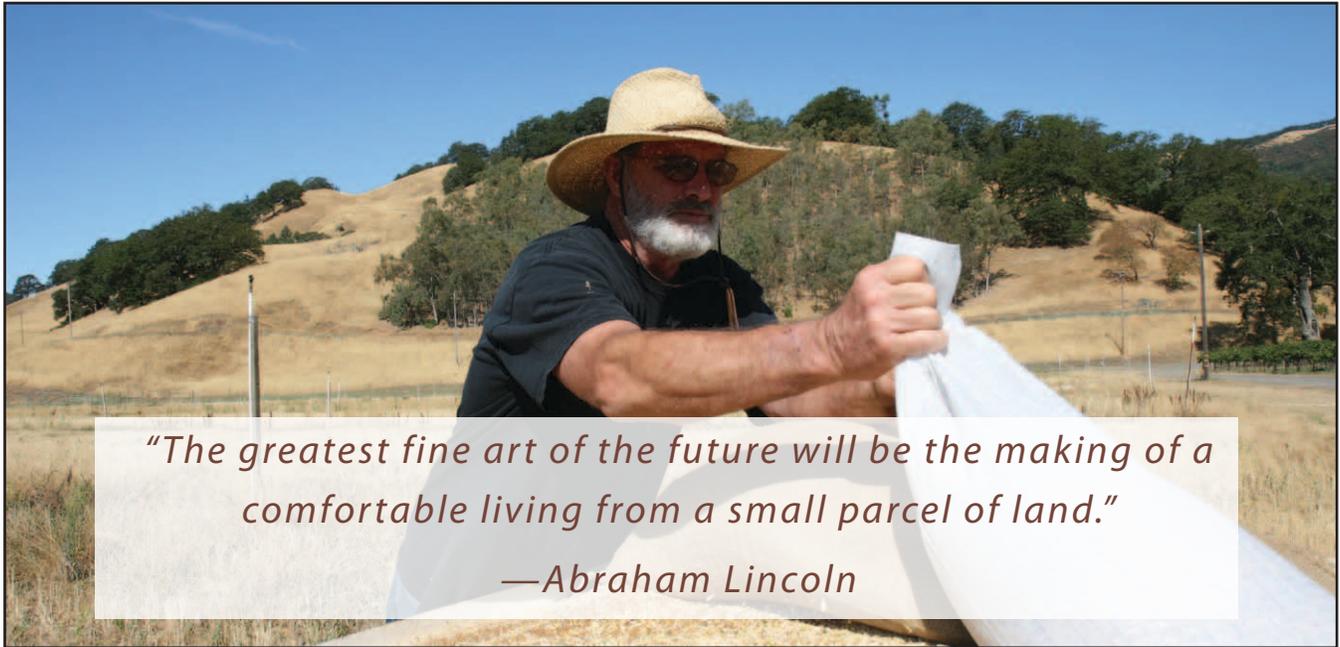


OUR FARMERS & FOOD PRODUCERS



John Gramke of the Mendocino Grain Project reaping the harvest. Gramke and partner Doug Mosel have successfully brought dry farming of wheat, beans and other grains to Mendocino County. With the support of the Nelson Family Farm, Gramke and Mosel have access to farmland which has been a test site for innovative farming techniques.

From the Ground Up: Celebrating our Farmers

From the fertile banana belts skirting the Mendocino Coast to the rolling hills of the North County, today's farmers are bringing innovation and a renewed sense of commitment to everything they do. Family farms are at the heart of local food systems, and have the potential to revitalize and significantly enhance our health and our economy. Throughout history, farmers and ranchers have learned to respond to cultural and societal shifts, adjusting to market changes and consumer choice. There has never been a better time to support the efforts of those who have dedicated their lives to the provision of sustenance for ourselves and our children.

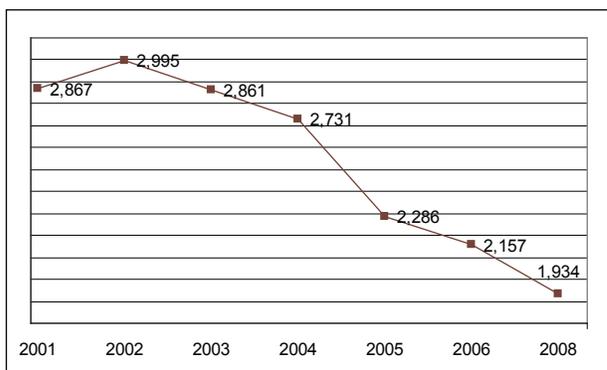
Today's Farmers: Struggling to Bring Food to Our Tables

Farmers, once revered for providing us with life-sustaining foods, are now becoming an endangered species, locally and across the country. Local farmers and ranchers struggle to make ends meet, competing in what is now a subsidized global economy that

prices food artificially low, making it nearly impossible for the small-scale farmer to compete.

Nationally, small and mid-sized farms are being supplanted by large-scale ventures that specialize in "monocrop" cultivation of a single crop such as soy, wheat or corn. Six percent of U.S. farms now produce 75 percent of our agricultural products.⁶ Market

Declining Farm Jobs in Mendocino County



U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis. Created by: Center for Economic Development, California State University, Chico

analysts report that a single bite of food has traveled, on average, 1,500 miles before it is eaten. By contrast, the concept of local food looks at food produced several hundred miles from its final destination.

