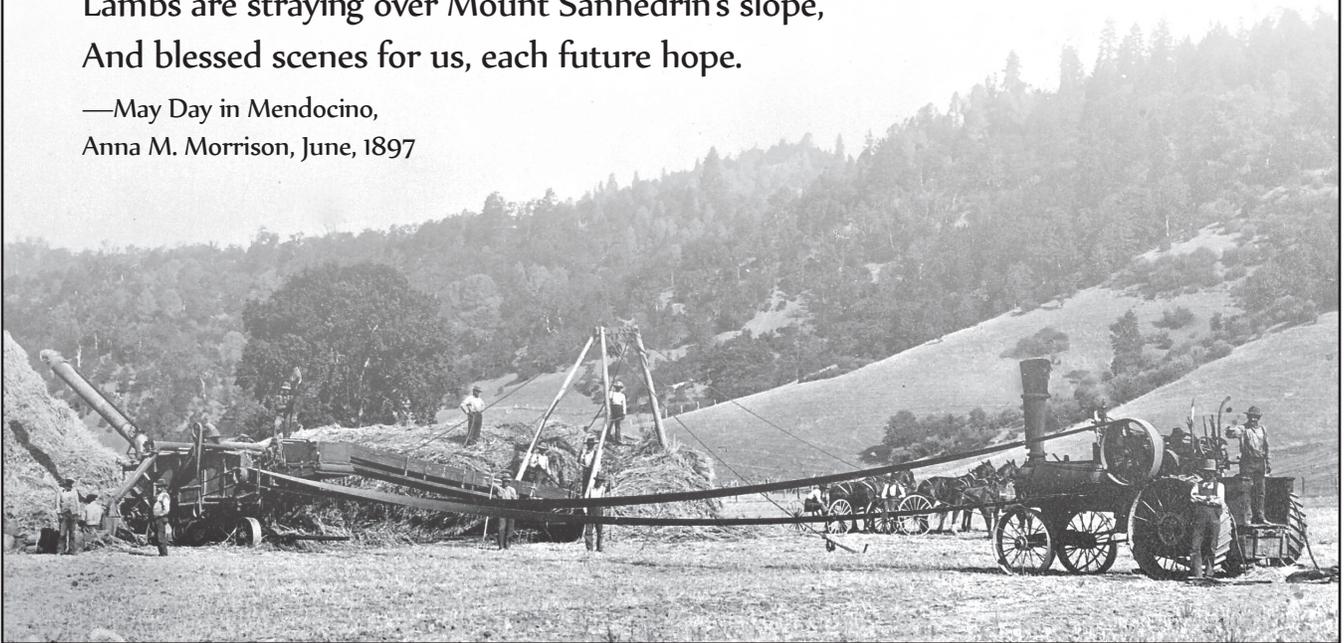


OUR HISTORY

Fields where but late the fruitful seed was sown,
Promise us soon a plenteous harvest-home;
Our redwood forests wave their noble crests,
O'er rivers flowing on toward the West;
Lambs are straying over Mount Sanhedrin's slope,
And blessed scenes for us, each future hope.

—May Day in Mendocino,
Anna M. Morrison, June, 1897



A threshing operation in Round Valley circa 1895

A Long History as a Major Food-Producing Region

Mendocino County residents have a long history of successfully providing food for the family table. As we look to the past, we see how the county became an agricultural leader, how we moved away from that position and how we can regain that status in years to come.

Our Oldest Food Producers

For approximately 3,000 years, Pomo, Yuki and other native peoples lived in relationship to the changing seasons and the corresponding ebbs and flows of food. Tribal communities subsisted by gathering and preparing acorns. Salmon were skewered and dried, and seaweed, mushrooms, wild greens and herbs

were harvested. Game provided tribes with food, medicine and utilitarian items.

Feeding a Growing County

The area's first settlers arrived in the mid-1800s and lived in isolated communities within the county's sprawling, 3,510 square-mile boundary. Nearly every resident had a small garden.

Because of the county's geographic constraints, food producers had difficulty getting products to larger markets. Ironically, this is a challenge still faced by farmers today.

Historic accounts list a cornucopia of products successfully farmed in the county, with most farms located on the coast until irrigation was established

inland. Potatoes were such an abundant crop in Mendocino Village there were surplus bushels exported to other cities. In 1864, the Coyote Valley Flour mill processed a daily average of four tons of wheat. In 1877, as the United States was undergoing a severe economic downturn, Mendocino County was relatively insulated from the worst effects. This editorial, from the first edition of the Ukiah City Press describes the county's status, as compared to the challenges of other areas:

*"In our county...we are blessed with an abundance to supply our needs. Grain and vegetables enough have been raised to meet all our wants, with a portion to spare other sections. Our cornfields are waving in luxuriant green; the stock-raiser looks for a handsome remuneration for his hogs and cattle; the wool yield has been most gratifying to the sheep-raiser, and every vocation promises to make plethoric pockets."*²

In 1880, Anderson Valley, a community of less than 1,000 people, raised 20,000 head of cattle and 75,000 head of sheep. There were 28,000 apple trees, 2,000 acres of barley, 3,000 acres of oats, 375 beehives and 8 operating gristmills within the fledgling county.

