

MALT News

Marin Agricultural Land Trust

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About MALT

Marin Agricultural Land Trust (MALT) is a member-supported nonprofit organization created in 1980 by a coalition of ranchers and environmentalists to preserve farmland in Marin County, California.

With financial support from individuals, public agencies and private foundations, MALT has permanently protected nearly half of the working farm and ranch land in Marin County. MALT also encourages public policies that support and enhance agriculture.

To learn about Marin's working farms and ranches and the food they produce, visit malt.org.

Front cover photo © Jeff Stump
Back cover photo © Michael Woolsey

The Future of Farming in Marin

Ag Summit points to strategies for success

There were a hundred people in the room — farmers, ranchers and food producers from around Marin, spending a day with staff from various County offices and allies from a range of agricultural organizations — and the conversation was spirited and wide-ranging.

By the end of the Marin Agricultural Summit, a clear picture emerged. Yes, there are tough challenges facing farm families in Marin — but there's a diverse and vibrant community working on creative strategies and solutions. Put that together with the Bay Area's love of fresh, local food, and the future of farming here looks better than ever.

The summit took place last November and was organized by UC Cooperative Extension of Marin with help from a dedicated group of local ag experts and some of the county's finest producers and entrepreneurs. Sponsors included, among others, the County of Marin, Marin Community Foundation, Agricultural Institute of Marin, Marin County Farm Bureau, and Marin Agricultural Land Trust (MALT).

Represented segments of Marin's agricultural community included dairy farmers, grazing livestock ranchers, organic row crop farmers, shellfish producers, and value-added processors such as farmstead and artisan cheese makers.

The County of Marin's strong support of local agriculture was apparent throughout the summit. Supervisor Steve Kinsey, a MALT board member, said in his opening remarks, "The Board of Supervisors has identified agriculture as such an important part of our cultural, economic and land use history that we've made it one of only five targeted industries that we are working hard to protect going forward in our county."

The first summit was held in 1997, and that gathering resulted in a variety of innovative initiatives, such as the Marin Organic Certified Agriculture program.

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Marin Ag Summit: Strategies for Success

New Generation Ready to Lead

Ellie Rilla, Community Development Advisor for UC Cooperative Extension of Marin, and MALT's newest board member, has been working to support Marin's farming community for over 25 years. As a key organizer of both the first Ag Summit in 1997 and the recent event, Ellie sees an evolution taking place.

"It was wonderful to look around the room and see a whole new generation of farmers and ranchers coming to the

on to the next generation. The county is taking initial steps to reform tax codes to help family farms.

Permit processing - This is an ongoing problem for farming operations, sometimes taking years to clear a project. Ideas for improvement include adding staff with agricultural backgrounds to the county Planning Department.

"With new direct marketing channels, farm families have new ways to make their businesses work."

increase profitability is through "value-added" products. Several local dairies have added cheese-making operations, and some ranchers are selling their grass-fed beef to local customers rather than selling to feed lots in the Midwest.

Everyone left the summit energized and committed — knowing there's a lot of work to do to address all these issues, and ready to keep moving.

New Markets Bring Change

Looking at how agriculture in Marin has changed since the first summit in 1997, Ellie points out challenges and new opportunities. "Most Marin ranchers can't survive selling only to commodity markets," she explains. "There are a few outstanding beef ranchers that can make a good living this way, but others need to look for new strategies."

"I think we've proved in the last ten years that a more diversified agriculture is the future for Marin," she continued. "Yes, we've lost dairies because milk pricing hurts them. But we've made gains in other areas, such as pastured chickens and grass-fed beef, and organic row crops are coming along. And with new direct marketing channels such as farmers' markets, buying clubs, and wholesale distribution to Whole Foods, United Market and Oliver's to name a few, farm families have new ways to make their businesses work."



Marin Ag Summit Focus Group with farmers, ranchers, producers and ag advisors. © Steve Quirt

forefront," Ellie said. "A lot of them were still kids or maybe in college when we had the first summit in 1997. Now, they're standing up in front of the room giving presentations. It's tremendously important to have this new generation coming up. With their deep roots in family farming traditions and their fresh energy and new ideas, they really are the future of agriculture in Marin."

"Grown in Marin" label - People in the Bay Area want to buy food fresh from local farms. A "Grown in Marin" label would help educate customers and give a marketing boost to Marin growers and food producers.

Value-added products - One of the best ways for farmers and ranchers to

Tough Problems, Fresh Solutions

The Ag Summit provided a forum for discussing the challenges faced by Marin's farming families. It was also time for envisioning solutions that can make a difference. Here are just a few of the hot topics:

Inheritance taxes - High tax rates can make it impossible to pass land

MALT MAKING A DIFFERENCE

MALT board member Ellie Rilla, Community Development Advisor for UC Cooperative Extension, works with farmers and ranchers throughout the county, so she sees the challenges they face. She also sees solutions that make a difference, and one of those is MALT.