This type of high-yield farming has also created a dependency upon specialized equipment, which increases fossil fuel dependency. Depletion of the soil leads, in turn, to dependency upon pesticides and artificial fertilizers to correct problems created by unsustainable farming practices.

While farmers struggle with the demands of a subsidized global food economy, seasonal farm workers, many of whom are immigrants, perform much of the hard labor of bringing food to our tables.

The 400-mile-long Central Valley supplies one quarter of the food eaten in the United States. Huge farms in this fertile part of California (roughly the distance from Chicago to Pittsburgh) grow the majority of food sold in Mendocino County's grocery outlets. The remainder is grown out of country and shipped to the U.S. for distribution.

Globally, farm workers do the vast majority of planting, tending, and harvesting, often for subsistence wages in substandard environments. In Mendocino County, most food producers are owner-operated, meaning they don't employ many farm staff. However, immigrant farm workers are an important part of the Mendocino wine grape and pear economy. For a secure food future, we need to create an equitable system that is fair and healthy to all: farmers, farm workers, and those enjoying the bounty of their efforts.

Tomorrow's Farmers: In Short Supply

Meanwhile, family farms are disappearing at an alarming rate. The 2007 Census of Agriculture reported a loss of 80,000 mid-sized farms since the last census in 2002 and some researchers predict mid-sized farms will disappear completely within a decade.⁷

Farmers are aging and retiring, and in many cases, their children are not following in their footsteps. They also face the challenge of providing affordable training to farm interns, meeting various labor standards, and providing for the labor and housing necessary to run a small farm on a limited budget.

Mendocino County Top Crops Harvested Acreage, 2008

Crop	# of Acres	% of Total
Pasture, Forage, Misc.	365,000	49.0 %
Pasture, Range	355,000	47.6 %
Grapes, Wine	16,400	2.2 %
Pasture, Irrigated	6,000	0.8 %
Pears, Bartlett	1,720	0.2 %
Fruits & Nuts, Unspecified	343	0.05 %
Vegetables, Unspecified	320	0.04 %
Apples, All	265	0.04 %
Pears, Unspecified	233	0.03 %

U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis. Created by: Center for Economic Development, California State University, Chico

According to Devon Jones, Executive Director of the Mendocino County Farm Bureau, the decline of farm labor jobs in Mendocino County is related to the shift from pears and other commodities to wine grapes. "The number of acres of wine grapes that have transitioned to mechanical harvest from hand picking has also increased. This reduces the amount of labor needed and is correlated to the reduced availability of labor, the cost of labor as well as the regulatory risk involved with labor," she explains.

Conversely, growing groups of young people are experimenting with sustainable farming as a means to earn a living. But the economic barriers to entry as well as land and equipment costs make it difficult to begin farming. While some volunteer and intern positions are available, it is challenging for farmers to provide these opportunities. Farm volunteers or interns sometimes live at a subsistence level, without the benefits of wages, housing or insurance during their training period.

It is necessary to address these economic and social inequities that exist for those wishing to become farmers. Zoning laws often prohibit the housing of farm laborers near the farmland that they tend. Interns and other volunteers deserve the protection afforded by the provision of basic insurance coverage, and farmers should certainly be the recipients of wages that fairly compensate them for their efforts.

The Economics of Farming: Is it Worth It?

Even though agriculture and food processing comprise nine percent of Mendocino County's economy,⁸ Mendocino County farmers consistently operate at a significant loss—a staggering \$18 million per year from 1993 to 2007.⁹

Though county farmers sold \$110 million in commodities, it cost them \$128 million to grow and raise them, creating an overall loss of \$268 million since 1993. In 2007, 63% of our farmers and ranchers reported a net loss.¹⁰

County residents are demonstrating an increasing interest in developing strong localized economies that produce healthy food for local use. However, localization efforts are hampered by insufficient local production, which is the greatest gap in creating local food systems. According to the Mendocino County Agriculture Commissioner, only 320 of the county's two million-plus acres were under vegetable cultivation in 2009, producing just 1% of the year's agricultural value. Furthermore, the total gross agricultural value for commodities produced in 2009 showed an 18% decrease from the 2008 value.¹¹ Despite all these challenges, we have small farms like Mendocino Organics, Live Power Community Farm and the Mendocino Grain Project—farmers who are finding innovative ways to grow their crops and their businesses.

Finding Our "Niche"

North Coast Prosperity has identified speciality agriculture, food, and beverage as 3 of 6 top areas for Mendocino County economic growth. Many communities have discovered untapped resources by supporting pilot farming projects which translated into profitable and sustainable economic drivers. The University of California Cooperative Extension is a vocal advocate for small farm specialty crops, and has successfully supported the introduction of blueberry production in farms from Santa Clara to San Diego Counties. Dozens of Asian vegetables, usually trucked from the Bay Area to all sectors of Northern California are well suited to the varied Mendocino County climates.



Edible sea lettuce ready for harvest north of Fort Bragg



Kate and Keith of Lovers Lane Farms have taken their honey business to the next level with the establishment of a full-service coffee house featuring locally roasted coffee and pastries.

Many communities have found lucrative markets in other ethnic crops, including meat goats, roasted chiles and the highly lucrative Chinese Eggplant. Olives have already proven to be well suited to the warm inland areas of the county, and several local, small-scale olive oil producers are pressing and bottling their own varietal oils. Local farmers have already seen the interest in expansion of their produce line through the addition of colored carrot and beet varieties and other heirloom vegetables such as fingerling potatoes.

