

AGRARIAN ADVOCATE



COMMUNITY ALLIANCE WITH FAMILY FARMERS

Local Food Month in Santa Cruz County

BY KLARA RICE

In August, the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors and the City Council voted unanimously to designate September as Local Food Month. Thanks to Central Coast CAFF coordinators, and in particular to Buy Fresh Buy Local coordinator Liv Nevin, for encouraging local officials to take this step and help raise the community's awareness about the local family farms who produce this region's food. "Local Food Month is a month to celebrate and express gratitude to farmers in this region," Liv said.

The Taste of Santa Cruz, a yearly street fair served as the kick-off day for Local Food Month on August 30. It featured food and drink from nine local farms and three local restaurants. There was a bluegrass band and hundreds of folks strolling around, tasting and dancing throughout the evening.

On September 1, people were greeted with twenty enormous, bright Buy Fresh Buy Local banners which were hung on lampposts on the two main streets in Santa Cruz. The banners remained there for the entire month and drew much public attention to the BFBL



campaign, giving the BFBL label more exposure. CAFF also designed and mounted posters at participating grocery stores, and provided local food guides.

Local Food Guides

On August 8, CAFF launched the online version of the Local Food Guide, a project of CAFF's Buy Fresh Buy Local campaign. The Local Food Guide is a statewide database of local farms and food-related businesses, divided up into seven regions: Central Coast, Gold Coast, San Luis Obispo, North Coast, Northern San Joaquin, Sacramento Valley, and Southern San Joaquin Valley. You can search the database for farms, restaurants, farmers' markets, u-

pick farms, CSAs, grocers, caterers, bakers, bed & breakfasts, and other food-related businesses and supporting organizations. Go to www.BuyLocalCA.org, or go to the CAFF web site (www.caff.org) to see this new searchable database. By listing your farm or business in our new online Local Food Guide, you can help us build this direc-

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Fine Tuning a Cover Crop System

BY MARK CADY

Craig McNamara grows walnuts in northern Solano County, and has been growing cover crops for about 10 years—about as long as his orchards have been certified organic.

The most important benefit Craig sees from his cover crop system is suppression of winter weeds. The orchard gets about half of its nitrogen requirement from the cover crop, the rest coming from the 3 to 4 tons of compost per acre applied each year. (Compost from Jepson Prairie Organics, which uses urban restaurant waste as the primary feed stock.) Craig supports his plant nutrition decisions with annual tissue testing, and finds with his current program, cover crop and compost, the nitrogen numbers are consistently on target.

Craig started with a cover crop learning curve during which he overcame some of his expectations. First, he abandoned the idea of a reseed-ing cover. He decided that it's better to know what you're getting by ensuring that all the parts are in place to get a robust cover. He always seeds the cover crop and always applies inoculant to the seed. Finally,

he has decided not to be shy about the risks posed by frost, since he has not yet been hurt by frost in a cover-cropped orchard, and feels that the temperature-lowering effects of a cover crop do not outweigh the benefits of a robust winter cover year after year.

The biggest challenge to making cover crops work for walnut growers is timing of operations. After harvest, Craig prunes quickly and chips or pushes the brush away. Next, a light disking incorporates the first fallen leaves, and leftover brush. A grain drill plants the inoculated seed, followed by a roller to smooth the soil and ensure consistent germination. On his 25-foot alleys Craig plants 18-foot strips with the cover crop. As soon as it is planted, a post-harvest irrigation goes on by sprinkler.

Since he is no longer trying to get the cover crop to reseed, Craig mows it down at about 70% bloom, usually early- to mid-May. One key to mowing a dense cover is to go slow. Depending on the soil

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*Cultivating healthy farms,
food & communities*

PO Box 363, Davis, CA 95617
(530) 756-8518 Fax: (530) 756-7857
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 \$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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CAFF Contacts

Central Coast

Sam Earnshaw, Regional Coordinator (831) 722-5556

Liv Nevin, *Buy Fresh Buy Local* Campaign (831) 761-8507

Gold Coast

Judy Blue, Ventura Regional Coordinator (805) 684-1997

San Joaquin Valley

Jeremy Hofer, Farm-to-School (559) 485-1416

North Coast

Deborah Walton, Farm-to-School (707) 766-7171

Sacramento Valley

Temra Costa, Regional Coordinator (530) 756-8518 x18

Davis Office

Marcia Gibbs, Sustainable Cotton Project . . . (530) 756-8518 x34

Mark Cady, Biological Agriculture (530) 756-8518 x20

Anya Fernald,

Community Food Systems (530) 756-8518 x31

Molly Johnson, Community Food Systems . . . (530) 756-8518 x30

Joy Rowe, Membership (530) 756-8518 x17

Heidi O'Guinn, Controller (530) 756-8518 x19

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Managing Editor Karen Van Epen

Associate Editor Klara Rice

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Strengthening Local Foodsheds

In recent years, a movement has arisen to support the re-creation of local foodsheds. By encouraging people to eat food produced locally, transport costs are minimized, various differentiation strategies can be utilized (such as growing varieties that do not travel well and harvesting ripe produce), and a community is built between local farmers and urban

residents. Because the nutritional value of produce is usually a function of time since harvest, local produce can also be more nutritious. "Quality" is going to have to be redefined in various ways beyond "looks pretty" if local marketing is to make a big dent in sales. CAFF is currently working on two such programs: Buy Fresh, Buy Local, and Farm to School.

