They arrive by foot, bicycle, car and even bus every Friday afternoon - rain or shine.

Senior citizens on fixed incomes, cash-strapped students, jobless workers and low-income families eagerly line up outside the Davis Korean Church, waiting for a free bag stuffed with fresh peaches, pears, zucchini, onions and other produce in season.

“Last year, one of the farmers donated tomatoes,” said Charlene Shon, coordinator of the church’s “Friday’s Harvest” program. “This is the only way (the needy) can have fresh fruits and vegetables in their diet.”

The Davis church is among the Food Bank of Yolo County’s produce distribution sites providing more than 800 hungry individuals and families with farm fresh fruits and vegetables every week. Through donations from local growers and wholesale purchases, the food bank gives away 650,000 pounds of produce annually – a substantial increase from 50,000 pounds distributed just four years ago.

“There is an obesity problem in this county,” said José Martinez, food bank executive director. To tackle the malnutrition issue, food bank leaders decided to step up its produce program – something that made sense for an agriculture-rich community.

Increasingly, farmers across California and the nation are joining the fight against hunger. They are donating fresh, local produce, inviting gleaners to pick post-harvest crops.
Communities are an essential part of our everyday lives. Our libraries, schools, parks and a myriad of other organizations and individuals help define each one. Farms and growers, too, contribute to the wonderful diversity of our neighborhoods. By becoming involved in the agriculture community, we achieve a greater understanding and appreciation of where our food originates, as well as the challenges that farmers face daily.

In this issue of the Agrarian Advocate, we highlight some of the many opportunities available for us to give back to the men and women who work countless hours to feed us. Donating time is an invaluable way to assist those in need, and many individuals, including CAFF members, are contributing to farms in their areas through Crop Mobs (page 4), the HealthCorps program (page 6) and more.

Farmers themselves, such as Jim Leap (page 3), also give their time to educate colleagues and students about sustainability. Other growers donate thousands of pounds of fruits and vegetables to food banks and other organizations so that more people have the opportunity to eat fresh local produce (page 1). The Food Bank of Yolo County, for example, distributed 650,000 pounds of produce to needy families last year – a number that has increased drastically in the past few years, thanks to farmers who are willing to give away some of the fruits of their labor. While these stories illustrate the strengthening bonds between farmers and their communities, they also reinforce our continued need to address some of the state’s most crucial issues, ranging from childhood obesity to water conservation.

We also hope you join us in some of our upcoming community events this fall, such as our inaugural film festival (page 9) in the Bay Area and fruit tasting in Healdsburg (page 10). More of our events can be viewed at www.caff.org/events.

We look forward to working together to promote health, sustainability and small-scale agriculture within each of our communities.

Diane Del Signore
Executive Director
Jim Leap isn’t your typical fiftysomething farmer.

As a 1960s activist, he carried pickets while marching shoulder-to-shoulder with farm workers, protested the Vietnam War and campaigned for George McGovern’s presidential campaign. He farmed under the tutelage of Japanese- and African-American farmers and trained Native Americans to become growers.

“I wanted to be an activist, but I realized if I was concerned about how farm workers were treated I should start my own community-based farm,” said Leap, 55, the son of a Fresno insurance salesman. So he became a farmer.

Since those youthful years, Leap’s activism and commitment to the community never wavered. He has worked tirelessly as an advocate for the small, family farm, sustainable and organic agriculture, farmers and farm workers. He has run his own small-scale farm, worked with minority growers and mentored hundreds of future farmers.

“His knowledge is so overwhelming. He gave me confidence (to farm). I can’t imagine not having such a mentor around,” said Kirstin Yogg, co-owner of Freewheelin’ Farm in Santa Cruz who studied under Leap as an apprentice at the Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems (CASFS) at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

After a 20-year career as CASFS farm operations manager, Leap retired this past June to start his own one- to two-acre farm in San Juan Bautista as well as work part-time at the U.S. Agricultural Research Station in Salinas.

Whether it’s diagramming an irrigation system in the dirt to an eager apprentice or discussing cultivation at a CAFF breakfast meeting, Leap devoted countless hours to the university farm and the Central Coast agricultural community.

His legacy includes helping UC Santa Cruz transform its 25-acre campus operation into a diverse organic farm and building a 130-member community supported agriculture program. He also boosted the program’s produce sales from $20,000 to $100,000 a year and strengthened relations between the research university and the hands-on agroecology center, which has become a model for other universities across the country.

“Our program has been highly recognized as a pioneer in organic farming,” Leap said. “I’m just glad to have been a part of this process.”

