

# AGRARIAN ADVOCATE



GROWING FOOD, GROWING FARMS, GROWING COMMUNITIES



## Conservation Farming in Colusa County

STORY BY KATHERINE WEBB

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF COLUSA COUNTY RCD

The runoff of sediment and pesticide residue from orchards into local waterways during precipitation is a topic of concern for both farmers and environmentalists. In 2007, CAFF, along with many other project partners, undertook the "Colusa County Almond Project: Best Management Practices for Reducing Sediment and Pesticides in Runoff from Colusa County Almond Orchards." The project, funded by the California State Water Resource Control Board, sought to study the effectiveness of various best management practices (BMP) in reducing sediment and pesticides in orchard runoff, and to demonstrate this effectiveness to growers.

Goals of the project were to assist almond growers

throughout Colusa County to implement biological farming practices that reduce orchard erosion and the overall application of pesticides; determine the effects of erosion control practices and reduce pesticide use in almond orchards; and demonstrate and disseminate BMP and water quality impacts to almond growers and agricultural advisors in Colusa and Glenn counties.

Throughout the course of the project, BMPs such as cover crops, insectary hedgerows, grassed swales and various stream bank stabilization techniques were installed on eight Colusa County almond orchards. Measurements of sediment and Diazinon loads were taken upstream and downstream before and after BMP installation to assess effectiveness

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## Letter from the Executive Director

Summertime is here! The warmer weather is a great opportunity to have a picnic with a basket full of local food, enjoy an evening at a farmers market or go on a farm tour.

CAFF helps make these summer moments possible by working directly with family farmers, expanding the market for local food, and enhancing the relationships between growers and their communities. This issue of the Agrarian Advocate highlights the continued dedication of CAFF to advocate for family farmers and sustainable agriculture.

Our work allows us to work directly with farmers like John Gibson of Golden Bear Ranches in Lodi (page 3), and we have over 350 farmer members who rely on us for resources and support. In addition, our BioAg initiatives, such as the Colusa County Almond Project (page 1), incorporate sustainable and profitable practices to ensure that family farmers maintain their livelihood while protecting the community and the environment.

Several components of our Local Food System program are expanding the market for local food, while connecting communities to the farmers who grow their food. Farm stands—like that of the collaboration between CAFF and St. Joseph Health System (page 4)—help provide fresh food to community members. Our Farm to School program (page 8) continues to connect children with local food and agriculture in the classroom, on the farm and in the cafeteria. In partnership with the National Food Routes Network, CAFF has been running the Buy Fresh Buy Local (BFBL) campaign in California since 2002. Survey results from this past spring (page 6) indicate that BFBL has made a significant impact on both farmers and consumers.

CAFF is also a strong advocate for family-scale agriculture that cares for the land, sustains local economies and promotes social justice. In addition, CAFF's policy work keeps farmers and community members informed of current legislation and government proceedings (page 10).

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for helping ensure that fresh, local food is increasingly used throughout our communities. 🌱

Diane Del Signore  
 Executive Director

# Giving Back to the Dirt



*John Gibson, on his farm in Lodi, CA.*

**STORY BY ALLYSE HEARTWELL**

**PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF GOLDEN BEAR RANCHES**

John Gibson comes from a farm family. He credits his chosen profession to his great-grandmother's passion for agriculture, and likes to start his story with "Well, my Nona came over from Switzerland..."

John realized that he wanted to be a farmer as a teenager, while helping out on an uncle's farm in Linden during summer vacations. Now as the founder and President of Golden Bear Ranches (GBR), he farms sweet cherries and heirloom tomatoes on 150 acres in Lodi, CA.

Along the way, John won a football scholarship to the University of California at Berkeley, where he majored in agricultural history. When he got injured in his third year and had to quit the team, he poured all of his attention

into farming and hasn't looked back. Berkeley was a transformative experience, and the famously progressive hotbed of organic cuisine and environmental awareness left its mark on the way GBR (named in honor of his alma mater's colors and mascot) produces food.

After graduation, John went about setting up his business with a student's careful attention to detail. He talked to as many farmers and food buyers as possible, trying to determine what was in high demand amongst Bay Area and Sacramento chefs -- what was that "next big thing"? Eventually he settled on high-quality heirloom tomatoes, starting with 150 varieties on two acres.

