

**F A R M E R** <sup>T</sup> **o** **F A R M E R**

REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

August/September 2001 Issue #14

*Ventura, June 20***Ventura Farm-to-School Project**

A small, but potent group met on June 20 to hear a year-end progress report on the Ventura Farm-to-School Salad Bar Project. We also discussed ways

to move forward during the coming school year.

Salad bar meals were served at Juanamaria Elementary School on Wednesdays and Fridays, from March 21 through June 8. During that period, 3,943 salad bar meals were served, an average of 282 salad bar meals per day. Of those 282, 20 per day were for teachers. On days the salad bar was available, students chose the salad bar over the hot lunch by a factor ranging from three and a half to four and a half to one, depending on what the hot meal was for the day.

The average cost of a salad bar meal, including produce, protein, dairy and grains, was 81¢ per meal. This figure does not include the cost of labor and procurement. The meal cost is in the same range as the cost of a standard hot meal purchased from an outside vendor such as Dominos or Taco Bell.

Produce served at the salad bar included lettuce, tomatoes, jicama, lemons, avocados, carrots, broccoli, cucumbers, strawberries, tangerines and oranges. All produce was grown locally except for the cucumbers, although they were purchased from a local farmstand. Almost none of the produce was organic, by request of the school district.

The school district seems inclined to allow the trial to continue during the 2001-2002 school year. All decisions are complicated, however, by the resignation of the former superintendent, effective June 30, and the advent of a new superintendent July 1. In addition, the Director of Child Nutrition Services resigned effective June 30, and it is not known when or by whom he will be replaced.

During the past school year, the additional cafeteria positions required for salad bar preparation were classified as temporary part-time; for the coming school year they will become permanent part-time. Preparation time for each day's salad bar totaled 14 hours. Conversations with the salad bar coordinators at Davis and Santa Monica-Malibu lead us to believe this time can be cut considerably. This will require negotiations with the Department of Child Nutrition Services and perhaps the Classified Employees Association. Because of the delays due to staffing changes within the administration, we will not be able to use the summer to plan for the upcoming school year.

The salad bar project has been configured to be part of a larger Healthy School Project, which also includes coordination with a sequential nutrition education curriculum, classroom food demonstrations, a Garden Enhanced Nutrition Project funded by the California Department of Education, and an enhanced physical education effort. Cooperation with the PTA, which has been vital to the success of the project so far, continues.

The chief immediate obstacle is fundraising. In order to continue the project during the 2001-2002 school year we will have to provide funding for the cafeteria workers who will prepare and serve the salad bar meals. With the change of these positions from temporary to permanent, costs may increase considerably.

This past year the majority of the produce was purchased from one farmer. This minimized the time involved sourcing the produce, in order to spend more time working with the school district. However, there should be a more equitable process to open the program to more local farmers. We also need to find a local source of cucumbers and cherry tomatoes.

We owe enormous thanks to the following: Craig Underwood and his terrific staff at Underwood Farms; Steve Sprinkel and Will Etchart; Juanamaria Principal Shelley DuPratt and her sterling cadre of teachers; the Juanamaria PTA; our regular volunteers Sandra Knapp, Tammy Ryder, Sara Radding, Andi, Kathy, Norma and Nilda; the cafeteria staff at Juanamaria School; Ed Diaz, who just retired as Child Nutrition Services Director but who got us started; and to the Child Nutrition Services, Accounting, and Classified Employee Relations staff at Ventura Unified School District.

In addition, CAFF owes an enormous debt of gratitude to Pat McCart Malloy and Tim Malloy, who have truly sparked this effort and blown constantly on the embers.

*Watsonville, June 24***CSA Farm Tour Day**

With the rapid consolidation in wholesale and retail markets, direct marketing options like Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) are becoming a lifeline for many family farmers. CSA is a mutually supportive arrangement in which farm members pay a portion of a farmer's production expenses and in return receive weekly shipments of fresh produce which vary in content according to the season. The CSA Farm Tour Day was a joint effort between CAFF and local CSA farmers who have been working together for several years to promote this specialized form of direct marketing.

