

AGRARIAN ADVOCATE



GROWING FOOD, GROWING FARMS, GROWING COMMUNITIES



The Digital

Landscape

BY GILBERT MOHTES-CHAN

Full Belly Farm promotes its Hoes Down Harvest Festival on Facebook.

Live Earth Farm recaps its Summer Solstice Celebration on YouTube.

And Cole Canyon Farm fills its online blog with summertime reading and relaxation tips.

Welcome to the life of a 21st century family farmer, an entrepreneur plugged into Dick Tracy-like gadgets and the ever-evolving information age. Today's tech-savvy farmer is cultivating a legion of loyal followers with a steady diet of tweets, blog posts, e-mail alerts and interactive Internet Web sites.

More importantly, the Internet and social networking are becoming integral marketing tools for farmers to promote their businesses, boost sales and educate consumers about agriculture practices and issues. Farm-related organizations from the Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) to the U.S. Department of Agriculture are joining the trend as well.

"There are hundreds of farmers on Twitter. You're

seeing an explosion of this in the last year. I think it is going to continue to grow," said Chuck Zimmerman, president of ZimmComm New Media, a Missouri firm specializing in blogging and podcasting for the agricultural industry. What is emerging is a tight-knit virtual community of farmers and their customers.

Indeed, there are more than 300 farming-related Twitterers alone, including CAFF's "famfarms."

"It's a great place to publicize our policy-related action alerts, as we did when CAFF took a position on HR 2749 in July," said Kristen Schroer, CAFF's development director and Twitterer.

It's a far cry from those low-tech days.

Jeff Main of Good Humus Produce in Yolo County recalls cutting and pasting recipes into hand-written newsletters, running off copies at the local print shop and then stuffing them into the produce boxes for the farm's community supported agriculture customers.

The Internet revolution changed that.

About five or six years ago, Main and his wife, Annie,
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COMMUNITY ALLIANCE
WITH FAMILY FARMERS

MISSION

Strong partnerships exist between family farmers and their communities. Building on shared values around food and agriculture, and working together in practical, on-the-ground programs, these partnerships create locally-based economic vitality, improved human and environmental health, and long-term sustainability of family farms.

MEMBERSHIP

CAFF is a nonprofit organization that relies on membership dues and donations. Become a member or donate to CAFF online at www.caff.org or by mail.

AGRARIAN ADVOCATE

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36355 Russell Blvd., Davis, CA 95616
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Phone (530)756-8518 Fax (530)756-7857
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Staying Connected

Community Alliance with Family Farmers envisions a world in which strong relationships exist between family farmers and their communities. In fact, our tagline reflects this vision: **Growing Food, Growing Farms, Growing Communities.** One of our

strategies to make this happen is “*Keep it Real and Keep it Current!*”

Keeping it real is doing what we have always done for the past 31 years: Working on the ground with farmers to enact legislation and to improve growing practices.

CAFF’s initial advocacy work was aimed at farm worker rights and pesticide reduction. Our current advocacy work is focused on food safety, climate change, water conservation issues, and farmland preservation (see The Capitol Report on pages 8 and 9 and our Web site, which we keep up-to-date on CA Ag legislation and what CAFF is doing to influence it).

CAFF’s vibrant Biological Farming program has continued to expand and we are currently working to reduce on-farm pesticides and to implement conservation plantings. Conservation plantings improve soil, water, and air quality.

CAFF *keeps it current* in many ways, including taking advantage of technological advances, including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, which enable us to do our work more effectively.

We are proud of the innovators among us, like Nigel Walker of Eatwell Farm in Dixon (see opposite page) who fuels his irrigation pump engine with used vegetable oil from two San Francisco restaurants. Farmer Andy Griffin’s beautiful blog, The Ladybug Letter, offers everyone with an Internet connection a virtual portal into a day in the life at his Mariquita Farm (see our tech roundup on page 9).