"MALT's work to protect land through conservation easements — purchasing the development rights to that land — has really helped the next generation of farmers launch new enterprises," Ellie explains.

"I interviewed the 26 cheese makers in Marin and Sonoma counties, and a third of them are new in the past three years. Most are *farmstead cheesemakers*, meaning the cheese is made on the farm from their herd's milk. About 70% of these new businesses jump-started their transition by selling the development rights to their land, and in Marin that means they worked with MALT. That kind of support for new farm enterprises is another benefit of MALT and another reason why our work is so important."

Friend Your Farmer

Nancy Grossi uses social media to build community



Nancy and Dominic Grossi on their ranch with Bryce, Paige and one of the calves.

© Michael Woolsey

“I didn’t even know what a blog was until about a year ago,” says Nancy Grossi with a laugh. Now, her blog site *The Wife of a Dairyman* has become daily reading for a growing audience, and her Tweets and Facebook postings are connecting hundreds of people to her family’s farm.

Nancy’s husband, Dominic Grossi, is a fourth generation rancher who serves as President of the Marin County Farm Bureau and is also a member of MALT’s Board of Directors. The Grossis run a dairy operation and raise naturally fed beef on the rolling pastures of their 450-acre family farm just outside of Novato.

Conversing With Consumers

The blog began when Nancy became frustrated with what she sees as one-sided media coverage about the dairy business. “I think dairy farmers get a bad rap with these reports about cows being mistreated,” Nancy explains. “There is good and bad in every type of business. But when people only see the bad, they may think that’s the way all dairy farmers operate. It made me want to stand up and say, ‘We’re not like that, and none of the farmers I know personally are like that. We all care for our cows.’ So my goal with the blog is to begin a conversation with

consumers and be available for the public to ask questions.”

Nancy’s blog now features dozens of photo essays about the dairy farm, covering topics from feeding and calf care to milk testing and vaccinations. And with her great sense of humor and engaging photos, the articles are fun to read.

“Social media is a way we can get a dialog going with consumers.”

Recipes and Family Stories

It’s not all cow talk on *The Wife of a Dairyman*. Nancy offers entertaining stories and photos about life with her kids and a tantalizing section filled with favorite recipes.

“The family stories are just part of my life as a mom,” Nancy says. “But I also think it helps people relate to the blog. I’m trying to connect with a variety of people, not just farmers. If I can connect with someone on a parenting level, maybe they’ll read my farm posts as well. Or maybe the recipes are their favorite part, and that leads them to read about the farm. I try to find things that interest readers and keep them coming back.”

Connect and Thrive

For agriculture to survive in Marin, Nancy thinks that farmers need to

connect with people in Bay Area cities — and blogging, Facebook and Twitter are great ways to make that happen. “People want to connect with their farmers. That’s why farmers’ markets are so huge. It gives people a chance to meet farmers and talk on a personal level. As a dairy and beef ranch, we’re not at the farmers’ market. But social media is a way we can get a dialog going with consumers and they can learn about how we run the farm.”

To connect with the Grossis, visit thewifeofadairyman.blogspot.com

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Local Farming, Not Global Warming

Bill McKibben applauds protection of farmland

Preserving farmland for future generations, supporting local food production, caring for wildlife habitats, enjoying the beauty of open spaces — these are reasons we work to protect agricultural land.

Now, experts like Bill McKibben point to another reason to ensure land stays available for local farming. They say it's a key part of the solution to global climate change.

be marinated in crude oil. And that's not sustainable because we can't keep burning that petroleum and sending that carbon up into the atmosphere. So we need a food system that works on different principles, and it's pretty obvious what those principles will

“We need food that's raised with less impact, closer to home, and employs more people.”

continued. “Two years ago, the USDA released their annual agricultural census and reported that for the first time in 150 years, the number of farms in America is increasing, not decreasing. If you think about the scope of American history, that's a really epic turning point.”

Respect for MALT's Work

Bill pointed out that you can't have a local food system unless you have local agricultural land, and he expressed



Local Food as Climate Solution

The Boston Globe called him “the nation's leading environmentalist.” MSN named him one of the most influential men of 2009. And last October, his 350.org group organized the world's largest day of climate action with more than 7,000 rallies in 188 countries. Bill McKibben, author of a new book titled *Eaarth*, is a leading voice on the need for action on global warming, and he's not bashful about saying what he thinks.

