

MARIN RESOURCE CONSERVATION DISTRICT NEWSLETTER

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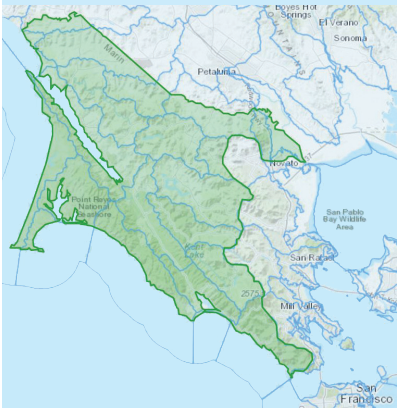
FARMING THE FUTURE OF THE LAND
True Grass Farms and the promise of
regenerative agriculture in Marin County



Marin Resource Conservation District's mission is to conserve and enhance Marin County's natural resources including its soils, water, plants and wildlife and to preserve and protect our agricultural heritage.

WHERE WE WORK

Our projects are located primarily on farms across Marin County, from the Point Reyes National Seashore to the rolling rangelands of Chileno Valley.



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Charting a Resilient Future for Marin County's Agriculture

AGRICULTURE IN MARIN COUNTY

has a long and impressive history. From time immemorial and for hundreds of generations, Coast Miwok peoples intentionally, dynamically, and adaptively stewarded the lands of Marin before outside settlers moved in.

The earliest agriculture was simply grazing on ranches, but it soon evolved into dairying. Dairy products produced in Marin County were known throughout the West. Marin County was a major producer of dairy products for the San Francisco Bay area and elsewhere.

Due to a lack of water and scarce relatively flat, productive soils, Marin County has never been a significant producer of row crops. While ranching continues throughout western Marin County, dairying has declined for a variety of reasons.

This has been part of a nationwide trend. The number of small dairies in the United States has declined dramatically and the same trend has happened in Marin County.

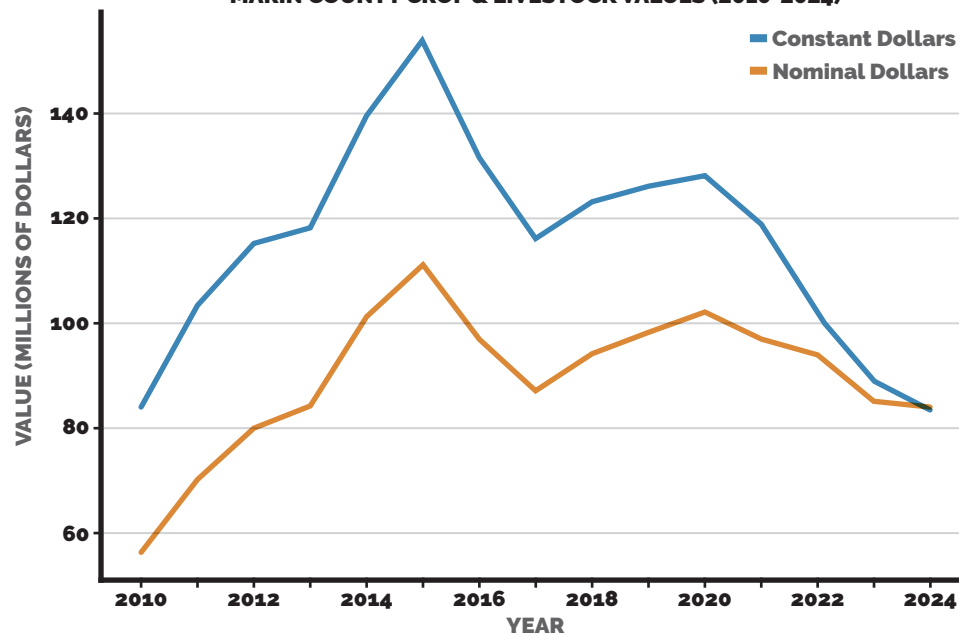
The number of dairy farms in the United States has declined from over 648,000 in 1970 to 24,470 in 2022, representing a decrease of over 95%.