Undoubtedly, the farmers featured in this issue of the *Agrarian Advocate* are bringing eaters closer to the source of their food in new and meaningful ways. Nonetheless, sometimes there’s nothing like actually getting out to the farm, so we’d like to encourage you to take advantage of two upcoming events. The 22nd annual Hoes Down Harvest Festival at Full Belly Farm occurs on Saturday, October 3 (see page 12). Shortly thereafter, we host our annual “Future of Cotton” tour in Merced and Fresno counties on October 13 (page 4).

This issue also recognizes our many supporters and members (page 10). We are grateful that so many of our members actively engage in our activities. I want to give a big ‘shout out’ to one noteworthy CAFF Board Member—George Davis. George and his sons own Porter Creek Vineyards, a biodynamic winery in the Russian River Basin. George tirelessly travels to Washington, D. C., to advocate on behalf of family farming, and is a generous supplier of delicious wines at various CAFF events, such as the recent fundraiser held at Pizzaiolo on August 25. Thank you, George!

We invite all of you to keep current and join us on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. 🌱

Diane Del Signore

Diane Del Signore
Executive Director



The oil is converted to biofuel.



The Eatwell Farm in Dixon, CA.



Nigel Walker, beside his converted pump.

FRYER TO FIELD

GOING GREEN WITH BIOFUEL

STORY BY GILBERT MOHTES-CHAN • PHOTOGRAPHY BY MEGAN SABATO

Going green helps Nigel Walker’s small organic farm stay in the black.

For years, his Eatwell Farm in Dixon has turned food waste from local restaurants into compost for his community supported agriculture operation. He has collected free waste vegetable oil from a pair of popular San Francisco restaurants to power his 42-horsepower irrigation pump engine. And soon, Walker plans to produce his own biodiesel to fuel two farm tractors.

“It’s part of the journey to be more sustainable. We figure if we do things right we can save the world,” the 48-year-old British-born farmer said with a smile. In the long run, the composting and biofuel programs make sense economically and environmentally, cutting expenses and emissions at the same time.

“Diesel is a lot of money,” said Walker, a member of the Community Alliance with Family Farmers. Using waste vegetable oil slashes the farm’s diesel fuel needs by almost 4,200 gallons a year, yielding a savings of about \$12,000 based on today’s retail prices. Walker could save even more if he decides to switch to vegi-fuel for a portable heating system in his greenhouse.

The conversion technology is rather basic and affordable. Walker spent about \$1,000 to convert the pump engine to burn both vegetable oil and diesel. (Inventor Rudolf Diesel originally designed the diesel engine to run on peanut oil in the early 1900s.) The set-up features two 275-gallon storage tanks, one containing the vegetable oil and the other stocked with diesel. The engine starts on diesel and after 10 minutes the engine and cooling system water becomes hot enough to switch over to the used vegetable oil. The oil is heated to 180 degrees Fahrenheit to give it the same viscosity as diesel and allow it to run smoothly in the engine.

Using the vegetable oil twice – in the deep fryer and in the field – pays dividends for the farm and the supplier – two Cha Cha Cha restaurants in San Francisco.

“It (oil) cooked somebody a nice calamari meal. Then we use it to power our organic farm. It makes sense to me,” Walker said.

In many ways, the arrangement represents support by the restaurants and their customers for sustainable agriculture.

Originally, Walker collected oil from an organic tortilla
continued on page 5

PROTECTING THE BAY

BY GILBERT MOHTES-CHAN



Sam Earnshaw, right, leading a discussion at Schoch's Dairy.

John Schoch's eyes battled the morning sun as they focused on the year-old riparian planting wedged between the brown grassy hills of his 100-acre ranch.

"I'm really surprised it has grown that much in one year," the long-time Monterey County dairy rancher said, surveying the dozens of young valley oaks, box elders and other trees and shrubs dotting the landscape.