His interest in farming began during the turbulent ’60s while growing up in Fresno. His father stepped up to sell insurance to the United Farm Workers union in Delano after other agents refused.
Back in the good old days, farm communities were interdependent—everyone helped out if there was a big job to be done. For instance, a barn raising meant that friends and neighbors would help a family raise the needed infrastructure. After the hard work, friends and neighbors gathered to celebrate and socialize with good food and company.

“Crop Mob” is a fresh name for an old-fashioned work party. The Crop Mob began when a group of young farm workers in North Carolina decided to help each other out as they met to talk about local farming issues. Now, mobs are springing up all over the nation, calling on landless farmers, local food enthusiasts and wannabes to join experienced farmers in accomplishing a large task.

Kevin Cunningham and Melanie Olstad of Shakefork Community Farm brought the Crop Mob to Humboldt County this spring. Shakefork is a grain community-supported agriculture (CSA) operation that produces some of the only grains grown in Humboldt County. They grow buckwheat, barley, rye and wheat on property they recently acquired in Carlotta. As their spring crop was coming in, Cunningham and Olstad couldn’t keep up with weeding the mustard growing throughout their fields. They called on friends and shareholders to get the job done.

Shakefork hosted three Crop Mob field days this spring. CSA shareholders, Community Alliance with Family Farmers members and other farmers joined forces, working a few hours at a time to pull mustard plants before they flowered. Though weeding can be a thankless task, working with friends for a few hours proved to be nearly as enjoyable as the potluck feast that followed.

“I love the idea of Crop Mobs,” says Michelle Wyler, Regional Program Manager of CAFF Humboldt. “It is such a simple way for people to physically support our farmers. Sometimes lending a hand can be as important to small-scale agriculture as voting with your dollar.” Inspired by the success at Shakefork Community Farm, Humboldt CAFF members hosted a mob at Flora Organica in June. Members hope to plan more Crop Mob events throughout the season, building the sense of community and mutual support upon which sustainable local food systems thrive.

Crop Mobs provide a way for CAFF members, both on farms and in the city, to join forces, meet neighbors, and increase sustainability. With minimal effort, and a good dose of camaraderie, communities can share the work and reap the rewards of small farming.
“We were on picket lines. I got to know a lot of farm workers,” said Leap, who spent some time picking grapes in the sweltering Central Valley heat. “It gave me a real sense of the challenges being faced by agricultural labor.”

In 1974, he and a group of friends rented 10 acres and grew sweet red onions.

“From that one year experience, I realized I didn’t know anything about farming,” he said. So Leap joined with a Japanese American farmer, offering to work with his field crew to learn all the ins and outs of farming. He later leased four acres to start his own farm called Hawk Ranch Produce. After rain waylaid the growing season in 1983, he spent a year teaching Native Americans how to farm. At the urging of a local farm advisor, he enrolled at Fresno State University while tending to his farm and earned his agriculture degree in 1989. A year later, he was hired as the UC Santa Cruz farm manager.

During his final days on campus, Leap strolled through the farm and spotted a group of students weeding a field.

“I’ll miss the apprentices,” Leap said. “They’re always dying to spend more time with me – pick my brain. I’ve had a number of mentors in the past. I feel like I should give something back.”

Advertisement
Long before it was the Silicon Valley, San Mateo and Santa Clara counties comprised the “Valley of the Heart's Delight.” The Silicon Valley HealthCorps, hosted by the Health Trust Foundation and the national AmeriCorps program, is working to revitalize a strong local food system in this agricultural area, which has been overshadowed in recent decades by the high-tech industry.

More than 40 HealthCorps members are working with 10 organizations to help revitalize some of the orchards, farms and vegetable gardens that once characterized this valley. HealthCorps members are also dedicated to increasing access to fresh produce and promoting awareness of the health benefits associated with a diet high in fruits and vegetables. CAFF is a partner in the project, hosting Laura Salcido (a HealthCorps member), who helps to run the Know Your Farmer program in elementary schools throughout Santa Clara County.

It has been almost a year since the first day of work for many HealthCorps members and it’s hard to imagine better results from the inaugural year of the program. In addition to teaching, farming or conducting outreach for their host organization, members also are charged with the task of building community through their projects.

Participating organizations witnessed growth in community support for their projects through volunteerism. For example, Veggielution Community Farm in San Jose began to see an outpouring of encouragement with up to 50 people participating at their Saturday workdays. In addition,
HeathCorps coordinates cooking and nutrition classes at a number of sites in the area. Community members donate their time to teach the six-week courses.

