

# AGRARIAN ADVOCATE



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## Members Promoting Change

*Public markets, like the Oxbow Public Market in Napa, encourage shoppers to enjoy local food.*

STORY BY **KATHERINE WEBB**

PHOTOGRAPH BY **MEGAN SABATO**

Nestled along the Napa River in verdant Napa Valley, the Oxbow Public Market offers an abundance of locally sourced culinary delights. Under a single roof, vendors offer an array of artisanal products; from decadent handcrafted chocolates, ice cream and pastries, to fresh produce, meats, seafood, cheese, wine, olive oil, and tea. The Oxbow Public Market is the brainchild of founder and CEO Steve Carlin, a market developer and specialty foods consultant who has been involved in many similar market projects across the country.

Carlin's motivation for founding Oxbow is born out of 30 years of involvement in Napa Valley food and wine industries as well as a strong belief in "independent sustainable food

businesses" and supporting local artisan producers. In addition to Carlin's connection to wine and food in Napa, he was also a managing partner with the Oakville Grocery Company for 20 years. He was responsible for overseeing the initial operations, marketing and planning of the Ferry Building Marketplace in San Francisco. This role solidified his belief that a similar marketplace featuring locally sourced artisan foods would be ideal in Napa, and led to his creation of the Oxbow Market. "Public markets have been the primary source for selling and buying locally produced foods for years," says Carlin, noting that "almost all the products sold at Oxbow and The Ferry Building are locally produced or

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## Letter from the Executive Director

As members, your loyal support is essential to the work we do, which becomes more urgent every day. Your contribution makes a profound difference to CAFF. We know that you have many choices concerning where to donate time and money, and your support enables CAFF to make a difference for family farming and sustainable agriculture in California.

I'd like to share some of CAFF's recent highlights -- in 2010 we:

- Worked with almond growers in Colusa County to plant over 5,000 trees, shrubs and cuttings, thereby reducing pesticide run-off and creating habitats for wildlife and native pollinators.
- Published 100,000 copies of the Bay Area Eater's Guide to Local Food and 30,000 copies of the Sacramento Valley Eater's Guide to Local Food.
- Reached over 66,000 students through classroom visits and farm field trips.
- Established fifteen farm stands at various hospitals throughout Humboldt County, providing over 1,200 people with quick access to fresh, local food.
- Staged multiple field days with our North Coast chapter to promote dry farming techniques for wine grapes growers.
- Helped to lead the efforts of the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition to decrease the impact of the US Senate's food safety legislation (S. 510) on family farmers.

In addition to donating financially, our members contribute to our cause in numerous other ways. Education leaders, such as Jennifer LaBarre (page 6), help to bring local food into school cafeterias. Community members and business owners, such as Steve Carlin of Oxbow Public Market (page 1), lead the way in providing locally sourced gourmet cuisine. And farmers themselves, such as David Retsky (page 3), inspire, teach, and continue to give back to the community in their own unique ways.

As 2011 progresses, we invite you to continue supporting our efforts. You help ensure that fresh, local produce is increasingly used throughout our communities. Together, we will continue to significantly change our local food systems. 🌱

Diane Del Signore  
 Executive Director

# Dedication to Sustainability



*David Retsky, on his Petaluma farm.*

**STORY BY ARIANE MICHAS**

**PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL B. WOOLSEY**

Established on a ranch on the Sonoma-Marín county border, County Line Harvest received its name for very literal reasons. Since then, the farm has moved only a few miles down the road to charming Petaluma, where the recent purchase by the Marin Agricultural Land Trust will forever preserve a 600-acre area for agricultural use.

The farm is owned and operated by first-generation farmer David Retsky. He became interested in agriculture at age 18, when he spent a year working on a kibbutz in Israel. He later returned to California and attended the UC Santa Cruz Farm and Garden Apprenticeship Program. In 2000, David started County Line Harvest on a six-acre plot. Today, at its 10-year anniversary, the farm spans 35 acres with eight employees, and produces crops year-round. County Line specializes in greens -- from several varieties of lettuce and hearty braising greens, to rare Italian chicories. The farm also grows tomatoes, strawberries, basil, carrots, onions, beets, fennel, various herbs, and edible flowers.