Already the restoration project has paid dividends. "We've never seen quail (before). Now we see quail. Lots of different birds are coming in." Not to mention the fox and other wildfire attracted to the fledgling riparian forest planted in August 2008 by the Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF), Wild Farm Alliance and Central Coast Agricultural Water Quality Coalition.

Schoch, who has operated the family dairy for nearly four decades, discussed the benefits of habitat restoration to a dozen visitors who were spending a day touring farms in San Benito and Monterey counties. The August field tour was part of a two-day water quality management

program co-sponsored by CAFF.

CAFF Central Coast regional coordinator Sam Earnshaw discussed conservation plantings during a morning workshop and helped lead field tours of riparian plantings, grassed waterways, hedgerows, windbreaks and vegetative treatment systems over the two days. More than three dozen farmers, resource conservation officials and agriculture advocates attended the event.

"Erosion is a big issue here," Earnshaw said during his talk. "This (planting) is a good way to keep soil and pollutants out of the waterways."

Farmers such as Schoch are counting on conservation plantings to help manage their watershed areas and improve the natural habitat and water quality of the Monterey Bay. Schoch pointed to the nearly 500 trees and shrubs planted on both sides of a 1,600-foot-long natural drainage area on his ranch along Highway 101, just north of Salinas. "This whole area just floods (during heavy rains)," he said. "We hope it slows (the water) down." 🌱

Cotton Tour: You're Invited

BY GILBERT MOHTES-CHAN

Fall often inspires visions of scarecrows, pumpkin patches, apple picking – and cotton farm tours?

Indeed, the Sustainable Cotton Project's (SCP) annual "Future of Cotton" tour is back. This year, it heads to the fields of Merced and Fresno counties on Tuesday, October 13, giving participants an intensive one-day behind-the-scenes look at cotton production in California.

The popular event attracts about 100 people from across the country and examines conventional cotton cultivation, SCP's Biological Agriculture Systems in Cotton program, and organic cotton production. Participants tour cotton fields, meet with farmers and visit a cotton gin.

"The cotton tour brings retailers onto the farm and

exposes them to the natural environment of farming," said Lynda Grose, marketing consultant to SCP, a program under the direction of the Community Alliance with Family Farmers.

The field tour highlights the successful efforts of SCP farmers, who follow sustainable agriculture and biointensive integrated pest management practices to reduce the application of the most toxic pesticides used in cotton production and create a greener fiber called Cleaner Cotton®. In the coming year, SCP will launch a major consumer marketing campaign to build brand recognition for Cleaner Cotton®.

More information about the tour is available from SCP program director Marcia Gibbs at (530) 370-5325 or marcia@sustainablecotton.org. 🌱

continued from page 3

factory. About five years ago, he connected with the Cha Cha Cha restaurants in the Haight-Ashbury and Mission districts. Every Saturday morning, an Eatwell truck drops off a load of produce at the Ferry Plaza farmers market along the Embarcadero waterfront in San Francisco and then picks up large steel drums containing about 120 gallons of vegetable oil used to cook calamari.

“They (restaurants) have nice clean oil. Their oil is really easy to clean,” Walker said.

To remove food particles, the oil goes through a three-step filtration process and is then stored in one of the four green 2,500-gallon storage containers at the farm. The oil is later filtered two more times at the pump.

Meanwhile, Walker has installed a small biofuel-making system and plans to start production once he receives the necessary permits. “The aim is to make biodiesel to run the tractors.”

Walker studied at Writtle Agricultural College in Essex, England, and farmed in his native country before coming to California in 1992, where he worked at Terra

Firma Farm in Winters. In 1998, he and his then partner, Frances Andrews, purchased 65 acres of prime farmland about three miles north of Dixon. The farm grows about 50 different fruits and vegetables, from sweet potatoes to tomatoes. Eatwell also leases 40 acres of adjacent land, which Walker is transitioning to organic.

Eatwell maintains a 15-member crew for the year-round operation and boasts 1,200 members in its community supported agriculture program. Each week, it delivers produce boxes to drop-off sites stretching from Sacramento to San Francisco, offering members a variety of organic fruit and vegetables as well as eggs from its pastured chickens. It is launching a grain CSA this fall.

