celebration of local partner North Coast Growers Association's thirtieth anniversary, we will team up to highlight local artist Alan Sanborn's food and farming paintings. Sanborn has been creating local farmers' market posters for twelve years. Calendar sponsorship is available.

Call (707) 444-3255 for information on this exceptional advertising opportunity.

### September is Local Food Month

September is the height of the growing season in Humboldt County so we are proclaiming it Local Food Month. Look for an entire month packed with food and farming activities, beginning with the roll-out of our *Buy Fresh Buy Local* educational campaign. Other September Local Food Month events will include a food justice workshop, and youth farm tours culminating in "Dinner in the Garden." This feast is not to be missed! Picture a lush garden on the perfect fall day, white linen tables set with fine local wines, farm-fresh fare and soothing music, all against the bucolic backdrop of Redwood Roots Farm in the Jacoby Creek Valley. Pre-sale tickets will be available soon by calling (707) 444-3255 or visiting our website at [www.caff.org](http://www.caff.org).

If you'd like to get involved with the CAFF chapter or volunteer at any of these events, please call (707) 444-3255 or email [michelle@caff.org](mailto:michelle@caff.org). 🍌

Tortilla Fiesta continued from page 1

Farm-to-School Program strengthens kids' interests in healthy foods.

CAFF has been cooking farm-fresh foods with kids in classes across the district, making everything from fresh tomato salsas and bok choy tacos to orange/jicama and kiwi/strawberry salads. By connecting the cooking lessons with food system education and farm field trips, students in Salinas are learning that delicious, healthy foods come from our healthy local farms. To learn more about the Central Coast Farm-to-School Program, contact Ildi Carlisle-Cummins at (831) 761-8507 or at [ildi@caff.org](mailto:ildi@caff.org). 🍌

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# UCCE Researchers Put the “Straw” Back into Strawberries

BY CHRIS GOODSON

Planting grass between strawberry rows can significantly reduce soil and nitrogen losses during winter rains. Those were the key findings shared at a field workshop held March 28, 2007, near Watsonville. This was the first event to show data from an ongoing winter research trial conducted by University of California Cooperative Extension Researchers Mark Bolda, Michael Cahn, Richard Smith, and Arnett Young. From 2005 to 2007, Dole Berry Co. and Beach Street Farms graciously allowed the researchers to conduct this work on one of their strawberry farms. From this year’s research site at the end of Jensen Road, one can see waves crashing on the shores of Pajaro Dunes and the expansive Monterey Bay—poignant reminders of the motivations for improving runoff water quality.

According to the researchers, it all started on November 10, 2006, when they hand-sowed the field’s furrows with Barley and Trios triticale, while keeping some furrows empty as a control. Sprinkler pipe—already in place to water the newly planted strawberries—helped get the grasses established before the rains started. Runoff water-flow measuring equipment allowed the researchers to automatically quantify and qualify what ran off the three different treatments during rainstorms. When the grasses grew to the height of the strawberry beds, they were either sprayed with herbicides (Prism or Poast plus Dynamic) or weed whacked to avoid shading the strawberry plants. The “straw” residue was left to decompose in the furrow bottoms.

Once the rains came, researchers saw dramatic improvements in runoff water quality. Cumulative sediment losses were over 80% lower with grassed furrow bottoms compared to the bare-soiled control treatments. In other words, given a “normal” winter with 12 inches of rainfall, grassed furrows could reduce soil losses by 1.2 tons per acre at this site.

Nutrient concentrations in runoff were significantly reduced with grassed furrows as well. Runoff nitrogen concentrations were consistently cut in half with grassed furrows. The researchers noted that after the grasses were well established, the dense ground cover created significant reductions in phosphorus runoff concentrations during late winter rains.

## Some Logistics

The researchers estimated that furrow cover cropping costs roughly \$40 to \$50 per acre. Costs included cover crop seed and seeding, mechanical management, and chemical control (herbicide spraying). Michael Cahn pointed out that keeping soil in place saves having to move it back uphill in the spring. They calculated that growers can save \$6 to \$14 per acre in earth-moving costs with grassed furrow bottoms. Estimates were based on 12 inches of rainfall, 50% runoff, 1.5 tons per acre of soil loss from bare soil, and 0.3 tons per acre of soil loss from cover-cropped furrows. Other values associated with

cover crops are more difficult to quantify but have definite benefits. These include improved soil organic carbon, nitrogen, and microbial communities. It is not yet clear whether furrow cover crops affect productivity. However, once picking begins, strawberry yields will be compared between the different treatments at the research site.

“Ideally, we’re looking for a quick-growing grass that gives good cover...and which commits suicide if it gets higher than the (strawberry) beds” said Richard Smith. Barley was quicker to germinate than the “lazy” Trios, as one grower put it. Also, Trios was slower to form dense cover. However, Smith observed that Trios is always greener and tests higher for nitrogen content than other grasses. This may indicate that Trios picks up and banks soil nitrogen better. Barley yielded somewhat lower cumulative sediment losses than Trios at this site, though the reverse was true for another site. This could illustrate Rich Casale’s point that site-specific differences in soil type, slope, percent of area covered by plastic, and other factors will produce variable results in sediment control and plant growth.

Food safety and pest issues were brought up. Nobody present had any anecdotal reports of grassed furrow bottoms attracting rodents. Barley does create large seed heads but only after growing taller than growers would tolerate before killing it. The grower managing the study plot reported no insect problems associated with the grasses. To the contrary, he reported seeing the eggs of the beneficial *Big-Eyed Bug* on the grasses.