Five years later, he has narrowed the varieties down to thirty-five and grown his production to ten acres. His foremost criterion for selecting which heirloom varieties to grow is hands-down great taste, and GBR tomatoes are sought after by some of California's best chefs. "Every one has a different taste," John exclaims excitedly. "Each one is its own thing. It's amazing!" His favorite is Azoychka, a firm, round, golden tomato with a crisp, citrusy taste.

GBR tomatoes and cherries are shipped directly from the farm to chefs and other buyers. Often they are picked the same morning they are transported. This summer their produce will also be available through the Growers Collaborative Bay Area aggregation hub, allowing them to reach new and bigger markets via mainstream distributors. Next school year they will also begin selling to schools in the Lodi and Stockton area, starting with kid-friendly cherry tomatoes.

GBR's on-farm practices are based on biological and conservation farming methods, and the farm is Certified Naturally

*GBR continued on page 5*

# Hospital Farm Stands:

Increasing workplace wellness in Humboldt County



*The farm stand at St. Joseph Hospital is helping to increase workplace wellness.*

**STORY BY MICHELLE WYLER**

**PHOTOGRAPH BY COURTNEY HUNT-MUNTER**

In Humboldt County, the Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) has teamed up with the St. Joseph Health System (SJHS) to deliver produce from local farmers directly to hospital employees. Hospital staff will have the opportunity to make meals that are good for their health, the environment and the community.

Following in the footsteps of Kaiser Permanente, SJHS is committed to bringing healthy food options to their employees. Eight years ago Kaiser started a successful farmers market at one hospital and it spread like wildfire to almost thirty of their other facilities across the nation.

In Eureka, SJHS has provided funding for a weekly farm stand, and more recently, a produce subscription program as part of their extensive workplace wellness initiative. "Workplace wellness" is creating a work environment that is healthy for employees encouraging healthy activity, eating, and education to improve employees' overall health.

Increasing evidence supports the need for workplace wellness programs and more companies are implementing health and wellness strategies to reduce injuries, health care costs and long-term disability. With additional benefits such as reduced absenteeism, higher productivity, reduced use of health care benefits and increased morale and loyalty, it's not surprising that more and more employers are choosing to implement these programs within their companies.

In addition to disease prevention and employee wellness, the weekly farm stand, and now the produce subscription program, also address food access. The farm stand, located on the front lawn of the General Hospital campus in Eureka, provides an easy food access point not only for hospital staff but for neighborhood residents as well. Patients receiving treatment, or picking up prescriptions, can stop for organic fruits and vegetables. Molly, a senior citizen, who was a regular at last year's farm stand, stated "I can't drive anymore, so getting to the store is hard for me. I come every

week for blood work and can get my veggies at the same time. How nice!” Access to, and education about, healthy eating is important since 58.5 percent of Humboldt County residents are overweight or obese, putting them at risk for preventable, diet-related disease.

A small market venue may not be lucrative enough for a farmer to attend while on-farm tasks pile up, so the CAFF-SJHS partnership is beneficial in many ways. To supply the farm stand and subscription boxes, CAFF works with a number of small local farmers to round out their offerings. Ideally, SJHS would like to incorporate local produce into the hospital meal program as well. The food service director would like to highlight a different fruit or vegetable each month, and CAFF is considering using the successful school-based Harvest of the Month program for promotion.

In Humboldt, and across the state, CAFF has worked with many institutions to connect local farmers with food service. Many institutions that are interested in sourcing local need technical assistance to make the transition from their current buying practices. CAFF provides individualized solutions, as situations vary drastically. In Humboldt, a lack of distribution choices and small quantities create challenges. Acting as a liaison, CAFF currently bridges institutional needs with farmers’ offerings to create new markets while also addressing the larger more complex issues.

The farm to institution relationship offers numerous benefits for all involved. In response to flooded farmers market venues in the region, the promising opportunity exists for developing new relationships with local institutions while focusing on workplace wellness. This timely and creative marketing is healthy for the workplace, the farmer and the community as a whole. 🌱

*GBR continued from page 3*

Grown. John considers stewardship to be a big part of what he does. He uses integrated pest management (IPM) and keeps insect pests in check with weekly ladybug releases. Soil fertility is maintained with organic compost and both annual and permanent cover crops. “I don’t want this spot just to have everything taken out of it and nothing put back in,” says John. “You always have to give back to the dirt. Every spring.”

