

# FARMER<sup>TO</sup>FARMER

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

WINTER 2006

## Chip Chop Shred

On November 3, 2005, a crowd gathered in a Modesto-area walnut orchard to see the latest in innovative brush chipping and shredding equipment. Stanislaus County Farm Advisor Kathy Kelly Anderson and CAFF worked together, with funding from the "Buy California" Initiative, to host the popular event. Following introductions and a review of the air quality regulations by Anderson, the group heard from Joe Mota from the Natural Resources Conservation Service. He provided information on cost share funds available to offset the costs of chipping or shredding the prunings from almond and walnut orchards. For more information on cost share funding, contact your local NRCS office.

The crowd of more than 120 farmers and other agricultural professionals then moved into the tree rows where stacked brush was piled, awaiting the onslaught of the big equipment. Nine different machines demonstrated their capacity to chip and shred pruned branches, and growers rushed into the rows to examine the results. "It's about the environment and organic matter, but also about big, noisy diesel engines driving steel into wood, shattering or slicing it into bits. It's literally a thrill and it's free." That's how Mark Cady of CAFF describes a Chip-Off event.



Farmers are looking for alternatives to burning orchard brush.

Interest is high in chipping and shredding equipment because in June of 2010, brush pruned from almonds, walnuts, pecans, pears, chestnuts, and other orchard trees will no longer be eligible for burn permits. Growers cooperating with University of California Cooperative Extension are working out effective systems to re-use their prunings in the orchard as part of the natural biological system. In-field



chipping adds valuable organic material to the soil and can lead to better water infiltration and soil quality. This practice is evolving as more growers and equipment manufacturers innovate and collaborate, making the process work for everyone. Veteran brush chipper Bert Walters of Turlock has

seen the condition of soils change dramatically after five or more years of in-field chipping, "It's like adding compost every year, the ground just gets better."

Bringing the machines, their operators and farmers together in the orchard is an exciting and useful event that CAFF has been a part of for many seasons. Growers have seen improvements in the technology and refinements of chipping and shredding. With CAFF's help they have been able to make informed decisions about this increasingly important farming practice. ■

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A Project of Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF) P.O. Box 363, Davis, CA 95617  
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## Farm-to-School Vision

CAFF has been at the forefront of the Farm-to-School movement in California since 1999. To date, CAFF has mobilized more farm-to-school projects than any other group in California. CAFF's program is focused on creating distribution networks that can be used by school nutrition directors to purchase their produce from local farms easily and without increasing their standard food budget. This makes the purchase of more fruits and vegetables a sustainable economic choice for financially strapped school districts.

Schools often balk at including fresh fruits and vegetables into their cafeteria because of the extra cost involved and the perceived additional difficulty of preparing and presenting the food. CAFF resolves these problems by:

- Working with school nutrition directors to build purchasing schedules that take advantage of seasonal shifts in cost of produce
- Forming not-for-profit distribution cooperatives specifically to supply local schools with efficient distribution from local, small-scale farms to local schools
- Finding cost-effective ways to bring fresh food into the cafeteria with minimal processing and transport
- Partnering with other organizations with similar infrastructure needs (food banks, community gardens, etc.) to share storage space and cut overhead costs

Where possible, CAFF's distribution system can impact many parts of the community, increasing access to fresh fruits and vegetables with on-school and mobile farmers' markets for low-income parents.



## Sustainable Cotton Tour

BY MATT VALDIN

In late October, the Sustainable Cotton Project held its annual Sustainable Cotton Tour in Fresno County. It was our largest tour to date, with over 50 people including representatives from Levis, NASA, Wal-Mart, the California Department of Food and Agriculture, the Organic Exchange, and many others from the cotton industry. Levi Strauss & Company was nice enough to sponsor our tour this year. Thank you, Levis!

The tour highlights the work of the Sustainable Cotton Project's

Biological Agriculture Systems in Cotton (BASIC) growers. Starting from Fresno, we headed to Terranova Ranch to view the only organic cotton in California. The farm's general manager, Don Cameron, spoke about the difficulties and the lessons learned from growing organic Pima cotton. Though Terranova could grow other crops with

greater profitability, the farm is growing organic cotton because they are committed to environmental stewardship and are trying to farm in a more ecologically sound manner.