It is the hope of the Food Policy Council that one outcome of the Food Action Plan will be a concerted effort to investigate the many opportunities which could open up the niche market for our farming community.

A Bountiful County: Wild Mendocino

Along with growing local foods for local markets, Mendocino County is the bounteous repository of a variety of wild foods, including seaweed and mushrooms. According to local mushroom expert Eric Schramm, “Our county, in an average year, produces and sells 300,000 to 500,000 pounds of mushrooms.” There are 500 known edible species of mushrooms found here in the county, 100 of which, “have the texture or presentation a chef can use and 20 of them are readily identifiable.”¹²

Mendocino County boasts several successful seaweed harvesting companies that provide edible and medicinal seaweed products via direct sales and mail order. The clean ocean waters off the Mendocino Coast are a rich source of a variety of sea vegetables including Kombu, Ocean Ribbons, Wakame, Nori, Sea Palm, Fucus, Grapestone and Sea Whip Fronds. The harvesters also produce a variety of seaweed-based bath products, spice mixes, energy bars and recipe books.

Each year, Mendocino County’s agricultural economy loses an average of \$83 million: \$18 million through farm production losses and \$65 million buying agricultural inputs from external suppliers.¹³



Fisheries such as the Point Arena Harbor have been severely impacted by regulations, a downsized sport fishing industry and prohibitive costs to maintain harbor infrastructure.

Beekeepers at Lovers Lane Farms have merged their expertise producing raw honey with the production of goat milk and honey soaps, beeswax, pollination services and the raising of free range, forest-fed Tamworth and other heritage breed pork. Their latest venture is the opening of a premium coffee café and roastery located in Ukiah. Diversification may provide viable solutions for small farmers looking for reliable income sources.

Food Producers: Transforming and Celebrating County Food

Mendocino County has attracted many talented individuals who have devoted themselves to the creation of unique and highly marketable products, many of which are identified as originating in the county. Mustards and jams, dried herbs, specialty teas, desserts, artisanal cheeses, olive oils and numerous other products are produced and sold through storefronts, mail order and at farmers’ markets.

Beginning and experienced food producers are impacted by a complex series of municipal, county and state regulations that inhibit the ability to build up a small business. The cost of leased and purchased property in certain areas of Mendocino County remains artificially high, partially due to competition with the cannabis industry.

Catch-22 of the Day

Although Mendocino County borders include miles of pristine coastline, those who make their living from the sea face significant challenges which must be addressed in order to preserve the industry’s viability.

The Noyo commercial fisheries include the groundfish trawl, urchin dive, Chinook salmon troll, Dungeness crab pot, sablefish, rockfish/lingcod hook-and-line and trap fisheries. In 2010 the fleet consisted of approximately 80 vessels, five charter operations and several processing facilities which handle a combination of local and out-of-area distribution.

The 1990s saw a drastic reduction in recreational and commercial fishing opportunities. In 1988, 32.2 million pounds of fish were landed. By 2007, landings had decreased to 5.3 million pounds, with groundfish accounting for the highest dollar value and landing proportion.

Costs for fuel, gear, insurance and maintenance of equipment and vessels has risen, while prices for fish and in some cases demand has declined. Additionally, the Noyo Harbor and the Dolphin Isle areas are in great need of dredging and other improvements, particularly for those fishermen and women who depend on the harbor for supplies, services and refuge from rough seas.

The recent passage of the North Coast Marine Life Protection Act, a 2011 individual quota program for the federal groundfish trawl fishery, and potential offshore energy developments have the potential to forever alter the viability of county fishing operations. Another impact to the local commercial fishing industry was the establishment of crab pot quotas in 2011.

The salmon fishery as well as the sea urchin fishery have begun to show improvements since their heyday in the 1980s and subsequent decline. But regulations designed to protect fragile ocean ecosystems have had the unintended effect of sidelining commercial fishermen, and may also contribute to fewer tourists coming to the area due to the necessity for compliance with complex species-by-species regulations, restrictive fishing seasons, and in some years, uncertainty about whether the season will be cancelled. Fluctuating revenues make it extremely challenging for fishing operators to engage in long-term planning. As a consequence, support businesses as well as the harbor infrastructure are suffering. The fisheries community is increasingly dependent upon the recreational sector to bring in the necessary funds to support a thriving, working waterfront.¹⁴

A Long Distance for Local Meats

Demand for sustainably raised meat and poultry products is growing rapidly, across the country and here in Northern California. As consumers become increasingly aware of the impact of their food choices on the environment, their community and their local economy, many are choosing to purchase beef, pork, chicken, lamb and other locally-raised products from family farms and ranches they know and trust.

But local livestock producers need a facility to enable them to process their products and make them ready for sale. A meat processing facility

Having it Their Way

A 2007 study shows more than one in five shoppers buys natural or organic meat. Their reasons?

- » Better, fresher taste
- » More nutritional value and long-term health benefits than conventional meat
- » Animals are healthier and better treated than conventional livestock.

Food Marketing Institute and American Meat Institute



Proponents of a county meat processing system see many benefits resulting from a localized slaughterhouse: reduction in fuel costs and vehicle wear-and-tear, and less stress on their animals.

handles the slaughter, cutting, packaging and often the distribution portions of the meat supply chain, adding value to the finished product with each step. Kathryn Quanbeck, project coordinator for the Economic Development and Financing Corporation (EDFC) Meat Processing Project explains the benefits of a Mendocino County meat processing facility.