Participating farms throughout Santa Cruz County from Boulder Creek to Watsonville invited residents to check out their offerings during this Farm Tour Day. Participants had the opportunity to visit several individual farms that provided tours and activities. The activities allowed visitors of all ages to experience farming first hand and become part of the farm life. The tour culminated with a main event at High Ground Organics where there were booths, games and farm animals for the kids to see and pet.

The main event included tours of High Ground's row crops, flowers and adjacent wildlife habitat restoration project. Live Earth Farm, Mariquita Farm, High Ground and CAFF hosted information tables and displayed sample share boxes of fresh organic produce. 3C Acres brought rare breed turkeys, chickens and mini-rex rabbits for all to pet and see. The other participating farms were Camp Joy, The Homeless Garden Project, The UCSC Farm and Garden and Ella Bella Farm.

Each CSA farm was described in a booklet that provided directions to the participating farms. The booklets were made available during the event and beforehand at selected retail establishments. In addition, a media release was prepared and distributed to local and regional newspapers and television and radio stations. Several participating farms expressed interest in making this an annual event. Thanks to CAFF member Cathy Carlson who was the volunteer coordinator for this event and to Mike DiMarco for getting the word out to his extensive media list!

*Hilmar, June 28*

## BIOS for Almonds Field Day

Merced area farmers and industry representatives met at Glenn Anderson's almond orchard for a BIOS field day. The event included several informative speakers, an equipment demonstration and informal discussions.

To begin, host farmer Glenn Anderson and board members of Big Tree Organic Almond Cooperative shared information on growing and marketing organic almonds. Growers receive a price that is approximately three times higher for organic

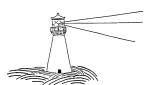
almonds than conventionally grown almonds. Prices for conventionally grown almonds are low right now, which results in low returns to growers. Organic almonds offer an attractive alternative to that market. At this time the organic almond supply is completely sold out, and the Big Tree cooperative is seeking to add more growers. The transition to certified organic is a three-year process. However, some growers receive a price premium for almonds in transition to organic.

Weed and disease management without synthetic pesticides are two areas of orchard management that present challenges for the organic grower. Anderson advised that growers interested in farming organically should seek out a mentor with experience to guide them through the transition process.

Garton Tractor of Turlock brought a Muratori reverse tiller for demonstration. Anderson used this tiller for the first time this year to turn under the organic matter on the soil surface to prepare for harvest. When Anderson demonstrated the tiller, those present saw a floor with significant organic matter turned to a floor with little, or no, visible organic matter in only one pass. Additionally, this tiller is now available with a seeder and roller mounted on it. An excellent application for this tiller would be a single pass after brush chipping to incorporate chips while planting a cover crop.



Sherman Boone, a BIOS almond farmer and custom harvester, presented an analysis comparing the cost of maintaining a clean orchard floor throughout the season to letting a cover crop grow as much as possible through the year and cleaning up just before harvest. The cost of several strategies were compared that included: mowing versus spraying, varying combinations of mowing and spraying, and using Round Up versus Surflan. The cost for slower crop pick-up on the covercropped floor was taken into consideration. Each management strategy cost about the same, Boone said, with the exception of the strategy that used Surflan. He pointed out that it doesn't cost more to let the cover crop grow



Through a statewide network of monthly meetings and field days, the Lighthouse Farm Network (LFN) provides technical assistance and support to all those interested in biological farming practices.

Biologically Integrated Orchard Systems program, or BIOS, offers technical assistance to growers who want to adopt an approach to orchard management that reduces their reliance on agricultural chemicals.



The LFN and BIOS come under the umbrella of CAFF's biological farming program, providing technical support, services and assistance to farmers, commodity boards, agricultural professionals and communities about biological farming practices.

We use farm field days, tours, collaborative projects and informational materials to demonstrate and increase the implementation of biological farming practices.

Mission: CAFF is a nonprofit membership organization 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. CAFF encourages contributions of any size to support our work. Contributions to CAFF are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by the law.

*Many thanks to our funders: Patagonia, Farm Aid, USDA-EQIP, Cal Fed Bay/Delta Accord, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Center for Ecoliteracy.*



*Cultivating healthy farms, food & communities*

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through the season and take it down just prior to harvest, and there may be a cost savings due to the nitrogen the cover crop supplies to the system.