Today, the CSA generates 90 percent of the revenue, with the rest coming from the San Francisco farmers market and handful of restaurant and grocery stores that have been long-time customers.

“The CSA has really taken off. I think of it as customers taking responsibility for their food.” For Walker, the growth is helping the small farm remain sustainable. 🌱



The farm offers CSA boxes, as well as fresh eggs and pastured chickens.



Every Saturday, Nigel obtains new drums of oil to recycle.

TIPS

Here are some tips if you're interested in running your diesel engine on recycled vegetable oil:

- Make sure conversion to vegetable oil fuel won't void the warranty coverage on your equipment.
- Find a steady fuel source before buying conversion equipment.
- Restaurants and fast-food establishment are the most common sources, providing about 300 million gallons of waste cooking oil annually in the United States.
 - Be aware larger restaurants, especially the big chains, often have contracts with rendering companies to collect the oil. Smaller, independent restaurants may have more flexibility.
 - Find an eatery that changes oil often and doesn't fry a lot of heavily battered food because the flour in the oil can clog your filter quickly.
 - Contact the restaurant manager or owner during the off-peak lunch or dinner hours.
 - Be prepared to explain what you intend to do with the oil and discuss ideas about storage, filtration and pick-up.
 - Act professionally and assure the restaurant you will pick up the oil on schedule without disturbing employees or customers.

Sources: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and greasecar.com

Back to School



A *Berry* Good Choice

BY SETH MASARIK

Through a pilot program launched in April of 2009, about 800 students at Korematsu Discovery Academy and Esperanza Academy in Oakland have been munching on fresh fruit and vegetable snacks throughout the day. It's a big boost for the youngsters to meet the daily nutritional requirement of five helpings of fruits and veggies.

The Community Alliance with Family Farmers once again initiated the change in the state's school lunch program. With the help of Growers Collaborative and the California Department of Education, the Oakland Unified School District instituted the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program at the two elementary schools.

The project aims to improve student nutrition and education, while supporting small local farmers. Each week, students have access to seasonal fresh fruit and vegetables that they might not receive in a typical lunch program.

A similar program began this past spring in Sacramento. Mary Vincent, outreach coordinator with the collaborative, and Jennifer Sowerwine, a postdoctoral scholar at the University of California, Berkeley, launched the Sacramento Strawberry Pilot Program in the Sacramento City Unified School District with great success.

Schools in Sacramento plan to continue the program this fall throughout various sites within the city.

This new initiative is responsible for supplying the school district's lunch programs, which serve more than 19,000 students, with strawberries grown by the local Mien community.

The strawberry program has the potential to bring a wave of change for local farmers within our region. These farmers are able to expand their markets and reach new customers, who have not had access to fresh, local produce in the past. 🌱





Harvest of the Month earns an **A+** Following

BY KATHRYN SPENCER

The first-grader gave fresh green peas a chance to tantalize her palate and her eyes lit up.

“Peas are the best things in the world!” exclaimed Ashley, a small girl in Suzanne Laurens’ first-grade class at Loma Vista Elementary in Salinas. “Can we take some of the peas home so our parents can try them?” she asked, as if she had discovered a food that no one had ever eaten before.

It was Ashley’s first time taking a bite of a snow pea. And it was the first time she ever investigated the difference between the slender snow pea pod in her hand (and later in her belly) and the bulging pod of the English shell-pea she was about to crack open and eat.

This school year, thousands of youngsters like Ashley will experience similar tasty discoveries in the Community Alliance with Family Farmers’ Harvest of the Month program.

Each month, the program offers participating schools Tasting Kits featuring a locally grown fruit or vegetable and related resources for teaching food and farming lessons. Kits feature enough local, family farmed produce for each student to have a sample. Students might taste a perfectly ripe peach from Kashiwase Farm in June or a crunchy carrot from Route One Farm in April.