County Line Harvest has been USDA certified organic since 2007, and has continued its dedication to providing the community with fresh, organically grown produce. Retsky believes in the simple, yet principled practice of "taking care of the soil and feeding people good food!" The farm sells directly to consumers at several Bay Area farmers markets including Sundays in San Rafael, Tuesdays and Thursdays at the San Francisco Ferry Building, and Saturdays in Oakland and Berkeley. They also sell directly to local restaurants, such as Delfina in San Francisco, with whom they have been doing business for ten years.

More recently, County Line has become a supplier to CAFF's Grower's Collaborative Bay Area project, a partnership with the produce company Thumbs Up. This program is designed to open up new, robust revenue streams for small farmers, and provide local food to more people. Thumbs Up purchases a number of products from County Line and other farms, and makes them available to both local distribution companies as well as end buyers. This

*County Line continued on page 5*

# Growing Partnerships with Community Hospitals



## STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY SARA MOSSER

The Humboldt chapter of CAFF (HCAFF) is a unique and valuable component of the overall organization and the Humboldt County food system. Producers and consumers consistently rely upon HCAFF as a food network resource. As a result, HCAFF has ample opportunity to partner with community members, organizations, and institutions. HCAFF facilitates these partnerships by understanding consumer needs and how to match this demand with farmer supply.

Institutional partnerships, including those with Mad River Community Hospital (MRCH) in Arcata and St. Joseph Hospital (St. Joe's) in Eureka, are growing stronger and the gap between farmers and consumers is narrowing. Just as Farm to School (F2S) programs are gaining momentum, Farm to Institution (FTI) programs are increasing as well. Institutions, such as universities, hospitals, and schools, traditionally hold contracts with large corporations or food service distributors to meet the demands of their staff and clients. Increasingly, these institutions are looking for

*A new hoop house shelters plants at the MRCH on-site farm.*

alternative models in which they can supply sustainable food to their consumers.

FTI programs include on-site distribution outlets, institution-sponsored farms, and contracts with local producers to source products to campus cafeterias.

MRCH has taken the FTI model to the next level with an on-site farm that provides a wide variety of produce directly to the cafeteria. This extremely rare FTI collaboration was developed in 2008 when a team of employees (part of a Sustainability Committee) realized that a vacant lot, adjacent to and owned by the hospital, would make an ideal place to locate a garden. In 2009, a part-time farmer was hired, the ground was prepped and a hoop house built. In 2010, the 1.5-acre farm finished its second and most successful season to date. Now a full time employee with benefits, farmer Isaiah Webb manages the farm with the help of several dedicated staff volunteers who receive shares of produce for their efforts. The farm provides aesthetic benefits as well, as staff

and patients are encouraged to walk the approximately 50 yards from hospital to the farm gate to enjoy the grounds.

Although known for enjoyable meals before the establishment of the farm, the MRCH cafeteria has changed in exciting ways. Meal planning that previously occurred monthly soon adjusted to take advantage of the seasonal nature of farming. Webb now meets with Food and Nutrition Services manager Todd Heustis and Kitchen Manager Eric Bentler for weekly meal planning where he reports on current and future produce availability. The cafeteria, which serves nearly all MRCH patients and staff, offers diverse, seasonal items that change daily. The menu is often praised, and everyone looks forward to the next unique offering.

HCAFF has been instrumental in promoting the MRCH farm, and held three farm tours this year (spring/summer/fall) with MRCH kicking off the spring season. The MRCH farm continues to grow with the help of HCAFF and the community and will boast an additional hoop house in 2011. 🌱



Isaiah Webb helps incorporate fresh produce into MRCH's menu.

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County Line continued from page 3

winter, beautiful rainbow carrots, and golden, red, chigga, and white beets from County Line have found their way into kitchens at businesses and schools, including the St. Regis Hotel and UC Davis. The product is traceable throughout the entire supply chain, with each case bearing information on source and date of harvest. Eaters at the end of the supply chain learn about the local food and farmer through profiles produced by CAFF staff.

County Line is dedicated to providing the public with fresh, organic produce, sustaining the environment, and teaching a new generation of farmers. Retsky's son, Nico, was born in 2006 and already enjoys helping his father. There is an atmosphere of passion and innovation on the farm, and County Line looks forward to each new season with vigorous enthusiasm. Retsky says that working on the farm feels like absolute freedom, and that he "can't imagine doing anything else." 🌱

# School Meals go Local in Oakland

STORY BY KATHRYN SPENCER

PHOTOGRAPH BY CARLO FANTI

CAFF's Farm to School program works directly with many passionate teachers, parents, farmers, and food service directors who are committed to improving childhood health, reconnecting students to nature and agriculture, and improving access to local fresh fruits and vegetables in school cafeterias.