But John is perhaps most excited by his new weather station. The state-of-the-art soil moisture monitoring system employs an array of probes that detect moisture, temperature and salinity. The system records data every 15 minutes, giving an extraordinarily detailed, real-time picture of what is occurring underground.

The weather station means that irrigation and fertilizer applications can be calculated with precision, and nothing goes to waste. It means saving money on energy, water and pump time, and John estimates that GBR’s weather station will pay for itself within five years. Since heirloom tomatoes are likely to split if they are over-watered, efficient irrigation also means making more money on a better, more consistent product.

John is excited about making GBR work better as a system. He plans to add more soil sensors, and perhaps a wind turbine. “Every single day you find out something you didn’t know about your farm, something you can do better,” he says. “Every day I wake up at 4:00 a.m. and get home at 7:00 or 8:00 p.m. But it’s not a job. It’s something I get to do every day.” *This article is published as part of CAFF’s Lighthouse Farm Network, which educates farmers and consumers about the innovative conservation practices of California family farmers.* 🌱

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## Transforming local food systems

STORY BY ARIANE MICHAS

The Buy Fresh Buy Local (BFBL) campaign is national in scope, with over 75 chapters for different agricultural regions around the country. A region could be as large as a state or as small as the Shenandoah Valley. Adjudicated by the Philadelphia-based nonprofit, FoodRoutes, BFBL chapters have been urging consumers to buy and enjoy the wonderful foods grown by family farmers. Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) runs the California chapter, which we are proud to say is one of the biggest and most active.

CAFF began its adventures with BFBL eight years ago, launching the campaign on the Central Coast. BFBL is a bridge-building exercise – connecting consumers on one end to the farmers who feed them on the other. Like all bridges, for this one to be a success, the two foundations needed to be strong. Consequently, CAFF worked to educate consumers about the benefits of buying local and increasing demand for these foods. We worked with family farmers to improve their marketing skills and capabilities, helping them set themselves apart and reach new customers.

In order to better measure and understand the impact that the BFBL campaign has had on farmers and the consumers they feed, we conducted two surveys this past spring. Our consumer survey, distributed to over 8,000 BFBL newsletter subscribers, as well as posted on the CAFF Web site, queried respondents about their food buying and dining habits. We've been pleased to learn that eighty-four percent of consumers report that they have increased their consumption of local food over the last three years. Eighty-four percent also report that the BFBL campaign has had a significant impact on that choice. Consumers indicate that they purchase all types of local food produced in their regions around California, including fresh produce, milk and cheese, sustainably harvested meat and eggs, preserved and value added foods, wine and olive oil. Consumers are responding to the abundance that is available to them and taking full advantage of BFBL's tools, including food guides and a searchable online database, in order to find and enjoy local foods.

CAFF also surveyed hundreds of businesses that have been impacted by the campaign, through listings in the BFBL guide, promotion in a retail/market setting, or because of a featured article in our newsletter or the East Bay Express. One farmer reports that BFBL “brings people in our community away from large factory farms and into relationships with local producers like myself.” Another finds the marketing assistance of BFBL especially valuable to her business: “By raising general awareness of the importance of buying local food [it] helps make our job marketing our food locally much easier and more effective.”

Another farmer recognizes the guide as an important educational resource for the eating public as well as a useful directory for business owners: “Thanks to the guide, consumers are more aware of the importance of choosing local, fresh, organic and seasonal foods. It’s a great resource for the caring consumer. It also helps me to find other like-minded business that may want to buy my fruits.”

Farmers aren’t the only businesses impacted by the activities of the BFBL campaign. Members include retail grocers, farmers market associations, food artisans, and restaurants, among others. Our survey revealed that retail grocers are finding that the campaign also appeals to their customers. One market owner reported, “We have a big sign in our front window with the logo. It’s a very memorable tag line, so I think it sticks with people.” Many consumers use the guide as their go-to source to find a dining spot. One restaurateur relates that, “We’ve had several customers that have mentioned that they used the guide to locate our restaurant.”