CAFF’s Tasting Kits are a local companion to the statewide Harvest of the Month Program, which offers teachers, parents, and food service directors free educational materials to teach students about California produce.

With so few Farm to School coordinators and so many teachers asking for class visits, CAFF decided to package its lessons and farm connections in an easy-to-use way,

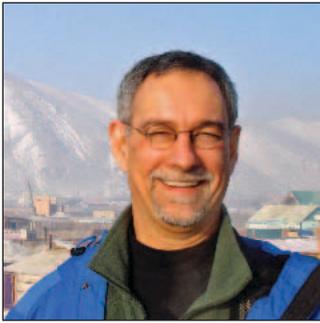
allowing teachers to participate in Farm to School education. The Tasting Kits connect children to their local farm communities and make agricultural education meaningful and fun for teachers and students alike, while meeting state educational content standards.

CAFF’s Harvest of the Month program is steadily growing in popularity, now reaching more than 4,000 students on the Central Coast. And as one element of CAFF’s Farm to School Initiative, the Harvest of the Month Tasting Kits reinforce concepts and experiences students have gained out on a farm field trip, in a school garden or with a farmer’s visit to their classroom.

This fall, CAFF is publishing a School Food Service Guide to Harvest of the Month, which makes it easier to introduce fresh produce onto the school menu by detailing handling, ripening and cooking instructions for each of the 26 Harvest of the Month produce items.

Ashley is just one of many students who are realizing that fresh peas are edible, interesting, and even delicious! Since her class has begun trying new fresh fruits and vegetables, they have become big fans of things like broccoli, green beans and tomatoes. This type of education readies students for what they might find in their school cafeteria’s salad bar.

The Harvest of the Month Tasting Kits are currently available in Monterey, Santa Cruz and Santa Clara counties and cost \$15 a month, with a seven kit minimum order per school site for delivery and at least a three month commitment. For more information about this program, please email harvestofthemonth@caff.org. To learn about the statewide program, visit www.harvestofthemonth.com. 🌱



Capitol Report

FALL 2009

BY PETE PRICE,
CAFF LEGISLATIVE
REPRESENTATIVE

Farmland preservation defunded:

The Williamson Act, the state's essential farmland preservation law for more than 40 years, was defunded by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger in the state budget revision signed in July. Full funding for the Williamson Act would reimburse counties \$34.7 million in fiscal year 2009-10 for revenues they lose by assessing farmland at its agricultural value instead of its higher value as developed land. The Legislature proposed reducing Williamson Act funds by only 20 percent as a budget-cutting move, but Schwarzenegger left only a nominal \$1,000 in the program. While the Governor's action does not eliminate the Williamson Act, cash-strapped counties are likely to halt entering into any new contracts with landowners and may seek early termination of existing contracts.

Funding may, however, be restored by the courts. Because the measure signed by the Governor was not actually the state's annual budget bill, but only a revision of the budget legislation enacted in February, the state's Legislative Counsel has opined that the Governor had no legal authority to cut spending in the budget revision bill. The courts will soon hear the case; in the balance is \$489 million, including the \$28.7 million for the Williamson Act.



Regardless of the outcome, the state will face continuing budget deficits in the coming months as tax revenues remain low in the current recession.

Water package introduced: After months of behind-the-scenes legislative staff work, a five-bill package has been introduced for hearings during the last month of the 2009 legislative session. The package recognizes that the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta is at the heart of reforming water use and management in California. As the largest estuary on the west coast of North or South America, the Delta is not only critical to California's fisheries and its environment, but it also serves as the conduit for much of the fresh water used in the San Joaquin Valley and Southern California. Often forgotten in the statewide debate on water is the fact that the Delta is also home to many California farmers and some of the richest farmland in the state.