The Panoche Gin was the next stop. Participants were able to see what happens to cotton after it is picked and put into modules. We were met by manager Ed Wandzell, who described how cotton lint is separated from the seed and then baled for transport to a spinning facility. He also explained the mandatory bale numbering system, which assures traceability of each bale from the field through processing.

Firebaugh City Park was the destination for our lunch stop. Food provided by a nearby taqueria was supplemented with local fruits and organic heirloom tomatoes from BASIC grower John Teixeira's Lone Willow Farm. We discovered the hard way that the park's sprinklers come on in the afternoon, and were forced to take cover out of the sprinklers' reach. Luckily, Jose Antonio Ramirez, Firebaugh City Manager, came to the rescue and turned off the water system.

Our lunchtime speaker was Dr. Marcia Sablan, of Firebaugh's Sablan Medical Clinic, who spoke to us about the impacts of agriculture on air quality and the health of local residents. Her talk emphasized to participants the importance of pesticide reduction and the vital role that projects like the Sustainable Cotton Project play in reducing farm impacts. We also heard from grower Frank Williams, who talked about his participation in the BASIC program and then invited us to head out to see his cotton field.

We boarded the buses and headed toward the west side of the San Joaquin Valley to Windfall Farms. Windfall has had two 80-acre cotton fields enrolled in the BASIC program since 2001. Growers Mark Fickett and Frank Williams greeted us and showed the techniques they have implemented as BASIC growers, including intercropping cotton with alfalfa plants to provide a sink for the lygus bugs. We saw the farm's annual hedgerows of sunflowers, corn, sorghum, dill, and mustard, which provide habitat for beneficial insects.

At the end of the day, the bus headed to Fresno full of tired cotton enthusiasts. Everyone in attendance seemed to enjoy the tour and left with a better understanding of how to support California cotton growers in their efforts to reduce cotton's environmental impacts. ■

We'll see you at the 26th annual  
**Ecological Farming Conference**  
January 25-28, 2006

Asilomar Conference Grounds, Pacific Grove

## 2006 Irrigation & Nutrient Management Meeting and Cover Crop Field Day

Tuesday, February 21, 8:00 AM – 3:00 PM

Monterey County Agricultural Center, 1432 Abbott St., Salinas & USDA Spence Vegetable Research Station, 1572 Old Stage Road, Salinas

We will discuss new research on irrigation and nutrient management. After indoor presentations, the meeting will move to the USDA Spence Vegetable Research Station for a field day examining cover crop and other strategies for improving water quality, as well as for organic vegetable production. There will be a presentation on Vegetation Conservation Practices: Hedgerows and Grassed Waterways. Continuing Education, Certified Crop Advisor and Water Quality Credits will be requested.

For information call Richard Smith (831) 759-7350 or Sam Earnshaw (831) 722-5556

Sponsored by University of California Cooperative Extension, Monterey County; USDA, Salinas; Community Alliance with Family Farmers; Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA); Community Foundation of Monterey County's Supplemental Environmental Projects Fund; State Water Resources Water Control Board

## Monitoring Data & Agricultural Waiver Workshop

Elkhorn Slough Conference Center, Watsonville

BY CHRIS GOODSON

Growers, land owners, and technical assistance specialists recently met to discuss the Agricultural Waiver process, monitoring data, and what can be done to improve Elkhorn Slough water quality. The November 18 meeting was sponsored by the Central Coast Agricultural Water Quality Coalition and CAFF.

This meeting also had the purpose of convening the Elkhorn Slough Watershed Working Group—local growers and landowners interested in water quality issues.

Marc Los Huertos, of UC Santa Cruz, gave a presentation on the key water quality issues facing Elkhorn Slough. Of note are the unusually high phosphorus inputs from tile drains, very high nitrate concentrations flowing into the lower Elkhorn Slough from the Salinas River, and sediment pulses following rain storms.