CAFF is the California partner in the Food Routes Network, which was started with the support of the Kellogg Foundation to promote local food buying. We share logos and promotional materials with other organizations around the country (see www.foodroutes.org). We have developed an extensive Buy Fresh, Buy Local campaign in the Santa Cruz area with local farmers, restaurants, and stores, and we plan to extend it to a number of other regions of the state.

CAFF is also an important participant in the efforts to improve food in schools. We are actively working in Sonoma, the Sacramento Valley, the Central Coast, Ventura, and Fresno, and we are planning to work in the Bay Area, Los Angeles, and Humboldt. We assist with farm tours for schoolchildren in several regions and we conduct nutrition education in the Central Coast, but our focus is to create distribution mechanisms in the different regions that allow for local produce to be delivered to the schools.

The Ventura Gold Coast Growers' Collaborative is the most far advanced of these efforts, and they are now delivering produce not only to the Ventura region, but also to the Compton school district in South Central Los Angeles. The USDA has supported the creation of this collaborative and they will also support our partnership with the Latino farmers of the Agricultural Land Based Training Association (ALBA) and its distribution arm in the Central Coast region. We will support a similar effort in the Fresno area, where we will collaborate with organizations of Hmong and African-American farmers.

We fervently believe that the combination of taste testings, nutrition education, school gardens, farm visits, and salad bars can make a big difference in the eating habits of children. We are focusing many of our efforts on the public schools in some of the poorest areas of the state, where obesity problems are most acute. At the same time, we are building a local distribution system that can serve hospitals, restaurants, and other institutions in the future. We believe this will provide new local markets for farmers.

In the next issue, I will have more to say on the strategy and benefits of constructing a more locally oriented food system in California. 

Introducing David Runsten, CAFF's New Executive Director

David Runsten has been influential at CAFF since 1989 and has been on our Board of Directors since 2001. He is a researcher who strives to connect his analysis with positive community outcomes. Dave's ever-ready powers of insight have been of great benefit to CAFF's staff over the years. His expertise is in migration and labor conditions of California farm workers; Mexican smallholder cooperatives such as Del Cabo in Baja California; and fair trade organic coffee. In addition to serving as CAFF's Executive Director, Dave is the Associate Director of the North American Integration and Development Center at UCLA.

—Judith Redmond

Sonoma GE-Free Initiative Heads to a Photo Finish

BY GEORGE DAVIS

With the Legislature adjourned, all eyes are on Sonoma County to see if voters approve the initiative to impose a 10-year moratorium on GMO use in the county. The outcome of the Sonoma election will influence what happens in the Legislature in 2006. Two bills carried over from 2005 will be heard next year: AB 984 (Laird)—which shields farmers whose crops have unknowingly been contaminated with GMOs from being sued by the GMO manufacturer and instead imposes liability on the manufacturer for GMO contamination—and SB 1056 (Flores), which prohibits local governments or voters from passing local measures to restrict the use of GMOs. Whether the Sonoma County initiative passes or fails, expect fireworks over this issue in the Legislature in 2006.

—Pete Price

A lot is riding on the Sonoma County GE-Free Initiative, which calls for a moratorium on growing genetically modified crops in the county. Because of the timing and the fact that Sonoma is so evenly divided between agricultural and urban lands, many view the outcome as a referendum that will greatly influence California's response to the GMO issue. This local initiative is being vigorously opposed by the Farm Bureau and Monsanto. Monsanto reportedly intends to spend an unprecedented one million dollars on radio ads and other campaign materials in the final weeks before the November election.

Consumer groups are concerned about the lack of clear labeling for foods that contain GMOs. Though most surveys have shown that 85 to 95% of consumers want labeling of GMO products, industry lobbyists have been able to block legislation requiring even basic labeling of consumer products. Some studies of GMO

foods report allergic reactions in humans and effects such as tumors and lesions in animals that are fed GMO products. The industry opposes labeling because of possible market losses, and also because labels would make it possible to track allergic reactions to GMO foods, revealing their health consequences.

CAFF's North Coast Chapter, the California Farmer's Union, the Sierra Club, and Slow Food USA have joined with other groups to support the Sonoma initiative. Organic farmers are concerned that GMOs will contaminate their crops and that they will lose their organic certification. Farmers are also concerned about the emergence of resistant superweeds, which would require the use of more pesticides. Even conventional growers are concerned about the loss of foreign markets due to GMO contamination of their crops. Recently several large shipments of non-GMO corn exported to Japan were turned away due to contamination. 

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tory and create regional markets.