Tom DeWitt of Valent followed with a discussion about ant baits. Esteem and Clinch, two ant baits currently available, have been used successfully to control ants in almonds for the last couple of years. Before the baits were widely used, Lorsban was the chemical control of choice. Esteem and Clinch provide a level of control and cost comparable to Lorsban. They are more environmentally friendly, however, putting out only a fraction of the amount of active ingredient as Lorsban. DeWitt also brought a spreader to the field day and discussed Valent's program to assist growers in obtaining this spreader, which costs between \$300 and \$400.

Cindy Lashbrook of Four Seasons Ag Consulting concluded with a presentation on orchard monitoring. Lashbrook is an independent pest control advisor who has been successful in helping the growers she works with soften their pest management strategies. At the field day she displayed pheromone traps, hand lenses and magnifiers. These orchard monitoring tools help assess levels of insect populations and stages of development. Lashbrook emphasized that understanding pest biology is critical to proper management, especially when not relying on strong chemicals. Lashbrook also passed around some vials and cards that held living beneficial insects, some just barely visible to the naked eye. These were purchased from insect rearing facilities and are released into fields and orchards to help control pests.

If you would like more information on this field day, please contact Gwen Huff at (559) 268-2696.

*Ventura, July 18*

## **Organic Production Methods and Resource Conservation in Stonefruit and Citrus**

Camille Sears' eight-acre, CCOF-certified organic stonefruit and citrus orchard in Meiners Oaks had been severely neglected when she purchased it five years ago. The plot was once planted to Valencia oranges, but the previous owner quit irrigating after the freeze of 1990. Sears, who has been doing weather data observations and record keeping in the Ojai Valley for decades, was familiar with the property, which contains the lowest (and coldest) spot in Meiners Oaks outside of the river bottom, and she had a plan

Sears first removed almost all of the Valencias, ground them up, and planted Peaceful Valley soil builder mix plus rapeseed. In 1998, with the El Niño rains, the cover crop grew to eight feet tall; it produced so much organic matter that she couldn't disk it in.

After two years of covercropping, she began planting. The property is essentially flat, but there is a gentle grade downhill from north to south. She planted citrus in the back of the property, where it's higher and warmer, and stonefruit at the

front where it's colder. She planted varieties of stonefruit that would ripen sequentially, allowing her to service a fruit CSA. The six varieties of apricots, five varieties of nectarines, nine varieties of peaches, five varieties of plums and four varieties of pluots were all purchased from Dave Wilson Nursery. She also has three varieties of Asian pears and pixie, seedless kishu and gold nugget tangerines. All trees were planted in 1998 or later; the citrus hasn't started producing but the stonefruit is heavy enough this year so that it's way ahead of her.

Sears is still covercropping each year. She is currently using berseem clover. This species of clover is epigeal (the seed does not have to be incorporated in order to grow the following year). Other benefits of berseem clover are that it sprouts with the first rain, it can be mowed multiple times, reseed itself and it is a decent competitor against other resident vegetation. She does experience weed problems with sowthistle and bristly oxtongue, however.

Sears mowed in February, April and June, basically when the cover crop reached a foot and a half high. The seed is broadcast at the rate of 20 pounds per acre with an Earthway Spreader, which has adjustable width and volume.

As a result of the covercropping, there is little erosion on the one percent grade in her orchard. The neighboring parcel, identical to Sears but still planted in Valencias, has gully and sheet erosion. On April 19, 2000, when she had four inches of rain in one morning, she had no erosion.

She irrigates the stonefruit three times a year, applying three inches of water at a very low volume. The stonefruit has received no nutrients other than what it obtains from covercropping. For the young citrus, she originally used EZ Green for fertilizer, but this year had a better experience with feather meal, which was substantially less volatile, much easier to work with, and supplied adequate nitrogen.

Sears brought soil tests from March 1997 and from October 2000 in order to demonstrate the increase in soil fertility since she began planting cover crops. The post-cover crop tests showed an increase in organic matter from 1.4 percent to 3.4 percent and increases of nitrogen, potassium, calcium, sulfur and manganese.