David Martella, of the Central Coast Water Quality Preservation—Agricultural Committee, answered audience questions regarding the Agricultural Waiver and cooperative water-quality monitoring program. He stressed that growers can still complete the requirements for the Agricultural Waiver without penalties.

Cost-sharing possibilities for water quality improvements were also mentioned. Water quality protection practices, features and services were discussed by panelists Mark Los Huertos, Sam Earnshaw (CAFF), Karminder Brown (Monterey RCD), as well as Natural Resources Conservation Service staffers Terry Hall, Kevin Healy, Cheryl Lambert, and Glenn Wilcox.

At one point, the panelists were asked how growers can be sure that their water quality improvement efforts will satisfy the Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) without being given numeric targets for water quality monitoring parameters. The collective answer can be summed up as follows: the RWQCB measures success by the numbers of water quality practices implemented, rather than changes in water quality. In other words, what matters most under the current Agricultural Waiver is that growers are thinking about water quality management practices and are working to implement them. ■

For more information on watershed working groups, water quality technical assistance or the Agricultural Waiver, please contact your local Water Quality Coordinator.

- Santa Cruz County (English & Spanish); Elkhorn Slough (English): Chris Goodson, (831) 227-5404, email GoodsonWQ@yahoo.com
- Elkhorn Slough (Spanish): Craig Ficenec, (831) 786-8760
- Monterey County (English): April England, (831) 751-3100

### Save the Date for the TASTE THE DIFFERENCE CELEBRATION

Monday, January 23 6:30 to 8:30 1 Fort Mason, San Francisco

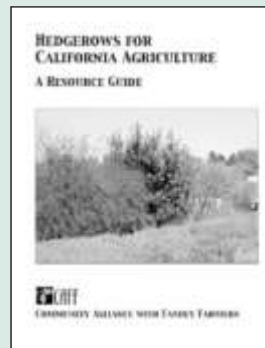
Lively discourse, local wines, and a wonderful array of tastes will show that we can still eat locally in the midst of winter.

A panel discussion moderated by Larry Bain of Nextcourse will offer rural and urban perspectives on sustainable eating in the winter.

To benefit Community Alliance with Family Farmers

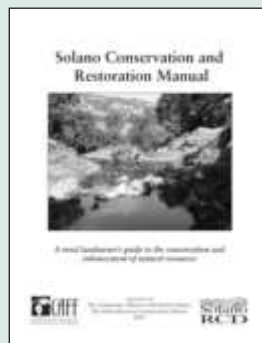
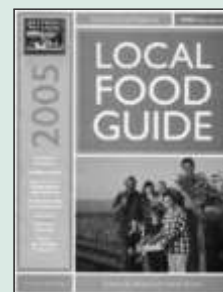
## CAFF Publications

**Hedgerows for California Agriculture.** This manual will help you choose and care for regionally appropriate plants that attract beneficial insects and prevent erosion. It lists native plant nurseries and consultants/contractors specializing in hedgerow and other restoration projects. Download it at [www.caff.org](http://www.caff.org).



**Making the Farm Connection.** This manual is designed to let farmers know what to expect when hosting a farm visit. The booklet is also very useful for teachers and classes so that they may get the most out of their farm visit. Download at [www.caff.org](http://www.caff.org).

**Central Coast Local Food Guide.** A free booklet from the *Buy Fresh Buy Local* Campaign, this will tell you where to find seasonal, fresh, locally-grown food, including farmers' markets, CSAs, restaurants, and family farms. Available at various locations. Call (831) 761-8507 for details.



**Solano Conservation & Restoration Manual.** Do you constantly battle unwanted weeds on your land? Are you tired of watching the stream carry away your land? Worried about that gully that grows larger every year? Find the solutions to these and other resource concerns in this manual. Establishing native grasses, managing rangeland, pond habitat, hedgerows, grassed waterways, riparian practices, prescribed burns, and much more. 145 pages, easy to use, update and share. \$15. To order, e-mail [marcia@caff.org](mailto:marcia@caff.org).