## Testimonials

Deborah Nares (Resource Conservation District of Monterey County) has assisted growers with planting furrow cover crops. Deborah noted that furrow cover cropping is a relatively new practice, but that it’s catching on among the growers who she helps with grassed road seeding, cover crops, and other means of farm winter preparedness. For this workshop, she brought a few growers who had experience with grassed furrows.

“We’ve definitely seen improvements,” said one grower who seeded the full lengths of his furrows with barley for the first time this winter. “Before, we used to have situations with our (residential) neighbors and with cleaning the creeks.” He used backpack-sprayer-applied Gramaxone to kill his barley. Mark Bolda emphasized that grass-specific herbicides registered for strawberries are the best in this application. Another grower said he had good results with weed-whacking on two occasions to knock down Trios between his beds.

In closing, Richard Smith said what is true for all cover crops: “The idea here is that you want the soil covered with vegetation, whether live or dead, during the rainy part of the year.” ■

*Chris Goodson is a Water Quality Coordinator with the Central Coast Agricultural Water Quality Coalition.*



Strawberry field furrows sown with Trios triticale.



## How to get CAFF's Bay Area Local Food Guide

- Visit [www.buylocalca.org](http://www.buylocalca.org) to download the PDF.
- Pick one up at the Oakland office at 580 2nd Street, Suite 265, Oakland, California, 94607
- Call the Oakland office at (510) 832-4625 to find out which participating retailers and restaurateurs are carrying the guide.

## CAFF Publications

**Biodiversity: What It Is, and How to Increase It on Your Farm** Brochure developed by the Wild Farm Alliance and CAFF defines biodiversity as it relates to agriculture, and describes specific practices that farmers can implement to conserve biodiversity on their farms. On most farms, opportunities exist to accommodate habitat, native species and the larger landscape with few changes. Resources and cost-share opportunities listed.



**Hedgerows for California Agriculture** This manual will help you choose and care for regionally appropriate plants that attract beneficial insects and prevent erosion. It lists native plant nurseries and consultants/contractors specializing in hedgerow and other restoration projects.

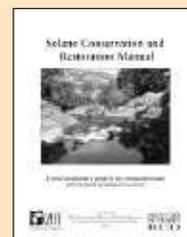
**Making the Farm Connection** This manual is designed to let farmers know what to expect when hosting a farm visit. The booklet is also very useful for teachers and classes so that they may get the most out of their farm visit.



**Central Coast Local Food Guide** A free booklet from the *Buy Fresh Buy Local* Campaign, this will tell you where to find seasonal, fresh, locally grown food in the Santa Cruz area, including farmers' markets, CSAs, restaurants, and family farms. Available at various locations. Free. Call (831) 761-8507 for details. Also see [www.caff.org/buylocal](http://www.caff.org/buylocal)



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**BASIC Cotton Manual** Practical Lessons Learned from the Sustainable Cotton Project's Biological Agriculture Systems in Cotton (BASIC) Program, San Joaquin Valley, California, 2001 to 2004. This manual describes management and marketing options for cotton production systems that use bio-intensive, integrated pest management to reduce chemical inputs.

Unless otherwise noted, all publications can be downloaded for free at [www.caff.org/publications](http://www.caff.org/publications). For a small fee, you may also order bound copies, call (530) 756-8518 to place an order.



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# Buy Fresh, Buy Local by the Bay

This summer, CAFF is launching the San Francisco Bay Area's Buy Fresh, Buy Local Campaign. Highlighting local farms and produce, the Campaign is sparking consumer interest in the Bay Area's vibrant food system. Campaign manager Temra Costa coordinates a cadre of interns at CAFF's new office near Oakland's Jack London Square. "This is the right message at the right time," says Costa. "We are engaging people through our partnerships with key farms and groups that grow, promote, and purchase local food." The Bay Area *Buy Fresh, Buy Local* program encompasses the counties of Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano, and Sonoma. It has been funded to date by the Columbia Foundation, the San Francisco Foundation, and the Marisla Foundation. Recent funding from the San Francisco Department of the Environment will help the Campaign grow in scope, particularly in the diverse, low-income neighborhoods of Bayview-Hunter's Point.

Bay Area retailers and institutions such as Bi-Rite Markets, John Muir Hospitals, and the Real Food Company have joined the



Campaign, along with the San Francisco Mayor's office, the Center for Urban Education about Sustainable Agriculture (CUESA), Pacific Coast Farmers' Market Association, Urban Village Farmers' Market Association, Brentwood Agricultural Land Trust, Slow Food, San Mateo Farm Bureau, Marin Organic, Suisun Valley Growers Association, the city of Fairfield, and others. CAFF has already generated commitments of over \$20,000 in sponsorships and ad sales for its *Buy Fresh, Buy Local Guide to the Bay Area*, which was published in print and placed online in June. By the end of the year, the

Guide will be available at hundreds of Bay Area retailers, restaurants, schools, hospitals, and other institutions such as John Muir Health and Kaiser Permanente.

In July and August, CAFF and collaborators will be organizing events at Flea Street Café in Palo Alto, and Rosenblum Winery in Alameda. For more information about the Campaign and how to get more involved, please email [bfbf@caff.org](mailto:bfbf@caff.org) or call the Oakland office, (510) 832-4625. 🍌