Food production continued briskly into the next century. As recently as 1940, there were 20,000 cultivated acres between Westport and Gualala. In 1948, residents reported that all that could be seen from Cloverdale, Anderson Valley and westward to the coast were apple orchards and sheep.³ Up to 150,000 acres were being utilized for farming at one



Threshing watermelon seeds at the C.A. Carner ranch, Potter Valley, circa 1900

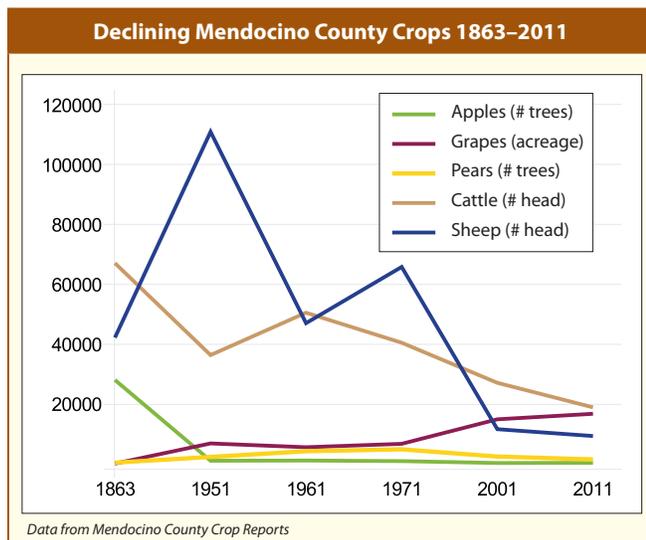
time. Mendocino County was the nation's leader in the production of hops, Easter Lilies and berries.⁴

A Shift in Priorities

During the past 50 years, the acreage devoted to apples and pears in Mendocino County has declined by one-half. By 1990, there were 50 sheep ranches in Anderson Valley. Today there are less than five. Walnuts, grains and prunes, which comprised over 3,000 bearing acres as recently as 1969, are no longer listed as separate items on today's crop reports due to their diminished production. Changing social mores and the availability of year-round, out-of-season food created a new food paradigm for America, one relying less and less on small family farms.



Prunes drying in the sun, Stipp Ranch, Ukiah, 1910



A New Generation

In the 1960s and '70s, the earliest “back-to-the-landers” began settling in Mendocino County. Small-scale farmers began experimenting with organic and Biodynamically® grown crops. Farmers’ markets began to sprout within the county and across the nation.

In 2004, Mendocino County residents became the first in the nation to vote to ban the growing of genetically modified crops and animals in their county. According to Laura Hamburg, one of the “Yes on H” campaign coordinators, the Measure H campaign was the most costly in the history of Mendocino County. “No on H” supporters spent over \$700,000, with \$600,000 donated by Croplife America. Supporters of the initiative, which sought to ban GMO-grown crops in the county spent less than \$200,000 on their campaign.. Despite the difference in campaign war chests, the measure passed by 57%. Since then, more than 16 states and municipalities have adopted similar ordinances.

What Will Tomorrow Bring?

Despite its long history as a food-producing region, Mendocino County no longer has a sustainable food system. In just a few decades, we have become dependent on outside sources to keep our pantries and our stomachs filled. The problems facing our food security are interwoven and affect each and every resident, food producer, social program, institution and governmental official in this county and beyond.

Global and environmental issues impact every aspect of how we grow, process, purchase and consume our food. The number of farmers nationwide is decreasing

rapidly, and few young people can afford the astronomical costs associated with purchasing land and developing the infrastructure needed to grow crops. Inexpensive fossil fuels created the ability to produce and ship cheap, abundant food around the world and drastically changed the farming landscape. However, diminishing availability of these cheap resources necessitates a return to more local food production. Currently Mendocino County exports its products to 31 nations,⁵ while more than 90% of locally eaten food comes from outside the county. If we ask the average citizen where their food comes from, they would be hard-pressed to identify the county or even the country of origin.