“Most ranchers currently process their animals in Eureka, Orland or Petaluma. That means dollars leaving our economy combined with lengthy drive

times, increased fuel costs, vehicle wear and tear and the stress of transporting animals long distances. Not to mention the difficulty of getting on the schedule at nearby facilities that are booked to capacity. Not having a meat processing facility is a lost opportunity. These are jobs that could be here in Mendocino County and revenue for our community," says Quanbeck.

Starting Small

There's been talk about a local facility for many years. In 2009, the University of California Cooperative Extension, working with UC Davis researchers released a feasibility study. "It looked at the economics of building a facility in our area. The purpose of the study was to determine if we really have the necessary supply of animals and the demand for locally raised meats to warrant building a processing facility. The final outcome of that study was 'yes, we do!' but the study had a big vision, with farmers and ranchers from farther afield traveling to Mendocino County to use our facility. We've since realized that it's better to start small," Quanbeck continues.

How small is small? "Big slaughterhouses in the Midwest and Great Plains can process up to 4,000 head per day, sometimes more. What we're talking about here is more like 10 to 20 head per day. Throughout this process, we've been very conscious of designing a facility that fits our community - a sustainable size and scale, one that utilizes environmentally friendly practices and operates with the highest animal welfare and workplace standards in mind," says Quanbeck.

Do we have enough supply and demand in Mendocino County to keep a local facility operating and profitable? "The nearby facilities that our local ranchers currently use are quite busy and are often completely booked up in the fall, so we know there is significant demand for processing services in the region. I think we have enough supply and demand to keep a small-scale facility in business, but it will be tough for the first few years, especially during the slower winter months. As the market for local meat grows, demand for processing services grows, and the facility would become more financially stable," Quanbeck adds.



A New Generation: Farmers, educators and food producers must make teaching farm skills to youth a high priority.

Mendocino County's Farms

- » 1,136 farms. This represents a 4% decrease in farms since 2002.*
- » Mendocino County has 1.4% of California farms.
- » 81 (7%) of these are 1,000 acres or more.
- » 569 (50%) farms are less than 50 acres.
- » The most prevalent farm size is 10–49 acres, with a total of 352 farms (31% of farms).
- » Average farm size is 536 acres, 171% of California's average.
- » The county has 608,674 acres of land in farms.
- » 590 (52%) farms have a total of 27,120 acres of irrigated land.
- » Average value of land and buildings per farm is \$2.8 million. This is 142% of the state average of \$2 million.¹⁵

**74% of commodity sales are winegrapes, while only 1% are vegetables. This prevalence of vineyards skews the average farm size and value of farm land upward.*

Only 1% of all of the Mendocino County produce and livestock sales in 2007 were sold to Mendocino County consumers.

The EDFC, along with a “Meat Committee” comprised of local ranchers, cooperative extension personnel, city and county government officials, representatives from non-profits and community members continues to study the economics of a small-scale meat processing facility for Mendocino County. A grant has enabled researchers to develop plant designs, construction estimates, operating costs projections and supply and demand forecasts. The outcomes of this study will be used to inform potential owners and attract potential investors for a local processing facility.

An Interim Solution?

John Harper, University of California Cooperative Extension Livestock and Natural Resources Advisor and member of the Meat Committee, has been extensively studying the prospect of a meat processing facility in the county. He suggests a possible, more immediate solution for ranchers.

“I think we’re ideally suited to capture the larger portion of the niche meat market—grass fed, heritage breeds, the organic meat market and pasture-based hogs. We bottleneck on the cutting and wrapping. If we could open up that part of the bottleneck, more producers would be willing to participate. With a USDA-certified cut and wrap facility, you’re not bringing in live animals. It’s the same as the butchering department in big box grocers, where they take large portions of meat and further process them. I think it’s a win-win idea for the community. We have to take baby steps to become more self-sufficient,” says Harper.

Agreeing to Disagree

For everyone who is passionate about a processing facility going forward, there are others who are not supportive. “Not everyone in our county eats meat,” Quanbeck concedes. “But I believe that the importance of local, humane and sustainable processing is something we can all agree on.”

Future Farmers?

The hard facts are in. Land prices continue to rise. Farm equipment is expensive to purchase and maintain. Farmers are aging. What are the solutions?

While the past several decades have seen an aging of the farming population and a decline in interest from young people in farming as a career, there are encouraging signs that this trend is reversing.

The Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems at the University of California Santa Cruz, the Center for Land Based Learning in Winters, and Monterey’s Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA) have experienced significant growth during the past several years. The University of California Cooperative Extension’s Beginning Farmer and Rancher Program recently had twice as many applicants for their program as available positions. Students at Mendocino College’s Ag Intern program work hands-on while receiving college credit. Farmers’ Markets and Community Supported Agriculture provide opportunities for a new generation of farmers to make a living and connect with people who eat and appreciate the fruits of their labors.

More opportunities are needed to expand the pool of future farmers. The University of California Cooperative Extension and North Coast Opportunities are pursuing ways to launch incubator farms in Mendocino and Sonoma Counties. Following successful models like ALBA and The Intervale Center in Vermont, incubator farms are providing aspiring farmers access to land, shared equipment, and mentoring—increasing the possibility for future farmer success.