Jennifer LaBarre, Nutrition Services Director for Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) is one such farm to school champion. LaBarre is tasked with serving over 42,000 meals each day at over 100 school sites with an extremely limited budget. CAFF's work with LaBarre began in 2009 with a contract to help lay the groundwork for a cohesive district-wide Farm to School produce purchasing program.

In spite of many challenges, LaBarre and the district made serious steps to improve school meals. There are now 52 schools with operating salad bars and 32 schools that participate in CAFF's Harvest of the Month nutrition education program. Nutrition Services also worked to increase the availability of fresh fruits and vegetables



*The Oakland Unified School District has started to source produce from several local farms.*

on the menu by introducing salad bars, offering fresh fruit with every breakfast and a fresh vegetable with every lunch, operating the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program at two schools, and purchasing produce from local farmers.

Along with CAFF, LaBarre built upon these efforts and programs to create a Farm to School purchasing plan by convening stakeholder meetings, analyzing current produce purchasing, suggesting shifts towards local producers, and offering suggestions on the district's produce contract bid. CAFF gathered community input for the Farm to School plan and researched local farms from which the district could start purchasing produce.

In addition to the new purchasing plan, school-based farmers markets jointly run by the East Bay Asian Youth Center and OUSD increased to 25 school sites in 2010. These markets provide students, parents, and community members with access to locally grown produce and also accept EBT (the electronic form of food stamps). The relationships that are made with farmers who supply the school-based farm stands are translating to the cafeteria as well, increasing the amount of local produce featured in school meals. LaBarre is now researching the possibility of contracting with local vendors and producers to buy items such as local baked goods and meats. She is also spearheading an effort called "Oakland Eats Garden Fresh" -- a district-wide endeavor to incorporate Harvest of the Month into school gardens and cafeteria offerings. LaBarre's tireless commitment to the students she serves demonstrates her desire to create healthier, locally sourced meals throughout the school system. 🌱

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*Oxbow continued from page 1*

grown," which is what he calls the "hallmark of a community market".

As a member and supporter of CAFF's Buy Fresh Buy Local program, Carlin stresses the importance of farmers markets, grower cooperatives and community markets in nurturing the principals of sustainability and local harvest. At Oxbow, tenant involvement in market management helps enhance these principals and promotes community unity through "education, community outreach, and support of local businesses and farms".

It is Carlin's hope that markets like Oxbow will encourage shoppers to develop a habit of daily shopping to take advantage of the incredible freshness afforded by local produce, meats and seafood. Carlin believes that cooking with local foods is the best way to enjoy what we eat, noting that, "I can be a pretty good chef with wonderful ingredients. That's a credit to the ingredients - not me."

To learn more about the many products available at the Oxbow Public Market and its commitment to sustainable foods and supporting local harvests, visit the Web site at [www.oxbowpublicmarket.com](http://www.oxbowpublicmarket.com). 🌱



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# Policy Update



*President Obama signed the Food Safety Modernization Act in January, which will affect many farmers.*

BY DAVE RUNSTEN

PHOTOGRAPH BY CARLO FANTI

## Food Safety Bill Signed

The Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) that CAFF has been working on for the past two years was signed by President Obama in January. CAFF worked with the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) to achieve food safety rules that satisfied the consumer groups without curbing the growing movement toward fresh, local and regional food. The food safety bill passed by the House in July 2009 would have imposed a one-size-fits-all regulatory system biased toward large-scale agriculture with a regressive registration fee, expensive food safety plans, and regular on-farm FDA inspections (regardless of the degree of potential risk for food-borne illness).

It is hard to call it a complete victory since CAFF and NSAC have been playing defense the whole time. We decided to try to improve the bill in the Senate because we were convinced it would pass -- and it did. The coalition improved it by eliminating the across-the-board fees on producers, requiring harmonization with environmental laws and the National Organic Program, limiting paperwork requirements, and finally providing some possible exemptions for small producers.

The Tester-Hagan amendment, sponsored by Senators

Jon Tester (D-MT) and Kay Hagan (D-NC), will provide a size appropriate and less costly alternative to preventative control plans and produce standards for farmers who:

- Direct market more than 50 percent of their products directly to consumers, stores or restaurants,
- Have gross sales (direct and non-direct combined) of less than \$500,000,
- Sell to consumers, stores, or restaurants that are in-state or within 275 miles, and
- Provide their customers with their name, address and contact information.