Ben Faber, UC Cooperative Extension, began his presentation by taking a shovelful of earth from the edge of the orchard, outside the covercropped area, and comparing it with a shovelful from the covercropped area. The differences in tilth and moisture retention were clearly evident. Faber discussed that water and carbon dioxide exchange are essential for root health and how the good structure of a soil high in organic matter facilitates that. Cover crops are also the principal line of defense against erosion, which occurs on bare soil with only a slight slope. Faber suggests planting annuals, which start growing after the frost season, in order to minimize the risk of frost damage.



**Lindsay, July 18**

## **Foliar Nutrition in Citrus**

The July meeting of the Lindsay group was engaging and informative. Bill Leigh, owner and chief chemist of Pent-A-Vate Agricultural Laboratory in Lindsay, shared preliminary results of a foliar nutritional test conducted in a block of Cliff Loeffler's oranges.

Two foliar applications of common nutritional products were made during the bloom period in April and early May. Leaf samples were taken before a foliar spray, then about a week after the application to see how much of each element was absorbed by the leaves. In addition, Leigh recorded the number of trees per acre, how much of each element was sprayed onto each tree, and how much the leaves of the trees weighed (estimated about 100 pounds on a typical mature tree). Although not "scientific" in the sense that there were no control sections within the block, it stimulated thought and discussion about foliar nutrition and its value.

Leigh said a couple of the nutritional products had formulations of elements that were virtually insoluble in water. When foliar sprays are applied, water carries the nutrients from the leaves into the plant through the process of transpiration. After the application, Loeffler said the leaves had a whitish residue from elements that had not been absorbed into the trees. Leigh referenced a chemistry handbook with tables showing the solubility of different compounds. Calcium, for instance can be found in calcium sulfate, calcium carbonate, calcium phosphate and other compounds. In some of these compounds, the calcium is very water-soluble, but in others it is virtually insoluble and unavailable to the plant. Leigh reviewed the results of the leaf analysis and the levels of nitrogen, potassium and calcium showed the greatest change.

Leigh has plans to continue the trial and said the questions raised in these initial tests will be followed up in a more rigid sampling method over a longer period of time. He said he was not aware of any other nutrition tests being conducted using the same methods. Ads promoting foliar products look at the end result; for example, does product X produce more fruit, bigger fruit, or fruit with better color? Leigh and Loeffler are more interested in the nutritional impact on the tree and will continue collaborating.

Loeffler said a tree needs to be strong and healthy to produce strong and healthy fruit. Leigh cautions that foliar nutrition is a temporary boost and probably shouldn't be considered a cure-all. If the soil isn't healthy or the tree is sick, a couple of sprays won't solve the underlying problems. Annual soil and leaf analysis is a valuable tool to assess nutrient levels and determine if changes need to be made. Look for continued updates on these trials at upcoming meetings.



CAFF's Executive Director Jim Tischer and Gwen Huff, Central San Joaquin Valley Coordinator, joined the meeting to meet our "regulars" and hear what's going on among the farmers of the central/southern valley area. They discussed the organization's long-term strategic plan and goals for the future.

**Sonoma, July 25**

## **Atwood Ranch Water Retention Program**

Because of this past winter's lower than normal rainfall, farmers are motivated to make the most of their water resources. As struggles over California's limited water supply create ongoing and intensified challenges, growers need to develop new alternatives to collect and use water with increased efficiency. In response, a group of farmers, agency personnel, and watershed group members met at the Atwood Ranch in Glen Ellen to investigate simple, low-cost water conservation techniques.

The group first observed the ranch's dry well water retention system. The dry well catches rainfall coming off roofs that would otherwise run off the ranch. Ranch manager Tish Ward is pleased with their first attempt to collect water; however, she acknowledged ample opportunity to experiment and improve the system. "Water retention is easy and it doesn't have to be a fancy situation," Ward said. Every setup is different, however and anyone engaged in a project will have to look closely at their goals and site specific variables to design and implement an appropriate system.

Ward started to seriously consider a water retention project a couple years ago after she observed significant quantities of rain water running off the roofs of the barns and buildings into ditches, under the road, and off to Sonoma Creek. While addressing the public's negative perception of grapegrowers, Ward also recognized a simultaneous need to retain the water for later use and diminish flooding for hay farmers downstream. Assuming many soils can absorb around 80 percent of rainfall during average rains, large roofs on barns, houses and outbuildings displace considerable amounts of water.