Farm internships create opportunities to transfer farming knowledge to the next generation. Live Power Community Farm in Covelo has a long history of intern training. There is also an internship and apprenticeship program in Willits through the Ecology Action Program. Interns benefit from the extensive knowledge of experienced farmers and also provide essential support to the farm. Replicable models such as the Rouge Farm Corps in southern Oregon offer farm interns the ability to work at one farm while receiving additional training at other regional farms.

Unlike the programs listed above, many interns and students live on marginal incomes and need sufficient income to eat and a place to sleep. In order for programs such as these to flourish, it is critical for communities to address housing and labor policies



Eric Schramm has made a successful career as one of the region's premier mushroom harvesters.

to help support the forward momentum of a new generation of farmers.

Mendocino County Farm Bureau Executive Director Devon Jones hopes that educators will continue to value agriculture-related vocations. "The next generation is not going into farming for multiple reasons. Agriculture is hard work which is dependent on a number of uncontrollable factors and often is not lucrative. Farmers and ranchers take up the vocation because they have passion for doing so. Young people's passions are not fostered when school districts are forced to reduce trades taught in high schools, when teachers are compelled to teach to standardized testing protocols and curricular options continue to decline. Students need to be encouraged to learn about agriculture and where their food and fiber comes from. They need to be allowed to take agricultural classes—to 'get their hands dirty' and be supported to pursue the many careers available in agriculture."

A Focus on Sustainability

Mendocino County produces over 3,000 acres of organic fruits, nuts, vegetable and forage crops. The commitment to sustainable agriculture takes many forms, including thousands of acres that are farmed Biodynamically® or under conservation

programs such as Fish Friendly Farming. The program includes a large acreage of wine grapes, pears and some county rangeland. Growers voluntarily participate in these programs. To become certified as a Fish Friendly Farm, farmers attend workshops covering property management and design, water and soil conservation, management of creek and riparian corridors, increasing stream flow and road maintenance. A unique plan is created, a third-party review conducted and the implementation process results in farm certification.

This commitment to sustainable agriculture enjoys strong community support with nine certified farmers' markets and numerous Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms.¹⁶

Sustainability: What Does This Mean?

Rather than pursuing a single definition for complex terms, the Mendocino County Food Policy Council has chosen to assign a range of values embodied by the words "local" and "sustainable." These words and phrases reflect what healthy food systems and economies can and should be.

A Local, Sustainable Food System:

- » Is good for farmers, consumers and the environment
- » Promotes health and well-being
- » Involves collaboration
- » Is affordable, inclusive and accessible to all
- » Celebrates heritage and tradition
- » Reduces fossil fuel dependency
- » Promotes self-sufficiency
- » Builds the local economy
- » Educates children
- » Requires community investment
- » Takes care of future generations
- » Provides a living wage and viable livelihood

Greener Pastures: Ingel-Haven Ranch

Mac Magruder, owner and operator of Ingel-Haven Ranch in Potter Valley worked on his family's ranch from the time he was a boy. "We had about 1,000 head of sheep and mountain Bartlett pears on what should have been grazing land," Magruder notes.

In 1976, after graduating from the University of Washington, Mac's father fell ill, and he returned to Potter Valley to run the ranch.

The rugged hills on the family's 2,400-acre ranch became Magruder's teachers. He removed the pear orchards and focused on a cow/calf operation, something the land was especially suited for. Today, Magruder's grass-fed beef, pasture-pork and grass-fed lamb is served at illustrious eating establishments including Chez Panisse and Oakland's Oliveto's Restaurant and Café.

Magruder has become a grass farmer, developing pastures rich with naturally growing legumes and grasses suited to grow healthy cattle. He incorporates rotational grazing into rhythms of the ranch. "We move animals, the grass comes back. It's better for soil. That's the way it used to be. It was a way of stewarding the land and raising healthier animals," Magruder explains.

Magruder is passionate about the need for a local meat processing facility. "In the commercial market, meats destined for supermarkets go to Arizona and get redistributed back to stores. We need a local facility that could cater to all markets. Every county used to have processing facilities as recently as the 1950's. We need regulations that make sense for both production and processing," he continues.



Mac Magruder with daughter Grace, who returned to help run the family farm several years ago

“People raise factory-farmed pigs in Iowa and get the meat shipped and processed cheaper than I can have it processed and delivered. Even though we offer a different product for a different clientele, I can’t raise prices enough to compete against large feedlots and commercial markets. We’re affected by commodity prices which are fueled by subsidies. It’s not a real price you’re paying.”

Magruder gazes at Mendocino County hills. Where some see acres of vegetables or rows of condominiums, Mac envisions grazing animals. “I’d like to see a program for putting livestock in vineyards in a controlled manner. We should be teaching 4H kids to train working dogs which would help get animals back into rotational grazing. Instead we’re teaching young people to raise animals in confinement.”

“Even though we offer a different product for a different clientele, I can’t raise prices enough to compete against large feedlots and commercial markets. We’re affected by commodity prices which are fueled by subsidies.”

Magruder’s ideas go even further. “Turn pigs out into the pear orchards. We have a food source going to waste. Use the sugar from excess pears to make ethanol. The animal ag industry has the makings for a biodigester to create power. We have tanoak and redwood bark, and we have animals. I don’t think there

are any tanneries left in the United States that use natural processes.”