For this reason, three of the bills focus specifically on the Delta. SB 458 by Sen. Lois Wolk, who represents the Delta, establishes a Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Conservancy and requires the Delta Protection Commission to prepare and adopt a comprehensive resources management plan for the Delta; SB 12 by Sen. Joe Simitian and AB 39 by Assemblyman Jared Huffman establish a state-level Delta Stewardship Council, with an independent Science Board, to implement a Delta Plan that will achieve the coequal goals of assuring a reliable water supply and protecting the Delta ecosystem; SB 229 by Sen. Fran Pavley increases water use reporting requirements, including new requirements for groundwater use; and AB 49 by Assemblyman Mike Feuer requires urban water suppliers to reduce water consumption by 20 percent by 2020 and agricultural water suppliers to implement



specified efficient water management practices. The bill package follows years of state and federal efforts to develop a plan to protect and manage water use in the Bay-Delta region. Because the bills have been introduced so late in the legislative session, which ends in mid-September, the bills will be sent to a two-house conference committee to be reconciled and amended.

Legislative update: Two bills supported by CAFF and described in more detail in the previous report are moving through the legislative process:

AB 856 (Caballero) – Strengthens the state’s fertilizer law to prevent the manufacture and sale in California of fertilizers fraudulently marketed as organic.

AB 929 (Blakeslee) – Adds needed flexibility to the California Farmland Conservancy Program by allowing the program to fund agricultural easements if they include practices with multiple benefits, provided the primary purpose remains consistent with agricultural use.

Several bills CAFF supported, and one (SB 173) we opposed, have been defeated or held in committee for consideration in 2010, including:

AB 537 (Arambula) – Would have increased opportunities for the use of Electronic Benefit Transfer for food stamps at certified farmers markets. AB 537 was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee over concerns about costs to the state.

SB 416 (Florez) – Would have encouraged schools to make reasonable efforts to purchase meat and poultry products that have not been treated with nontherapeutic antibiotics. Prior to narrowing amendments, the bill also would have prohibited the production of meat or poultry in California that has been treated with antibiotics for nontherapeutic use. SB 416 was held on the Senate floor and may be voted on in 2010.

SB 173 (Florez) – Would have required every food grower and processor in the state that tests its product for food-borne pathogens or microbes to notify the state of positive test results and subjected growers and processors to stiff penalties unless the person adopted a Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point plan. CAFF opposed SB 173 for its failure to focus regulatory attention on large food processing facilities, where evidence shows the preponderance of the food safety problem resides. SB 173 has been substantially amended to deal with different issues.

SB 677 (Yee) – Would have exempted low-income subsistence farmers from having to buy workers' compensation insurance for direct family members, provided only family members work on the farm, the farm has no worker safety violations and the farmer provides health insurance. SB 677 was held in Senate Appropriations Committee. 



famfarms

how do you use the internet and social media w/ your farm?

— — — — —
@Andy Griffin, Mariquita Farm I've been blogging for six years; it's a good tool. I farm on the fringes of Silicon Valley, and sometimes I think that if I'm not "virtual" consumers here won't even think I'm "actual," but having an online presence is actually very important to my farm's survival
— — — — —

@Greg Massa, Massa Organics Twitter and Facebook are now a part of my marketing strategy. They connect me to customers that I might not otherwise meet
— — — — —

@Andy Griffin, Mariquita Farm I use the blog to invite people to events on my farm or at restaurants in the city that support our farm. Once people come to my farm they begin to see how it can be "their" farm too and I get a better understanding of the target audience I'm aiming to produce for. The real payoff comes when customers have a good experience on our farm or with our produce and they tell their friends
— — — — —

CAFF now uses Facebook, YouTube and Twitter to stay connected. Visit us @ www.caff.org

JOIN today!

Thank you to our contributors:
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THANK YOU TO ALL OF OUR DONORS

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Our supporters are very important to us, and this list was developed with great attention. We apologize for any errors and request that you contact us at (530) 756-8518 x 30 so we may correct our records.