We are encouraged by the results from our surveys; the BFBL campaign is changing the eating and buying habits of consumers. In doing so, we continue to assist small farmers to find new markets, and help small businesses that offer fresh, local foods to thrive. We look forward to continuing to improve and expand California’s local food systems. 🌱



*Colusa from page 1*

of reducing sediment and pesticide runoff into adjacent waterways. Extensive outreach with landowners and almond growers was conducted throughout the project, including several field days, newsletters, fact sheets, and a reference manual detailing successful BMPs.

Overall, results from the project were positive. During interviews, landowners expressed a high level of satisfaction with project outcomes, especially in regards to decreasing stream bank and roadside ditch erosion, a common problem in almond orchards. Mary Fahey, Watershed Coordinator with the Colusa County Resource Conservation District and a participating landowner in the study, credits the large amount and variety of vegetation planted at each of the project sites with playing an important role in filtering orchard runoff while providing the additional benefits of “increasing soil health, providing habitat for beneficial insects, pollinators and wildlife, and adding beauty and biodiversity to the natural landscape.”

The Colusa Almond Project serves as a concrete example of how BMP and IPM techniques can be a successful and cost effective tool for reducing the impacts of stream bank erosion and pesticide runoff on water quality, while enhancing beneficial insect and wildlife habitat. Contingent on permission from landowners, the project sites could be used in the future for tours and workshops to show how similar projects can be successfully integrated into productive farming systems. Additionally, the Colusa Almond Project proves that collaboration may yield successful and cost effective solutions to agricultural management concerns.

Project partners included Audubon California, the Colusa County Resource Conservation District, the Center for Land Based Learning, Larry Walker Associates, Natural Resources Conservation Service and the UC Davis GIS lab.

*Funding for this project has been provided in full or in part by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 and the Clean Water State Revolving Fund, through an agreement with the State Water Resources Control Board.* 🌱

*For more information, please visit [www.caff.org](http://www.caff.org)*

# On-Farm Education Continues to Grow



*Students prepare to search for bugs on the farm.*

## STORY AND PHOTOGRAPH BY ERIN DERDEN-LITTLE

On a Friday morning in May, fourth graders from Dow's Prairie Elementary School gather in the grass circle at Redwood Roots Farm to start their Farm to School (F2S) field trip. One student raises her hand and asks what is happening in the field further on; it looks like people are sprinkling powdered sugar over chocolate cake! A staff member explains that the farm crew is spreading oyster shell flour on the soil to prepare it for spring planting. The students set off to explore different parts of the farm with the field trip docents, crossing paths with the farm crew as they go.

This scene is typical of field trips coordinated by CAFF's F2S program in Humboldt County, which relies on close partnerships with working farms. Redwood Roots Farm owner Janet Czarnecki is committed to on-farm education, and welcomes the integration of F2S into her operations.

"It is important to me that educational activities like field trips can happen at my farm," Janet says. "I can't devote enough time to do it myself, but the Farm to School Program makes it possible."

Janet must coordinate numerous details to meet the demands of her farm and her customers. With five acres under production, she grows over thirty types of vegetables, along with herbs, berries and cut flowers. Janet sells all of her produce and flowers on-site through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and a twice-weekly farm stand. Allowing large groups of high-energy children to invade a working farm takes a lot of communication and the appropriate space. For Janet, this is an added variable to her already complex equation. CAFF works hard to make the integration as seamless as possible, and to ensure the relationship is mutually beneficial.

CAFF is fortunate to have a partner like Redwood Roots



to provide students with a local example of a small-scale, ecologically managed, diverse farm. The farm has been the main site for CAFF's field trips since 2007, reaching almost 3,000 students from 18 elementary schools in Humboldt County. The field trips allow students to take a first-hand look at local food production, make a personal connection to agriculture, and apply science and nutrition concepts in the garden. As a female farmer, Janet also helps break down students' stereotypes about who can drive a tractor.

These field trips benefit the farmer, too. While exposing students, parents, and teachers to Redwood Roots, the field trips have helped to raise awareness of the farm itself, and of local agriculture in general. Referred to affectionately as the "The Roots Farm" by students all over the county, Janet's farm is now well recognized for the educational activities that happen there, and she benefits from the additional exposure within the community. Many families return to shop at her farm stand.