Mac’s wife Kate notes the increasing level of consumer understanding about the real costs of factory-raised food and its health and environmental impacts. The family is grateful to be able to offer food raised the “right” way. “This is an exciting time at the ranch. The vision Mac has nurtured is beginning to take shape, bolstered by consumer awareness and cultural movements like Slow Food, agritourism and sustainable agriculture,” Kate concludes.



Pigs raised on Ingel-Haven ranch are a cross between wild and domestic breeds.



The Magruder Family have taken bold steps to utilize their family’s legacy by focusing on livestock production.

Local Girl Makes Good Sausage, Potatoes and Eggs

Jessica Taaning-Sanchez, owner of Inland Ranch Organics is a fifth-generation Mendocino County native who raises organic produce, grapes, pigs, cows and chickens on her ten-acre property. She was raised on a 2.5-acre parcel where the family produced all of their own meat and most of their vegetables. “It’s amazing what you can produce on a small parcel,” Taaning notes.

Potatoes are one of her most lucrative crops. They grow in between rows of certified organic grapes, which Taaning sells to Frey Vineyards. She grows many types of potatoes including Yukon Golds, Mountain Rose Reds, Purple, Fingerlings and German Butterball potatoes.

Taaning collects heirloom seed from local farmers. She is fairly certain that a few crops, including her Mill Creek red onion strain were probably propagated originally by farmers working at the Talmage State Hospital. “Now they are almost nonexistent. I try to plant my onions at different times so that they don’t cross-pollinate,” she explains.

Taaning makes her own compost. As she walks to her upper garden, she gives out a hearty laugh. “If I added up all the hay, grain and gardening amendments I’ve used over 26 years, I bet we’ve put over \$100,000 into the soil.”

A decision was made to delve deeper into vegetable farming seven years ago. “This year it looks like we’ll finally pay back all the infrastructure dollars we put in,” she notes.

Third-year peaches are producing, lined alongside rows of pole beans, snow peas, artichokes, asparagus, pumpkins and sunchokes. “Sunchokes grow well here and it’s a vegetable most people aren’t familiar with,” says Taaning.



Jessica Taaning-Sanchez, owner of Inland Ranch Organics in front of her hay barn.

The most labor-intensive part of being an organic farmer is the weeding and soil amendments, Taaning notes, as she walks by cucumber vines, summer and winter squash, pulling a weed here and there as she inspects her crops.

Taaning raises hogs in large, concrete pens. Currently she raises market pigs, sows, boars and younger pigs available for 4-H and FFA members who continue to raise them for showing and sale at the Redwood Empire Fair. She works closely with Redwood Meats slaughterhouse in Humboldt County. Staff have supported her in the creation of her own sausage blends made from 100% organic herbs and spices. Round Man’s in Fort Bragg provides her with an all-organic, non-nitrate smoke process. She estimates that processing for two sows, including butchering, smoking, cutting and wrapping costs about \$1,200, not including the price of the animal. “It’s like having a good, high-interest savings account,” she explains. “If there were ever to be a slaughterhouse in our county, they would have to provide the kind of excellent, individualized service I get from my folks in Eureka,” Taaning notes.



Taaning-Sanchez loads an organic grain mix in preparation for feeding.

Taaning added a silo to the farm to help with grain costs. “This is the only way I can afford to buy organic grain. I have a special blend made for all our livestock.” Taaning is committed to using all-organic grain because she sees cost benefits that outweigh the higher price point. “Northern Dairy farmers are getting significantly more milk production since they switched to organic grains. These aren’t all-organic types of farmers. They’ve made the switch because the results are in the increased revenue,” she explains.

“My hat’s off to anyone in the local food movement.

There needs to be more of this so that we are promoting healthy living.”

Taaning has what she calls a “bartership” with the Ukiah Brewing Company, which provides her with their spent brewing barley, which she uses to feed to her animals. “The Brewing Company has really helped me with this project,” she notes.

She plants rows of garlic in her lower garden, where temperatures tend to be cooler. The genetics were originally provided by Irene Engber of Irene’s Garden Produce, a small



Jessica and husband Joe Taaning-Sanchez at their Redwood Valley farm.

farm in Laytonville, and are highly suited to Taaning’s Redwood Valley climate.

Taaning’s chicken coops are filled with about 200 Red Star, Black Star, Wyandotte, Delaware and Aracana chickens. She rotates her breeds, keeping track of their age. “We have 150 layers and about 50 young ones coming up. About every three years I give away the layers to people who don’t need heavy producers. Some will live until they’re old ladies and others will end up in the stew pot. We get about two yards of incredible mulch out of the combined animal pens every two weeks,” she explains. “An old German farmer once told me, ‘You’re as rich as your manure pile is high,’” she smiles.

Taaning gives a spritz to several dozen young artichoke plants she started from seed. “With the cooler summers we’ve been having, I’ll be planting more things like this.”

“My hat’s off to anyone in the local food movement,” Taaning notes. “The Farmers’ Markets are a great, grass-roots, wholesome project. I’m very happy that we now accept WIC and EBT cards. There needs to be more of this so that we are promoting healthy living. I’ve got a great life,” she notes—giving enormous credit to her husband Joe Sanchez who has built all of the infrastructure around the farm, and to her brother Mike, who assists Taaning at several of the seven farmers’ markets they attend weekly.