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France Ranch	New Leaf Community Market	Underwood Family Farms
Frey Vineyards	Norman & BJ Kline	Urban Village Farmers Market Association
Friends Ranches Inc	Oak Hill Farm	Venice Farmers Market
Fuentes Berry Farm	Organic Pastures Dairy Company LLC	Vino Farms Inc
Full Belly Farm	Oxbow Public Market	Weed Farms
Glaum Egg Ranch LP	Oz Farm	Zuni Cafe

A Bumper Crop of Regional Food Guides

BY ARIANE MICHAS

Buy Fresh Buy Local (BFBL) will produce a bumper crop of regional food guides in the coming months, connecting even more dining and culinary enthusiasts with hundreds of local food sources.

In October, 50,000 copies of the fourth edition of the Central Coast's Eaters Guide to Local Food will roll off the presses. A San Joaquin Valley guide will also make its debut this fall. The premier edition will cover eight counties and provide a much-needed new tool for Central Valley residents to access fresh, healthy food. To produce this guide, Buy Fresh Buy Local is partnering with the Central California Regional Obesity Prevention Program.

The impressive run will continue next year when Buy Fresh Buy Local teams up with the Northern California

Regional Land Trust to publish a North Sacramento Valley guide. BFBL will then head south to produce a guide covering the Southern Los Angeles region before returning north to publish a fourth edition of the Bay Area Eater's Guide.

In June, 75,000 copies of the 2009 Bay Area guide were distributed. Copies are available at Bay Area Whole Foods stores, other select retailers, and farmers markets. All the guides can be downloaded for free at www.buylocalca.org.

At its heart, the Buy Fresh Buy Local program is about building bridges between the growers who produce our food and the eaters who sustain themselves with it. Why not explore them all? 🍓



continued from page 1

tapped their son Zach's creative talent and a tech-oriented CSA member to help create a Web site for its 175 to 200 year-round members and prospective customers.

"Most people find out about our CSA service through the Internet. It's a good way to keep our information available and relevant to the public," Main said.

Today, the Good Humus Web site is full of information, publicizing everything from its CSA delivery schedule to an inaugural Art Farm program to university research conducted at the farm.

It was late last summer when McGrath Family Farm in Ventura County unveiled its Web site to coincide with the opening of a new roadside farm store.

"The Web site is a huge tool for promotion and publicity. A lot of people look at it. We just got on Facebook," said farm manager Phil McGrath, who oversees the 40-acre organic farm. His family has been farming in the fertile Oxnard Plain since the 1860s. "I don't think anything works any better than the Web site and weekly (e-mail) updates."

Their cyberspace presence has helped McGrath more than double the CSA membership to 70 in the past year and made it easier for restaurants to learn about produce availability and pricing.

Torrey Olson, who grows Asian pears, apples and Fuyu persimmons at Gabriel Farm in Sebastopol, is poised to join the world of bloggers. "Making juice is crazy! It takes all day," he wrote on his first test blog entry in July.

"Some people are more comfortable interacting with the Internet. I'm going to talk to people about our farm," Olson said. "It will keep them aware of what we're doing."

Olson compares the new blog and a redesigned Web site to a farmers almanac, calendar and agriculture education resource for consumers. He is banking on the online calendar to reduce telephone calls the farm receives during the fall harvest, when up to 2,000 people visit.

Experts say the expansion of high-speed Internet access in rural communities is making it easier for farmers to design more sophisticated, consumer-friendly Web sites and embrace the social networking culture – perhaps shattering the conservative, low-tech image of farmers, whose average age is 57.

"There's a stereotype of farmers as technophobes. I don't think that's accurate. They're just skeptics," said Alistair Croll, vice president of marketing for FarmsReach, a start-up San Francisco company that has designed an online ordering and sales site for Bay Area farmers and restaurants. Farmers, he said, will adopt new technology once they are convinced it works.

"For a long time good information tech-

nology was only accessible to big agriculture. The Internet is leveling the playing field for the (small) farmer," Croll said.