At a recent MALT sponsored talk, Bill said the local food movement is part of the solution to the climate change problem. “The food system we have now is damaging the environment pretty darned fast. It relies so much on fossil fuel that your food might as well

need to be: We need food that's raised with less impact, closer to home, and employs more people.”

Growth of Farmers' Markets

Bill is tremendously encouraged by the growth of farmers' markets. “The most exciting thing going on in this country, the one trend that's headed unambiguously in the right direction, is our relationship with food. Farmers' markets have been the fastest growing part of our food economy for a decade now. Their sales rise from 12-15% a year, and their number double every five years or so. There's no place in this country now where you're far from a farmers' market.”

“Proof of that explosion is in the most hopeful statistic I know,” he

appreciation for the work MALT does to protect farmland. “I have the honor of serving on the board of our Adirondack Conservancy and Land Trust in upstate New York, and I have some sense of just how much work this is. It's the real estate arm of the environmental movement, in a sense. There are times when I can't figure out what all my [climate change] work is accomplishing, day in and day out, as we try to change politics and things. So it's nice at the end of the day to be able to say, ‘Here's a piece of land that would have been turned into somebody's subdivision, and instead it's a living, breathing place.’ It's remarkable work.”



Photo of County Line Harvest (above) © Paige Green
Photo (facing page) © Michael Woolsey

Saving the Soil, Saving Ourselves

Sunday, March 13

Deborah Koons Garcia, the director of *Future of Food*, will preview and talk about her new film *Symphony of the Soil*. We'll also hear from Marin farmer Janet Brown of Allstar Organics, and soil scientist Jeff Creque PhD., an agroecologist and a partner with MALT in the Marin Carbon Project.

Time: 4:00 – 6:00 pm

Place: Cavallo Point, Sausalito

Cost: \$10 MALT members / \$15 nonmembers

Preregistration is suggested

Lamb Butchering & Cooking Demo with Lunch

Saturday, March 19

Aaron Gilliam, a butcher at Fatted Calf Charcuterie, demonstrates how to cut lamb into its many delicious parts. Adam Mali, Executive Chef at Nick's Cove, shows wonderful ways to cook lamb. And Kevin Maloney of Fallon Ranch talks about his family's MALT protected sheep ranch. Followed by a delicious lunch!

Time: 11:00 am – 2:00 pm

Place: Nick's Cove, Marshall

Cost: \$85 MALT members / \$105 nonmembers

Preregistration is required

Moore Ranch Hike

Saturday, March 26

Join MALT Stewardship Director Patricia Hickey and rancher Rich Gallagher on a two-mile hike through this 1,000-acre beef ranch, and enjoy spectacular views of the Nicasio Valley. This is prime habitat for a variety of grassland birds, with high densities of birds of prey — so bring binoculars and cameras!

Time: 10:00 am – 1:00 pm

Place: Nicasio

Difficulty: Moderate

Cost: FREE for MALT members / \$15 nonmembers

What to Bring: Water, picnic lunch, hiking shoes, binoculars

Preregistration is required

Leiss Ranch Wildflower Walk

Saturday, April 2

Hike over pastures and through the woods where wildflowers grow in profusion. Botanist and MALT co-founder Phyllis Faber will help us identify the flowers, along with Nancy Chaffin and Betty Nunes, who both grew up on the property and learned the wildflowers from their mother, Gladys Leiss.

Time: 10:00 am – 2:00 pm

Place: Chileno Valley

Difficulty: Moderate

Cost: \$30 MALT members / \$40 nonmembers

What to Bring: Water, picnic lunch, hiking shoes, camera

Preregistration is required

Tresch Dairy Family Tour

Saturday, April 9

Join Kathy and Joe Tresch on their 2,100-acre dairy which supplies milk to Straus Organic Creamery. Feed a calf, see the milking parlor, taste Straus products, make butter, and hike one mile across the pastures and along the creek to the heirloom apple orchard and garden.

Time: 1:30 pm – 3:30 pm

Place: Deer Valley

Difficulty: Moderate

Cost: Adults – \$15 MALT members/\$20 nonmembers

Children – \$8 MALT members/\$10 nonmembers

What to Bring: Play clothes and shoes, water, snacks

Preregistration is required

Save the date! Pinot Noir Wine Tasting at Escalle Winery on Saturday, June 11.
A benefit for MALT by the Marin Winegrowers Association





McEvoy Olive Ranch

Friday, April 15

Enjoy the spectacle of 18,000 organic olive trees in bloom at this beautiful ranch. You'll hear how olives are grown, then walk through the pressing facility to learn how oil is extracted from the olives. Taste the oil and, if you like, purchase items made with this wonderful farm product.