By opening her farm to F2S activities, Janet has enabled the program to mature and grow to the point where it must look beyond Redwood Roots to meet growing demand. Accordingly, CAFF is expanding its field trip program to other Humboldt County farms. One of those farms is Shakefork Community Farm in Carlotta, where farmers Kevin and Melanie Cunningham focus on grain, animal and vegetable production. Soon, Humboldt County students may be asking about their next visit to "The Fork Farm!" 🌱

*CAFF is grateful for all of our production and educational farm partners that make the Farm to School field trips possible, including: ALBA - Agriculture and Land Based Training Association, Everett Family Farm, Full Circle Farm, Route 1 Farm, UCSC Farm and Garden and Veggielution.*



## North Coast Chapter Update

BY JANUS HOLT MATTHES

- CAFF's North Coast Chapter policy committee has been actively engaged for several months, updating both the Williamson Act requirements and the agriculture zoning ordinance. These efforts have paid off, as changes have been made that will help protect and enhance small farms in Sonoma County. For example, farmstays will be allowed in all agricultural zones.

- We have focused most of our energies on the Agricultural Residential (AR) zone to stop commercialization and to strengthen food security. As a result of our efforts working in the community, wine tasting rooms will not be allowed in this important buffer zone. Small farmers will now have the chance to process on-site for local sales. By strengthening the AR zone, the county recognizes the importance and viability of small farms and fosters harmonious relationships between small-scale agriculture and neighboring residential uses.

- Sonoma County has seen a dramatic increase in vegetable production and processing of local agricultural products in recent years. According to the Sonoma County Agricultural Commissioner's crop reports, in 2009 there were 701 acres of vegetables grown in Sonoma County, an increase of 44 percent over 2007. And, the gross crop value of vegetables per acre exceeds that of wine grapes by 42 percent. We hope these numbers will encourage more diversity and food production in this region.

- In partnership with the Sonoma County Food System Alliance's Farm to Institution committee, CAFF's Farm to School Director, Diana Abellera, has applied for a grant to implement the Harvest of the Month program in West Sonoma County schools this fall. Four of the five counties in the North Coast Chapter are the focus of a USDA funded Aggregation and Marketing Center Feasibility Study led by Bob Corshen, Local Food Systems Director at CAFF. Four of our members worked for many months on a farmers' survey. Survey results can be found on the CAFF Web site.

*Chapter Notes continued on page 11*

# Policy Update



BY DAVE RUNSTEN

PHOTOGRAPH BY CARLO FANTI

The Food Safety Modernization Act that passed last year is starting to take effect. There are many consequences for food processors and food importers. The FDA is currently writing rules for the produce industry. They expect to finish them by the end of 2011. It appears that there will be some basic rules that all farmers subject to the law will have to abide by, and then there will be recommended practices for specific crops. They have abandoned their effort to write rules for each “risky” crop. The only specialty crop growers who will be exempt from FDA oversight will be those small enough and with enough direct local sales to qualify under the Tester amendment, and they will have to demonstrate that they are complying with state and local food safety requirements.

There is a process underway called the Food Safety Alliance, which is a joint effort among the USDA, FDA, and the Land Grant Universities to develop a food safety outreach program to for small farmers and other small food firms. It is being led by Cornell University. CAFF and other sustainable agriculture groups are trying to participate, but we are greatly outnumbered by representatives of produce associations and food corporations, even though this is supposed to be about small farmers.

The USDA issued a proposed rule for the National Leafy Green Marketing Agreement that Western Growers has been promoting. It would nationalize the approach taken at the state level in California and Arizona. Leafy greens processors and shippers who joined the agreement would be responsible for ensuring that all of their farm suppliers

operated with a set of food safety metrics approved by the Agreement. CAFF is opposed to this approach, since we have found the metrics used in California to be costly and inappropriate for smaller farms, unable to prevent outbreaks, and hostile to wildlife. And it would just make farmers even more subject to control by shippers and processors.

We will put material and links on our Web site and try to keep it up to date as these processes continue.

## **Sacramento legislation**

CAFF is supporting a number of bills in Sacramento and sponsored a couple as part of the California Climate and Agriculture Network (CalCAN). Here is an update:

AB 88 – Huffman, Labeling GE Salmon—This bill was not gaining the support it needed to move through the Assembly and so was turned into a 2-year bill and will be considered again next year. CAFF has always supported labeling GE foods.