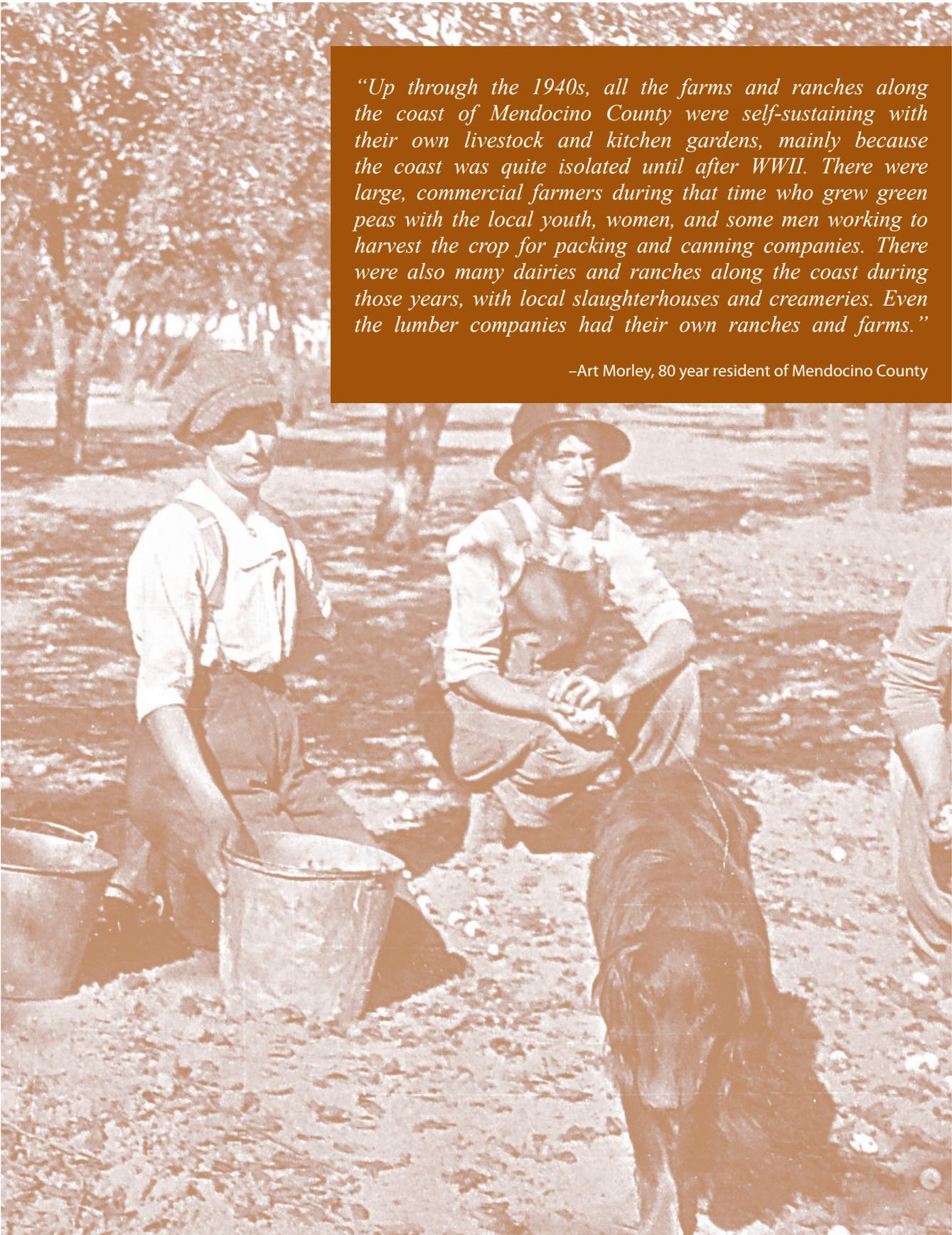
Planting Seeds for the Future

Loss of farmlands, increased transportation costs and stringent farming regulations create significant challenges to those concerned with creating a strong local food economy. Yet amidst these obstacles, we have many strengths—increased demand for sustainably produced local products, increased institutional interest in local purchasing, and the potential for “branding” Mendocino-made products.

Our favorable climate and unique geography, our agricultural history, the balance between our population and our natural resources, our educational system and our current economic circumstances afford us the opportunity to provide county residents a much larger local percentage of our food supply. It is the aim of the Food Policy Council that the Food Action Plan and the corresponding Principles, Goals and Actions will serve as a roadmap on our long journey toward a sustainable food system.



Back to the future: A horse-drawn straw binder used at the Finne Ranch in Redwood Vally circa 1913 is being employed today by Live Power Community Farm in Covelo.



“Up through the 1940s, all the farms and ranches along the coast of Mendocino County were self-sustaining with their own livestock and kitchen gardens, mainly because the coast was quite isolated until after WWII. There were large, commercial farmers during that time who grew green peas with the local youth, women, and some men working to harvest the crop for packing and canning companies. There were also many dairies and ranches along the coast during those years, with local slaughterhouses and creameries. Even the lumber companies had their own ranches and farms.”

–Art Morley, 80 year resident of Mendocino County