CAFF will soon be publishing the second hard copy edition of the *Central Coast Local Food Guide*, a directory for Santa Cruz, San Benito and Monterey counties. It will be available at farmers' markets, natural food stores and public libraries throughout the three counties. The guide also lists grocers, restaurants and caterers who sell or cook with locally grown products and includes information on local Farm-to-School programs, which educate children about local food, farming and nutrition. It will help people learn when and what produce is in season, and where you can get it. It also has recipes for using the produce. If you want to know where to find raw cow's milk, fresh goat cheese or organic grass-fed beef, this guide's for you. For more information about the Central Coast Local Food Guide, contact Community Alliance with Family Farmers at (831) 761-8507 or buylocal@calcentral.com, or visit the CAFF website. 

Cover Crop *continued from front page*

moisture, he may irrigate before disking in the residue. In any case, Craig will apply compost and irrigate again before a final disking, followed by land planing to prepare for harvest.

When Craig started cover cropping, he tried planting the "Plowdown Mix" recommended by UC SAREP and CAFF in the Biologically Integrated Orchard System (BIOS) program. He saved about 10 cents a pound on seed by switching to bell beans only. Recently, he has decided that some rotation of cover crops will provide better soil quality benefits in the long run and is using a clover mix, the BIOS "Rich Mix," every few years to take advantage of different rooting patterns and ecological diversity.

Craig thinks that the orchards he has been cover cropping the longest are now the healthiest they have ever been, and he considers his cover crop program to be an essential part of his walnut production system. For more information, contact mark@caff.org. 

We welcome these folks as new members of CAFF! Thanks for your generous support!

New Basic Members

A Moveable Feast, Carmel Valley
Andy's Orchard, Morgan Hill
Blue Moon Organics, Aptos
Dream Designs Co. Ltd, Vancouver
Kati Buehler, Santa Barbara
Glaum Egg Ranch LP, Aptos
Green Valley Grill, Watsonville
Julie Jervis, Cupertino
Ruth Lefkowitz, Santa Rosa
Love Apple Farm, Ben Lomond
Lakeside Organic Gardens, Watsonville
Clint Miller Farms, Watsonville
Rodoni Farms, Santa Cruz
Janet Schwind, Santa Cruz
Gabrielle Stocker, Santa Cruz
Tobias Wehrhan, Davis
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New Business Members

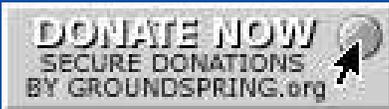
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Inner Light Ministries, Soquel
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CAFF appreciates your support

California Food & Farming Policy Update

BY PETE PRICE

CAFF Farm to School Legislation Vetoed

On the final day before the October 9 deadline, Governor Schwarzenegger vetoed AB 826 (Nava), the California Farm to School Child Nutrition Improvement Act, co-sponsored by CAFF and the Community Food and Justice Coalition (CFJC). The bill enjoyed widespread support in the Legislature. It passed the Assembly 77-2 and was co-authored by Jeff Denham, the Republican Chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee. The bill also was supported by numerous school districts, health and nutrition advocates, and some of the state's largest farm organizations, including the California Farm Bureau Federation and the Western Growers Association.

In his veto message, Schwarzenegger cited the enactment of another bill, SB 281, which is the centerpiece of his Childhood Obesity Initiative. SB 281 provides \$18 million to schools in 2005-2006 to increase the amount of fruits and vegetables in school meals. The initiative also includes a ban on soft drink sales at high schools. He cited the lack of funding to implement a statewide Farm to School program, even though the bill required no expenditures unless funding was made available in the state budget.

The veto is disappointing to CAFF and CFJC, who are working on the ground with farmers and school districts to implement Farm to School programs. CAFF and CFJC will work this fall to decide whether to pursue Farm-to-School legislation in 2006.

Final Tally on Other State Legislation

AB 1058 (Koretz)—Required beef sold at the retail level, not including restaurants, to be labeled with its country of origin. CAFF supported AB 1058, consistent with its support of the federal Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) law. **Vetoed by Governor.**

AB 1011 (Matthews)—Closes a loophole that allowed "big box" retailers to avoid paying the mill assessment on the sale of pesticides. Will generate \$3-\$4 million in additional revenues to the Department of Pesticide Regulation. **Signed into law.**

AB 1328 (Wolk)—Adds portions of Cache Creek to the state's Wild and Scenic River system. Includes numerous provisions to retain local input and authority over the use of the river. **Signed into law.**

SB 646 (Kuehl)—Tightens requirements for agricultural and timber land waivers from waste discharge requirements, which are required of all dischargers of pollutants into waters of the state. Requires the State Water Board to impose fees and to make water monitoring results public. **Defeated in Assembly.**

SB 820 (Kuehl)—Strengthens groundwater use monitoring. Requires statewide groundwater extraction reporting for all users of more than 25 acre-feet per year. Requires ag water suppliers to prepare ag water management plans. **Vetoed by Governor.** 

See page 3 for an update on state GMO legislation.