Time: 9:45 am – noon

Place: Point Reyes/Petaluma Road

Difficulty: Easy

Cost: \$30 MALT members / \$40 nonmembers

What to Bring: Water, walking shoes

Preregistration is required

Earthday 2011 Workday & Celebration

Saturday, April 23

Join us for Earth Day in West Marin, with a variety of work parties and a celebration of our beautiful earth and community. MALT will sponsor a crew to help with thistle control; visit our website for other work sites. After working, enjoy a community party with food and music at Toby's Feed Barn.

Time: 9:30 am work party

Place: Point Reyes Station

Difficulty: Moderate

Dinner & Dancing 4:00 pm – 8:00 pm

Cost: FREE

What to Bring: Water, picnic lunch, work clothes and shoes

Preregistration is required

Windrush Farm Family Day

Saturday, May 7

See the lambs, and feed the llamas, cows and goats — then look for tadpoles in the pond. Make butter to spread on bread with local homemade jams. Mimi Luebermann raises sheep for wool and spins yarn, and she'll teach us about carding and spinning. Make your own wool bracelets!

Time: 10:30 am – 1:30 pm

Place: Chileno Valley

Difficulty: Easy

Cost: Adults – \$20 MALT members / \$25 nonmembers

Children – \$10 / \$55 for family of 4 or more

What to Bring: Play-clothes and shoes, water, picnic lunch

Preregistration is required

Spaletta Ranch Hike & Tour

Sunday, May 8

Jim Spaletta talks about the beef ranch he runs on 1,400 acres of gorgeous grazing land near the Pacific Ocean. Enjoy the views on a hike with Naturalist David Wimpfheimer, and see wildflowers and Western Bluebird, Red-tailed Hawk — even a Golden Eagle if we're lucky — and a variety of waterbirds.

Time: 9:30 am – 3:00 pm

Place: Valley Ford

Difficulty: Strenuous

Cost: \$30 MALT members / \$40 nonmembers

What to Bring: Water, picnic lunch, hiking shoes, layered clothes

Preregistration is required

Straus Dairy & Ranch Members-Only Tour

Thursday, May 26

Vivien Straus will read selections from her memoir about growing up on the farm. Her brother, Albert, will talk about the organic dairy operation and the energy systems used at the ranch. Watch the cows being milked and enjoy a delicious Straus product tasting and drinks to go with your picnic lunch.

Time: 12:00 pm – 4:00 pm

Place: Marshall

Difficulty: Easy

Cost: \$50 MALT members only

What to Bring: Water, picnic lunch, hiking shoes, layered clothes

Preregistration is required

Register online at www.malt.org

or call 415.663.1158

MALT Business Memberships

Are you a business owner in Marin County?

If so, you know that Marin is a great place to live, work and play. The county is blessed with a magnificent coastline, thousands of acres of parks, and a spectacular agricultural landscape designed by nature and shaped by a 150-year tradition of family farming.

This living landscape exists today in part because of MALT and the thousands of MALT members from around the Bay Area who are passionate about local food, local farms and local land. Working together, we have permanently protected nearly half of Marin's agricultural land. But thousands of acres are still at risk and our work continues.

So how can you and your business make a difference? By becoming a MALT Business Member.

As a Business Member, you'll help us preserve farmland for the benefit of future generations. We have a variety of membership levels to suit your needs, and each level offers valuable benefits for you and your business.



We invite you to join MALT and be part of the effort to protect Marin County's working farm and ranch land. When you do, you'll be connected to an engaged community of members who care about preserving the beauty of Marin and its bountiful farmland.

To find out more, visit www.malt.org or call Deborah White, Director of Annual Giving, at 415-663-1158 ext. 312, or email her at dwhite@malt.org. We'll be happy to create a membership package specifically customized for your business.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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RANCHES & Rolling Hills

Landscape Art Show & Sale to benefit Marin Agricultural Land Trust

May 21-22 • Druid's Hall, Nicasio
Free Admission



For one weekend, a select group of artists offer their visions of Marin's beautiful open spaces and working ranches at this exclusive benefit sale. This year we welcome two artists new to *Ranches & Rolling Hills*: Carol Peek and Tom Killion.

The preview event on Saturday, May 21 will sell out quickly, so watch for your invitation in the mail!



Christin Coy working at Jensen Ranch



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Start making your shopping list now... then get over to Whole Foods Market in Novato on March 22.

MALT receives 5% of all sales in the store that day!

And stop by the MALT table while you're there. We'd love to meet you.

For information about MALT's Business Member Program, see page 7.



Noelle Moss, Marketing & Community Relations Team Leader at Whole Foods Market, Novato