The first plan Atwood Ranch developed to install a dry well called for three four-foot-wide ADS pipes to be laid horizontally in place of an existing culvert. Holes were drilled into the ADS pipe to allow the retained water to seep into the groundwater table. Catchment tubes oriented at 90 degrees to the ADS were to be placed above the pipe to channel water into the tubes. Similar to a French drain, the pipes are surrounded by a layer of gravel and covered with a landscape cloth that prevents sediment from filling in the pipes. As they pulled out the culvert and began digging the trench they hit a subsurface spring and had to stop. A longtime rancher, grower and president of the Southern Sonoma Resource Conservation District, Ward humorously pointed out, "Sometimes you come up with a great idea, and when you try it, you fall on your face."

They developed an alternative plan using a comparable technique. The perforated ADS was placed vertically near an outbuilding in a different location with the gutters draining directly into the pipe. The pipes were dug 7-8 feet deep, with a release valve allowing water to overflow when strong rains fill up the chambers. The set up worked nicely this past winter and the ranch intends to expand and improve the system.

Ward pointed out a number of other water saving opportunities during our program. She said native grasses help to conserve water because they generally have deeper roots that penetrate the soil and allow better water infiltration. A field or hillside of native grasses absorb considerably more water than the exotic grasses we generally see.

As we toured the ranch we saw a restored creek providing excellent fish habitat, a compost area next to a 6000 year old native midden site, a pond with native plants along its border and Canadian geese swimming in it, and other beneficial restoration and conservation projects. "If you implement sustainable management practices and you don't talk about it and share it with others, you are doing a disservice to all the people who can benefit from your experience," Ward concluded.

## The Soil Food Web

A Wisdom at the End of A Hoe Workshop  
Presented by Bioneers

October 23 - 24, 2001

(Evening presentation on October 22)

### Presentations by:

◆ *Dr. Elaine Ingham, President of Soil Food Web, Inc., and Associate Professor of Courtesy Research, Department of Forest Science, Oregon State University*

◆ *Bob Cannard, soil fertility innovator who grows food for Chez Panisse Restaurant*

◆ *Gabriel Howarth, Director of Siempre Semillas, an extraordinary ten-acre botanical garden in Baja Mexico*  
*This is a special opportunity to learn the dynamics of the soil fertility cycle from three expert practitioners and teachers.*

*The event will take place at the UC Santa Cruz Arboretum, with visits to the Center for Agroecology Farm and Garden. Farmers, gardeners, soil scientists, agricultural educators, and anyone interested in learning more about the dynamics of the soil fertility cycle should visit [www.bioneers.org](http://www.bioneers.org) and click on Restorative Development Initiative.*

For questions or to register call  
1-877-BIONEER toll free  
or email [soil@bioneers.org](mailto:soil@bioneers.org)

## Upcoming Meetings

### Central Coast

San Luis Obispo: *Quarterly meetings. Contact Cathy Darling, (805) 781-5910 or Mary Ann Vasconcellos, (805) 595-9653.*

Watsonville: *Wednesday, August 29, 9 a.m. - 1 p.m.* Field tour of Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency Water Conservation Demonstration Projects. *Contact Sam Earnshaw, (831) 722-5556 or Doug Coty, (831) 722-9292.*

Watsonville: *September 11-16, CAFF Booth at Santa Cruz County Fair. Contact Sam Earnshaw at (831) 722-5556 to volunteer.*

Watsonville: *Friday, September 28, Your Flower Garden/A & A Farms, 694 Elkhorn Rd., 9 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.* Field tour of farms participating in the Pajaro Valley Water Quality Project: Fields to Ocean. *Contact Sam Earnshaw, (831) 722-5556.*

Hollister: *Sunday, October 7, St. Francis Retreat, 549 Mission Vineyard Road, San Juan Bautista, 1:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.* Harvest Fair Celebrating the Biodiversity and Agricultural Bounty of San Benito County. Farm tour, presentation, food and music. Cosponsored by San Benito Common ground and San Benito Agricultural Land Trust. *Contact Keith Warner at (831) 623-4234 for more information.*