CAFF’s Know Your Farmer educational program benefits from the help of volunteer hands as well. This past school year saw more than 20 volunteers, many of whom believed so strongly about advocating for good food that they scheduled several mornings of their week to lead activities on field trips to Full Circle Farm in Sunnyvale. A parent who attended a field trip as a chaperone with her child’s school was so inspired that she decided to be a volunteer on the remaining trips. Other help came in various forms, including energetic community members from the South Bay, nutritionists, dieticians and college students interested in teaching and environmental education.

And it’s not just South Bay AmeriCorps members who are diligently working to build communities around local food systems. In Humboldt, AmeriCorps members have been running CAFF farm education programs and conducting community outreach for a number of years.

At a national level, there are conversations brewing about establishing a “FoodCorps” program that would be structured like AmeriCorps, but would be solely focused on school gardens and Farm to School. Programs like these are essential in channeling the expanding public energy and interest in food into tangible projects that support family farmers.

For more information about HealthCorps, please visit http://www.healthtrust.org/svhealthcorps/
California's **Water supply:**

Learning to **Conserve**

Although a variety of water contractors scoffed at this estimate—Westlands Water District called it "immaterial"—the report should not be taken lightly because a number of environmental and fishing interests want to see fish runs restored. Contractors south of the Delta have raised one under-the-radar aspect of this issue: all rivers flowing into the Delta would be affected. That means water diversions from the American, Tuolumne, Consumes, Stanislaus and similar rivers also would be subject to reductions. (More to come as Delta planning continues).

Meanwhile, CAFF has been working with several other groups on the California Agricultural Water Stewardship Initiative (www.agwaterstewards.com) to promote water conservation through a variety of practices and technologies. This summer, we continued our series of North Coast field days discussing the pros and cons of dry farming in vineyards. These operators are dry farming because they either have no irrigation water or believe that it produces better grapes and wine. While saving water is a secondary benefit, the practice could allow the North Coast to balance water needs among agriculture, environmental and urban uses. John Williams, Frank Leeds, Will Bucklin, and Joe Votek gave presentations at the July events.

Water conservation also is catching on in the Pajaro Valley. For many decades, too much fresh water has been drawn from the aquifer. The trend is threatening the health of the aquifer as salt water moves in to fill the void. Getting supplies from the State Water Project is unrealistic. Given this reality, landowners are finally spearheading an effort to reduce groundwater pumping. Miles Reiter, managing partner of Driscoll’s, believes strawberry growers are over-irrigating by 10 to 15 percent, and that less irrigation would improve the quality of the berries. CAFF will be participating in several working groups as we support local efforts to conserve water and recharge the aquifer.

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**Story and Photograph by Dave Runsten**

Water, water everywhere…the rainy spring didn’t help supporters of an $11.1 billion water bond that was scheduled for the November election. And because the bond would eventually take $800 million a year from the state’s general fund—which faces a $19 billion deficit—there had been growing opposition from many groups who depend on the general fund, as well as from environmentalists who oppose the $3 billion earmarked for dams and others who just see a lot of pork in the bond. Polls also showed it losing. So the governor asked the legislature to move it to the 2012 ballot. On August 9, lawmakers agreed to postpone the vote for two years.

The bond is not the only thing happening in the water policy world. One of the package of water bills approved by lawmakers last year required the State Water Resources Control Board to estimate the in-stream flows required to restore the Delta’s environmental health. In early August, the water board reported current flows are about 50 percent of historical levels and would need to be increased to 75 percent. In other words, half the water currently diverted from the Sacramento-San Joaquin river system would need to be put back.

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*Dry farming in vineyards helps to conserve water.*
The Oscar-nominated movie Julie & Julia gave us belly laughs. The acclaimed documentary Super Size Me gave us bellyaches.

Could the next blockbuster film for foodies emerge this fall from the inaugural CAFF film festival? Billed as a mini-version of the renowned Wild & Scenic Environmental Film Festival (WSFF), the nation’s largest environmental movie showcase, the October 28 Bay Area event will focus on food-themed films with a mix of short and long formats. The film fest will be at the Clif Bar Theater in Emeryville.

Rolling Out the Red Carpet

BY ALLYSE HEARTWELL

The Oscar-nominated movie Julie & Julia gave us belly laughs. The acclaimed documentary Super Size Me gave us bellyaches.

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CAFF’s Berkeley office is working with WSFF and Clif Bar to present an evening of food, drink, prizes and movies. There may even be dancing.

The program will include a variety of topics with the primary purpose of inspiring activism around good food and sustainable farming. It also will be a fund- and friend-raiser to gather and inspire new CAFF members.

The primary goal, however, is for the public to have a great time. More details will be posted soon on www.caff.org. Space is limited so be sure to save the date.
North Coast Chapter Notes

BY TERRY HARRISON

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF DAVE RUNSTEN

Building on the success of last year’s Dry Farming Field Day at Paul Bernier’s vineyard in Dry Creek Valley, the North Coast Chapter sponsored two more dry farming events in July. They were conducted at the Frog’s Leap Winery near St. Helena in Napa County and the Bucklin Old Hill Ranch near Glen Ellen in Sonoma Valley.