AB 292 – Galgiani, Mitigating the effects of High Speed Rail on Agriculture—There is concern that the route of the high speed rail line through the San Joaquin Valley will have significant impacts on agricultural land, and this bill seeks to force the authorities to pay more attention to them. It has moved on to the Senate.

AB 359 – Huffman, Mapping groundwater recharge areas—This bill requires local authorities to map groundwater recharge areas and provide the information to planning departments and other interested parties. It was opposed by the Farm Bureau, Western Growers, and the Chamber of Commerce, but it was amended to provide for notification

to such organizations. CAFF supports it as amended since we believe it is vital to focus water agencies on groundwater recharge. It has moved on to the Senate.

AB 581 – John A. Perez, Healthy Food Financing—This bill sets up a state entity to coordinate receipt of funds from the federal Healthy Food Financing Initiative, which would support increased food access in underserved areas, should those funds be appropriated by Congress. It has moved on to the Senate.

AB 634 – Huber, Vertebrate pest control—This bill would allow the use of carbon monoxide to kill gophers and other vertebrate pests. Sponsored by the Farm Bureau. It has moved on to the Senate.

SB 237 – Wolk, Climate Change and Agriculture—This is the second year that CalCAN has introduced this legislation, which states that should there be funds available from climate change regulation (AB 32), that some of them should be directed to agriculture for research and implementation of adaptive measures. The bill was held in the Appropriations Committee, as there is an unwillingness in the Legislature to move forward on this issue until broader problems with the implementation of AB 32 are resolved by the Air Resources Board.

SB 489 – Wolk, Expand net metering—This bill is also sponsored by CalCAN, and seeks to expand the net metering program—which currently covers only solar, wind, and fuel cells—to all alternative energy sources. In particular, we seek to have the program cover bio-energy projects by farmers and food processors utilizing biological waste products, such as walnut or almond shells. At present the costs to connect such projects to the grid are prohibitive. It has moved on to the Assembly.

SB 676 – Leno, The Industrial Hemp Farming Act—CAFF has supported this bill in the past and we continue to believe that California farmers should be able to produce industrial hemp, as the farmers in Canada do. This bill proposes a pilot program in Imperial, Kern, Kings, and San Joaquin Counties. It has moved on to the Assembly.

There are of course many other bills that affect agriculture that we have not taken positions on. One of these is allowing labor unions to use card check for organizing farm workers. That bill passed the legislature but was vetoed by Governor Brown.

We have put a list of bills on our Web site, which we

will update every few weeks. Most of the bills we have been supporting are still alive, although a couple were held because they were deemed to cost too much money.

### **Federal budget battle**

Congress cut \$500 million from current Farm Bill environmental programs (EQIP, etc.) in their continuing resolution for 2011. The House of Representatives is proposing to cut another \$1 billion from these programs in 2012, including \$100 million from NRCS technical assistance. CAFF believes that this is very short sighted and that we should be investing more in converting agriculture to sustainable practices. We have been working with ten other organizations in California and the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition to oppose these cuts. We have met with Sam Farr's and Dianne Feinstein's staff and we intend to continue to fight for these programs. We will be sending out action alerts at crucial moments in the process and we encourage you to contact your federal representatives and let them know that these programs are important for California agriculture. 🌱

### *Chapter Notes from page 9*

- We will be participating at the Mendocino County Sustainable Wine Grape conference in early August, presenting what we've learned about dry farming from our previous field days at dry farmed vineyards.

- North Coast Chapter leader Janus Holt Matthes was a guest this past spring on "The Food Show with Clark Wolf," a local TV show that promotes seasonal foods produced locally. Wolf is televised the last Saturday and Sunday of each month at 6 p.m. on channel 50 and usually features a CAFF farmer. Wendy Krupnick was the lunch speaker for EcoOdyssey stop at Bounty Farm in Petaluma. This is the first no-fossil-fueled, 12-day tour of the Bay Area that was attended by a host of dignitaries and had international recognition. In addition, Wendy is included in the July issue of North Bay Biz magazine's article on legislative and policy threats to the local agricultural industry. 🌱



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