**BASIC Cotton Manual.** Practical Lessons Learned from the Sustainable Cotton Project's Biological Agriculture Systems in Cotton (BASIC) Program, San Joaquin Valley, California, 2001 to 2004. This manual describes management and marketing options for cotton production systems that use bio-intensive, integrated pest management to reduce chemical inputs. \$15. To order, e-mail [marcia@caff.org](mailto:marcia@caff.org).



## Turkish Cotton *continued from page 1*

Farm groups from around the world attended the farmer networking meetings. Most had similar concerns about cotton production, which centered on the following areas:

- The need to balance price and demand and find inventive ways of sharing profits with farmers
- The importance of better forecasting and providing advance contracts for organic growers
- Maintaining the integrity of certification while reducing certification costs
- Finding rotation crops with good markets and fair market value



Cotton ready to be picked east of Izmir.

The OE conference was a three-day affair that ran like clockwork. We heard from executives of leading brands and retailers about their successes and struggles in the organic cotton market. There were folks from every part of the supply chain. I met Paraguayan farmers who have started their own organic program, a solo farmer from Kenya who is interested in trying organic cotton, and dynamic marketers with vision and know-how who are making organic cotton a reality within their brands. We were able to browse in the Organic Marketplace where retailers and spinners and textile manufacturers displayed their latest organic cotton products. One evening we were treated to a gala dinner, Turkish style, with local food, music and dancing.

The real highlight was getting to travel out in the country and visit Turkish cotton farms. Tour buses took us east out of Izmir and we saw vast valleys planted with grapes, olives, citrus, and fields of mature cotton with small groups of pickers gathering the bolls. We visited a very beautiful organic farm where cotton was being harvested along with fields of rotational food crops. The country is lovely, very reminiscent of California, with a warm climate and friendly, hospitable people.

It became easy to see why countries like Turkey, Pakistan, India, and even China are taking the lead on the organic market. They have the right growing conditions and a large supply of labor. Here in California, the number of acres of organic cotton has dropped

dramatically since 1995, when 24,000 acres were planted, to the current 80 acres. With hand labor at a premium, the costs for weeding an acre of organic cotton in California is about \$400 per acre. The price that apparel manufacturers are willing to pay for their cotton, even high quality California cotton, cannot really offset the costs.

The Sustainable Cotton Project is continuing to help California cotton growers utilize management practices that reduce cotton's impact on our biological resources while maintaining quality and yields. We also are sponsoring a program in 2006 to assist cotton growers who are interested in giving the organic production system a try. We will keep you posted. ■

### Coming up in CAFF's 2006

## Biological Agriculture Program

The Biological Farming Program builds and supports communities of farmers, agricultural professionals, and public institutions dedicated to the voluntary adoption of a whole systems approach to farm management. This approach is flexible, maintains long-term profitability, and conserves and enhances water, soil and air resources. To fulfill this mission in 2006, we will be working on these projects:

- Environmentally responsible tree crop production in the Feather River Basin, starting up in Yuba & Sutter counties
- The BASIC Project (Biological Agriculture Systems in Cotton) in Fresno, Merced and Madera counties —a continuing project
- A new organic cotton demonstration site in the San Joaquin Valley
- Market development for BASIC's reduced-pesticide cotton
- Hedgerow, filter strip and grassed waterway installation and organizing in the Central Coast
- International collaboration through the Better Cotton Project to develop ecological standards on the production of cotton worldwide

## We'll Miss You Liv!

Liv Nevin is leaving CAFF's Central Coast office this month after three years of running the region's *Buy Fresh, Buy Local* campaign, which she built into one of the nation's most successful local branding initiatives for small farmers. Liv brought an unusual and effective range of skills to CAFF—she worked as a Buddhist monk in Brazil and trained in conflict resolution in the Netherlands. Liv is wise beyond her years—very skilled at bringing diverse stakeholders and differing points of view together around the table.

Liv was just married in September, and is moving up to Corvallis to be near her parents, who bought a new place in Oregon after selling their farm back East this spring. We are all happy for Liv to be settling into a new life in the Northwest, but will sorely miss her energy, passion and beautiful smile! ■