There will be a benefit apple, pear and cheese tasting at Gina’s Orchard, part of Rancho del Obispo near Healdsburg, on Oct. 3 from 1 to 4 p.m. by the Slow Food Russian River Convivium and the Redwood Chapter of California Rare Fruit Growers. This benefit will allow us to hold a Sustainable Winegrowing Forum, “The Integrated Vineyard, What’s In Your Toolbox?” on Nov. 2 in Santa Rosa. The event is co-sponsored by the Sonoma County Winegrape Commission and California Climate and Agriculture Network. There are great speakers lined up. See www.caff.org/events for details of these events and to register for the forum.

Rose Roberts of Farm Stewards, an active member of our Leadership Circle, continues to establish hedgerows for pollinators and other beneficial insects, siltation traps and carbon sequestration on farms in western Sonoma County, in collaboration with Gold Ridge Resource Conservation District and the federal Natural Resources Conservation Service. Six pollinator hedgerows were installed in 2009-10, mostly on CAFF member farms.

CAFF was awarded a USDA Rural Business Enterprise Grant for a feasibility study for an aggregation hub. The hub would allow North Coast farmers to take their produce to a central location for distribution to larger retailers and institutions through the commercial distributors who currently are not buying directly from a large number of smaller, individual farmers. Packaging, processing and distribution will be considered in the study. The Slow Food Russian River Apple Corps supported the proposal and will be one of many organizations asked to help us identify farmers interested in discussing what they would want from such a facility. We are so pleased to have a project like this come to our region (including Mendocino, Lake and Napa counties).

Our chapter membership has increased almost 30 percent in the past six months. Anyone able to help in any of our program areas should come to a Leadership Circle meeting, held the first Tuesday of each month at the Environmental Center, 55 Ridgway Ave, Santa Rosa at 6:30 p.m. E-mail Terry Harrison, fresh@hughes.net to learn more and confirm meeting times.

A device at Will Bucklin’s vineyard, called a Waterboxx, collects moisture from the air and uses it to water a young plant.
to feed the needy and volunteering their time for food bank programs. Indeed, there is no shortage in demand.

“Fresh produce is a big thing. People love this. During the slow season when we don’t have much, people are clamoring for it,” Martinez said.

The Yolo food bank serves more than 70 community organizations from homeless shelters to soup kitchens that feed about 20,000 people per month. The economic downturn boosted demand as well as skewed the demographics to a younger clientele, including recipients in their 20s and 30s.

“During the last two years, we’ve seen it spike up to as high as 27,000 people a month,” Martinez said.

Donations account for about 95 percent of the 2.5 million pounds of food distributed annually. However, only a quarter of the produce comes from donations. While some fruits and vegetables are purchased from local farmers, the bulk is bought from a statewide food bank wholesale program.

“We have a lot of small growers in Yolo County. A lot of them are struggling. We are careful that we don’t ask for handouts,” Martinez said.

One grower, though, believes farmers can do their part for charity. Throughout history, “farmers have been the ones that provide to the less fortunate,” said Jim Durst, owner of Durst Organic Growers in Esparto and a new member of the food bank board of directors.

“Before welfare, there was socialized welfare. It’s time we all shoulder more of that burden.”

Durst and his wife, Deborah, operate a fourth-generation 600-acre family farm that grows asparagus, melons, watermelons, tomatoes, peppers and winter squash. In the past six years, their farm has donated about 240,000 pounds of produce to the food bank. His cousin, Fritz Durst, donates rice grown on a neighboring farm.

“I’m trying to put together some kind of program where growers set aside a certain part of their field to grow produce for donations to food banks,” he said. “Everybody can decide what they can do. It doesn’t have to be a large quantity.” Participation, Durst said, can be as simple as giving a box of strawberries or placing a donation can at the farm stand. “It’s just a way of building into our psyche that we are responsible for the less fortunate.”

In Northern California, Nicole Allegre, produce solicitor for the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano counties, has been working with farmers and packers to generate more donations. Her work has been aided by the growing local food movement and First Lady Michelle Obama's anti-obesity initiative.

“My main goal is to educate growers and let them know they can help,” Allegre said. “A lot of people are interested and want to do it. They give what they can.”

Volunteers at the Davis Korean Church hand out food donations.
YES! Please renew my membership!

Here's my gift of:

☐ $500  ☐ $250  ☐ $100
☐ $50  ☐ Other $_________

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