Plowing, Payroll and Paperwork: Challenges of Today's Farmer

Tyler Nelson's family purchased their ranch south of Ukiah 60 years ago. The prunes and sheep that were once on the property have been replaced by 200 acres of wine grapes, some grown organically, along with Bartlett pears, olives and Christmas trees. Nelson serves on the boards of the Mendocino County Resource Conservation District and the Mendocino County Farm Bureau.

Two tributaries to the Russian River flow through the Nelson Ranch, providing spawning and rearing habitat for steelhead trout. In 2004 and 2005, the Nelson family and the Fish Friendly Farming program, in collaboration with the federal Natural Resource Conservation Service, re-vegetated Kneeland and McNab Creeks with native riparian trees and shrubs.

The Nelsons' experience growing new crops and incorporating new farming modalities exemplifies the complex issues faced by county farmers.

Rules of the Game

Although farmers must "make hay while the sun shines," today's agricultural stewards have an additional job as time-sensitive as harvesting fruit at the precise moment of ripeness. Administrative tasks pull farmers out of the fields and into the office to attend to the voluminous "crop" of paperwork that defines modern farming.

"I have notebook after notebook filled with paperwork I have to keep track of," says Nelson, adding that it is not unusual to have to address the same issues for duplicate agencies due to overlapping laws and regulations.

A recently adopted workplace safety law requires farmers to provide specific amounts



Tyler Nelson is an example of a family farmer bridging time-tested traditional farming practices with innovative, sustainable solutions.

of shade, water and heat safety training for supervisors and staff. "The actual concepts and the elements I'm having to satisfy are extremely important. But the amount of paperwork I had to fill out to demonstrate that we are complying with the law is unbelievable," says Nelson.

Even simple improvements to the farm become surprisingly costly, as Nelson points out. "We're putting six lights into a new facility. We had to pay \$250 to draft and submit a written plan. Various taxes and permits are not large sums individually, but when you pay \$100 for this permit and \$200 for that permit, it adds up very quickly," he continues.

Size Matters and Looks Can Kill

"I'd love to sell our pears locally and drop off boxes at Safeway or the school district. When

you don't have a processing facility to box them the way the customer wants, it impedes the idea of local sales. The school district needs small pears. Safeway wants large ones. Each customer has specific needs that I would have to address."

"A cosmetic blemish on a pear decreases the value by 75 percent, even though the blemish does not affect the taste."

"If customers see a little browning on a pear, they won't buy it. A cosmetic blemish on a pear decreases the value by 75 percent, even though the blemish does not affect the taste. Small pears taste good. Big pears taste good. But consumers have preconceived ideas about size and appearance which affect the market," he notes.

The Right Tool and the Right People for the Job

For Nelson, sustainability requires a diverse infrastructure, collaboration between farmers and an engaged work force willing to accept the physical rigors of farm life.

"Our 300 olive trees are finally to the fruiting age. Olivino in Hopland has a processing plant for olive oil. We can take our hand-picked olives to a local processing facility and sell the oil in our tasting room."

An earlier experiment growing canola was not as successful. "We had this product, but didn't have the facilities to process it. We ended up with 6 tons of canola that was never utilized."

Nelson found an innovative solution to assist in the conversion from conventional to organic farming. "We decided to experiment with organic grape growing, and we had to clear

weeds from underneath the vines. The piece of equipment we needed to do this cost \$25,000. I found a beat-up old model and purchased it with another small farmer, and we shuttle it between the two farms."

"My concern as a producer is economy of scale. If I'm a small farmer growing an acre of lettuce, I can't afford to buy that \$80,000 piece of equipment I need to process it. When we're talking about smaller production units and doing things by hand, the labor costs are extraordinary."

"Years ago, my dad had the foresight to plan for mechanization. We made a humongous investment in a grape harvester. Everything in the vineyard had to be standardized for the harvester—the height of the wire, the size of vine. It's paid big dividends, because the labor force is not there anymore. There are very, very few people willing to work as hard as it takes to produce any sort of crop."

"With any of the new ideas we try, we have to have the equipment, labor and the infrastructure to make it cost effective. The critical questions that our community needs to consider: How are we going to farm our crops? Who is going to do the work and how is it going to get done?"

Think Sustainable, Not Just Local

"For smaller operations, selling at Farmers' Markets is great. We support 30 families, which we couldn't do if we only sold to Farmers' Markets. To make the ranch economically viable, I need to get my product to larger markets."

"I wish we could encourage our bigger stores to commit 2% of their products to local goods. If the school district adopted a 10% mandate to buy local, it could really help farmers. Let's get rid of the pizza one day per week and buy pears locally," Nelson smiles.