Salinas: *Saturday, November 3, Rana Creek Ranch, 35351 East Carmel Valley Road, Carmel Valley, 9:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.* Fourth Annual Rana Creek Field Day and BBQ. Principles of Restoration Ecology—Encouraging Biodiversity Around Us. Speakers include John Anderson, Hedgerow Farms; Bob Bugg, UC SAREP; Gordon Franke, Hastings Reserve; Paul Kephart, Rana Creek; Danny Marquis, NRCS. *RSVP to Julie at (831) 659-3820.*

### South Coast

Ventura: *No meeting in August. Meetings will resume Wednesday, September 19 and the third Wednesday every month, Acapulco Restaurant, 725 S. Victoria, 12 noon. Contact Jim Churchill or Lisa Brenneis, (805) 646-4212 or [jrchurchill@earthlink.net](mailto:jrchurchill@earthlink.net).*

### Sacramento Valley

Yolano: *Wednesday, August 15, Glide Ranch Conference Room, 36355 Russell Blvd., Davis, 12:00 p.m. - 2:00 p.m.* The Future of Farming. Featuring a discussion of the Conservation Securities Act (CSA) and Agricultural Community Revitalization and Enterprise Initiative (ACRE). A representative of the NFACT coalition will discuss their response to these issues. Sandwich bar lunch will be provided. *Contact Karrie Stevens, (530) 756-8518, x14.*

### San Joaquin Valley

Chapter Meeting: *Contact Gwen Huff, (559) 268-2696.*

Lindsay: *Wednesday, August 15 and the third Wednesday every month, Olive Tree Inn, 340 N. Hwy 65, 7 a.m.* Tulare County Dry Well Survey, How Can We Help? Speaker to be Alfredo DaSilva, Environmental Research Scientist, Dept. of Pesticide Regulation, Environmental Monitoring and Pest Management, Fresno State Office. *Contact Cliff Loeffler, (559) 568-1525.*

For more information about upcoming meetings, visit CAFF's Web site at [www.caff.org](http://www.caff.org)



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**Farmer's Kitchen in Davis:** Create value-added products or have us do it in our commercial kitchen. Labeling, packaging and marketing services available. Contact Rose Ann at (530) 756-1862 for more information.

**For Rent:** Efficiency apartment on small family farm, two miles north of CAFF office - own kitchen, share bath. \$410/mo plus PG&E, (530) 758-8847.

**For Rent:** 1 1/2 acres of table grapes (3 varieties), farmed organically, but not certified organic (10-11 year old vines); 60-70 peach and nectarine trees (6 years old); plus 23 misc. fruit trees - more for personal use; 1 acre undeveloped land; 3 bedroom-2 bath house with fenced yard; available to rent beginning any time between August 5th - Sept. 1st. Farming operations can be rented separately from house, or they can go together. House and vineyard is located on a 5 1/2 acre parcel just south of Davis on Mace Blvd. Call Beth Flory at home, (530) 756-2617 or work, (916) 228-2417.

**For Lease:** Up to 8 acres of mountain top land for organic farming in southern Nevada County, CA. Currently undeveloped. For more information or to view property, contact Winnie at [wcv@sfglaw.com](mailto:wcv@sfglaw.com).

**For Sale:** Two poly 1650 gallon water tanks. Have previously held only roof water runoff, \$400 or best offer. Eight foot, 10 step rolling steel warehouse stairs \$400 or best offer. Contact Robert Rauktis, (650) 494-3184 or [rauktis@AOL.com](mailto:rauktis@AOL.com).

**For Sale:** 1975 Dodge D500 compost spreader. Belly chain, double spinners in back, needs brake work, \$1500, sold "as is", (805) 967-7369.

**Work Wanted:** Two experienced organic gardeners from Massachusetts seek work in the San Diego area during January and February, 2002. Priscilla is the owner of a 5-person organic gardening business west of Boston, and Rich has been on the crew for two years. Contact us at (978) 597-3005 or [rwilliams@rigorousrecycler.com](mailto:rwilliams@rigorousrecycler.com).

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