Such producers would still have to comply with state and local food safety regulations.

What does the law really do? It requires manufacturers and farmers to develop strategies to prevent contamination and then continually test to make sure they work; gives the FDA the authority to recall food and access to internal records at farms and food-production facilities; and (for the first time) requires importers to verify that products and ingredients from overseas meet U.S. safety standards.

It is important to note that this is just one stop on a long road and there are a lot of regulatory proceedings ahead of

# North Coast Chapter Notes

BY TERRY HARRISON

Last year the North Coast chapter held several well attended dry farming workshops in Glen Ellen at Bucklin Old Hill Ranch and in Rutherford at Frog's Leap Winery. It is clear now that wine grapes with exceptional quality can be grown without irrigation in many North Coast areas. In November 2010, we held a Sustainable Wine Growing Forum covering conservation of water, soil management, hedgerows and GHG emissions and carbon sequestration. Participant evaluations were very favorable, and the presentation notes are now available on CAFF's Web site.

- CAFF's Farm to School Director, Diana Abellera, is helping us work with Sonoma County's Food System Alliance to develop a Farm to Institution program using materials created by CAFF.

- CAFF's grant from the USDA to create an aggregation and marketing feasibility study is halfway complete. A stakeholders meeting was held in the fall, followed by farmer meetings in all four counties (Mendocino, Napa, Lake and Sonoma). As part of the grant, we developed a survey to identify the needs of farmers and community members interested in a hub. There have been many positive responses to the survey, and we will continue contacting farmers, as well as distributors and institutions. Many believe that a hub would increase consumption of local foods in the North Coast region and greatly help regional farmers.

- Policy work has included a new Frost Protection Water Plan by Sonoma County, as well as work on pending ordinances concerning Ag Zoning and the Williamson Act.

- A planning meeting for the chapter was held December 7, 2010. Our wish list for 2011 includes Vineyard Dry Farming Workshops in Mendocino and Lake Counties, a Vegetable Dry Farming Workshop, a Pollinator Workshop, a Hedgerow Demonstration, a Biodiversity and Ag/Climate Field Day and Breakfast, and Farmer to Farmer Field Days/ Meetings. The number of workshops we are able to hold will depend on the funding that can be raised, our collaborations, and, particularly, how many volunteers assist us. Please contact Terry Harrison, [fresh@hughes.net](mailto:fresh@hughes.net), to discuss which program you are interested in and give us feedback. 🌱

us. For example, the FDA is trying to complete rules on leafy greens, tomatoes, and melons by the end of 2011. We will need to continue to participate to make sure that the FDA considers the potential impacts of its actions on all producers. We are encouraged in this respect by the FDA's recent shell egg rule, where the FDA exempted small farms (those with less than 3,000 layers)--65,000 out of 69,000 farms--because the benefits did not exceed the costs of applying the rule to them. Even the larger farms would be exempt if they sold all of their eggs directly to consumers.

## Regulation of Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs)

An effort has begun in Sacramento to address problems that some CSA farmers are experiencing with regulators. Recently, some CSAs have had CDFA inspectors questioning whether their boxes are truly exempt from grade and pack standards. Other CSAs have been told by county environmental health inspectors that because they are bundling products from various farms, they are actually retailers without proper permits. Several long-time CSAs have asked us to attempt to resolve these issues.

CAFF has long supported efforts to promote direct marketing and in the 1990s we ran a program to promote CSAs. However, because CSAs did not exist in the 1970s when the direct market exemptions were created, there is no mention of them in the Food and Agricultural Code. Only farm stands and farmers markets are exempt from grade and pack standards. We propose now to include CSAs within this direct marketing exemption.

In addition, there will be issues with Environmental Health regulations. The increasing focus on food safety has already caused officials to form a small task force to discuss CSAs. Some of the issues to be dealt with by this task force include agreement on "approved sources" for food, establishing state-wide best management practices, dealing with "potentially hazardous foods" such as raw milk cheese, and ensuring trace-back to all food sources. We hope to exempt CSAs from retail food laws if they follow a set of agreed-upon practices and register with their agricultural commissioner.

For more information, contact CAFF's Policy Director, Dave Runsten, at [dave@caff.org](mailto:dave@caff.org) or (530) 756-8518 x 25. 🌱

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<http://www.calclimateag.org/climate-agriculture-summit>

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