OUR FARMERS & FOOD PRODUCERS: GOALS & ACTIONS

GOAL 1: Support Our Farmers and Local Food Producers

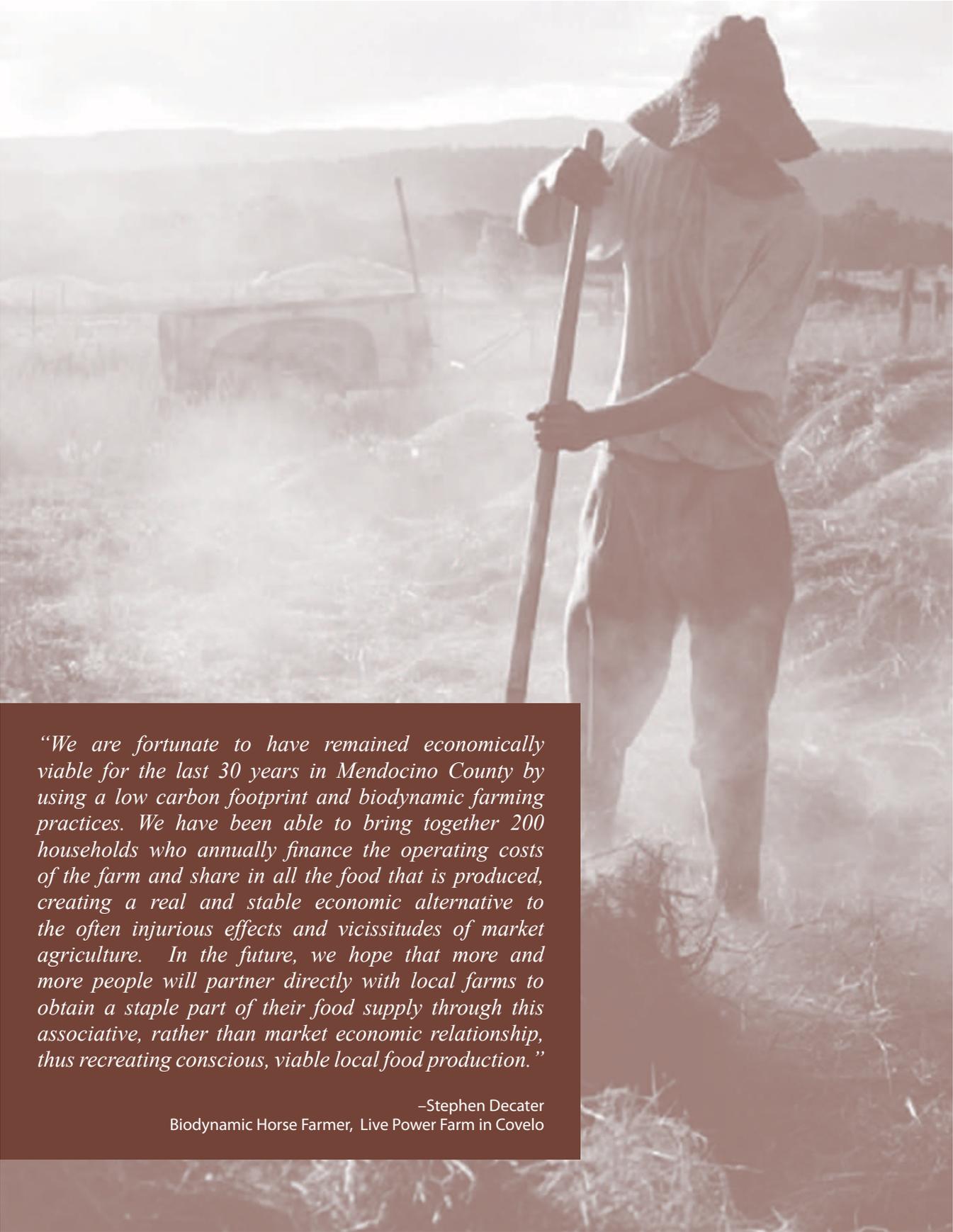
- 1.1 Facilitate and support a regional farmer/producer network promoting farming as a respected vocation. Connect novice and seasoned farmers.
- 1.2 Create a community based agriculture information clearinghouse for farms, labor, land, markets, investment opportunities, grants, and other funding opportunities.
- 1.3 Provide staff support to assist farmers and producers with financial and office activities.
- 1.4 Provide business development and marketing training for local food producers.
- 1.5 Facilitate agritourism opportunities.
- 1.6 Promote and support the development of niche crops and products.
- 1.7 Develop training and resources for producers to expand year round food production.

GOAL 2: Create Opportunities and Ensure Justice for Local Agricultural and Food Industry Workers

- 2.1 Establish institutional support for farm and food system workers.
- 2.2 Support quality housing opportunities for farm and food system workers through “host housing” and portable housing units.
- 2.3 Urge policy makers to establish equitable farm worker policies and regulations.
- 2.4 Create job-training programs for food production and food processing positions.
- 2.5 Advocate for livable wages for agricultural workers and food producers.
- 2.6 Establish uniform farm intern recruitment policies and provide interns with appropriate benefits (i.e. worker’s compensation, liability, etc.)
- 2.7 Modify land use plans to allow for the creation of additional housing for farm workers in proximity to farming activities.

GOAL 3: Attract, Train, and Empower New Local Food Producers

- 3.1 Research best practices of farm incubator programs.
- 3.2 Facilitate land leases by farmer-owner/consultants to farm apprentices.
- 3.3 Encourage Youth Food/Farming Entrepreneurship.
- 3.4 Expand agricultural and related vocational programs in local educational institutions.
- 3.5 Support WWOOFers, AmeriCorps members, recent graduates, farm internship programs and ROP students to diversify and increase the local farm labor pool.



“We are fortunate to have remained economically viable for the last 30 years in Mendocino County by using a low carbon footprint and biodynamic farming practices. We have been able to bring together 200 households who annually finance the operating costs of the farm and share in all the food that is produced, creating a real and stable economic alternative to the often injurious effects and vicissitudes of market agriculture. In the future, we hope that more and more people will partner directly with local farms to obtain a staple part of their food supply through this associative, rather than market economic relationship, thus recreating conscious, viable local food production.”

—Stephen Decater
Biodynamic Horse Farmer, Live Power Farm in Covelo