In February, FarmsReach launched a virtual farmers market site for farmers to list their products and prices for restaurants looking to buy local and fresh foods. In the future, the company plans to add hospitals and schools to the list of buyers. So far, about 100 restaurants and 25 sellers, including CAFF's Growers Collaborative, are participating in the program.

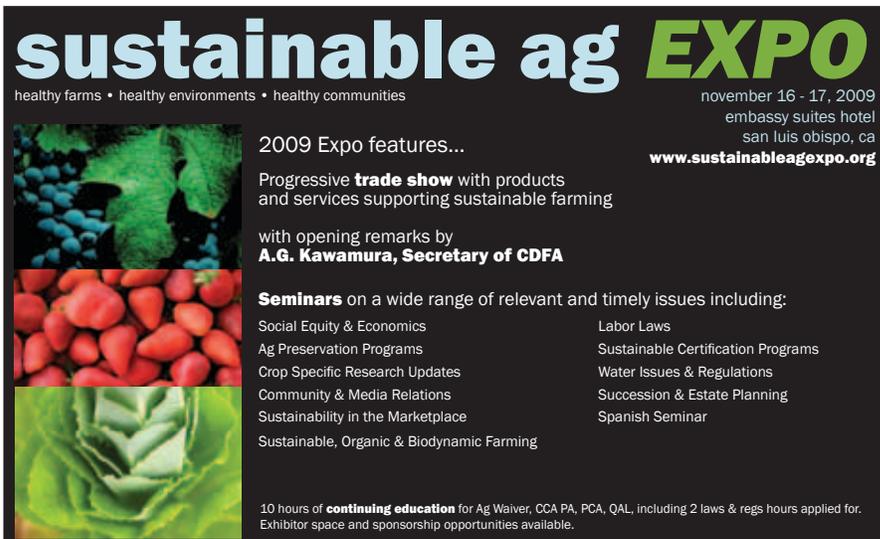
Yolo County farmer Thaddeus Barsotti considers high-tech tools an integral part of his family's Farm Fresh to You operation, which includes delivery of 7,000 CSA boxes to members in the Sacramento region and Bay Area.

"It's really an effective tool to provide a connection to customers. We use YouTube technology. We have a Facebook fan page. We have videos on our Web site," said Barsotti, who writes a weekly farm news column for the farm's Web site. "I always do something that was inspired from (the previous) week. People really like it."

At Cole Canyon Farm in Aromas, which grows vegetable plants and herb seedlings for home gardeners, the Internet and e-mail are essential for marketing and keeping in touch customers, who cover a wide territory stretching from San Francisco to Pleasanton to Big Sur.

Cyberspace, though, can have its drawbacks for the small farmer, said Cole Canyon co-owner Pamela Mason, who writes a regular blog and produces a quarterly electronic newsletter. "We had so many people gardening this year. We were getting five or six e-mails a day. We have had people e-mail pictures of their plants. We really try hard to be responsive. The questions have been almost disabling," Mason said.

While the information age is bringing consumers closer the farm and their food, many farmers aren't ready to immerse themselves in social media and online marketing. The bottom line, said Jeff Main of Good Humus: "We're farmers, not communicators." 🌱



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A Tribute to Fran Kirihara

Livingston, CA - One of the founding members of CAFF, Francis Kirihara, passed away on August 28 at the age of 85. Both she and her husband Jake were active in a number of CAFF's activities, serving as chapter officers, supporting the BIOS almond project, and planning conferences.

The couple was involved in a range of farming issues, including farm worker rights and farmland protection. A primary school teacher, Fran was awarded "California Teacher of the Year" by then Gov. Goodwin Knight.

Fran is survived by her husband and son. CAFF extends our deepest sympathy to the Kirihara family.

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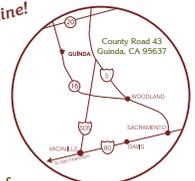
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