This decline is due to consolidation and the growth of larger dairies that benefit from economies of scale, leading to fewer, bigger dairies dominating the industry.^{1,2}

Marin County has followed the same trend, with 200 dairies in 1950, 100 in 1970, and probably fewer than 10 by the end of 2026, according to Marin County crop reports from the Marin County Agricultural Commissioner.

As dairy production has declined, so has Marin County's overall agricultural output, a trend reflected in the constant-dollar values shown in the graph.

MARIN COUNTY CROP & LIVESTOCK VALUES (2010-2024)



Nominal Dollars: what was paid at the time • Constant Dollars: what that amount is worth after inflation
 Values are adjusted to today's dollars so different years can be compared fairly.
 Marin's crop and livestock production has generally declined over time beyond the effects of inflation.



Chileno Valley Ranch

In recent comments to the Marin Resource Conservation District (Marin RCD) Board of Directors, Marin County Agricultural Commissioner Joe Deviney stated that total agricultural production has trended down in value over the last decade. The gross value of milk products dropped below that of poultry for the first time in history in the 2023 crop report.

In 2024 the price per unit of organic milk increased however, reflecting hope for our remaining organic dairies.

Deviney, who has worked in several Bay Area counties, applauds Marin as having done a great job of protecting its agricultural land through a variety of mechanisms. The county has generally zoned agricultural land in a way that reduces incentives to subdivide the land.

The Marin Agricultural Land Trust has also acquired easements over agricultural land, assuring that it will continue at some level of agricultural production in the future.

However, Deviney stated, the time has come to pay more attention to the needs of agriculturalists and adopt programs that will make their economic viability stronger in the future.

In a recent meeting between the Marin RCD and Sonoma and Marin County farmers, farmers stated that they needed several things to assure their continued productivity. They cited the cost and complexity of regulations and permitting as a significant challenge to ranch improvements. Cost share assistance programs offered by USDA and Marin RCD are helpful.

Additional farmer priorities include stronger programs to sequester carbon in the soil; increased use of solar power on farms, additional support for manure management practices to protect water quality; funding to address eroded gullies; better protection and improvement of productive soils; and a better explanation of how Marin RCD, USDA, and other programs can work together and be more accessible by farmers.

The Marin RCD's primary mission is the protection of natural resources and continued productivity of the land. The District believes that environmental enhancement and agricultural productivity go hand in hand.

The Marin RCD is now in the process of adopting a new five-year strategic plan which will seek to achieve these two goals.

¹ Structure, Costs, and Technology Used on U.S. Dairy Farms Jeffrey Gillespie, Eric Njuki, and Angel Terán. United States Economic Research Service July 2024.

² <https://www.newsfromthestates.com/article/americas-dairy-farms-are-disappearing-down-95-1970s>



Guido Frosini

RANCHER SPOTLIGHT: **Guido Frosini and True Grass Farms**

ALONG THE WIND-KISSED ROLLING landscape of the Estero de San Antonio, there are rows of young cypress trees that have created a little shelter oasis for the headquarters of True Grass Farms. True Grass Farms, established in 2012, is operated by Guido Frosini.

Along with his partner Emily Federe-Frosini and their 3 year-old son, Adriano Luce Frosini, he raises grass fed beef and sheep as well as chickens. His family: Gaver-Conlan-Frosini has been in the West Marin Area since 1867. True Grass Farms is certified organic and certified Animal Welfare Approved.

True Grass Farm's primary goal is to regenerate landscapes and restore water cycles by increasing plant diversity, biological communities and overall soil health. They use

holistic type decision making and animal impact as tools to stimulate ecosystems beneficially. They seek partnerships and collaborations with land-based individuals and organizations interested in the long-term health and function of their ecological assets. They raise and produce seasonal grassland finished beef, lamb, chicken, pastured eggs and pastured pork. Guiding values stem from three main pillars of focus: Food, Ecology and Culture.

True Grass Farms seeks to collaborate, empower and give opportunities to individuals that want to work in ag, and care deeply about the land and the animals and the True Grass culture around land care and animal management. Currently True Grass

Farms is helping to establish Taylor Black with her livestock ecological contract and meat business and is presently collaborating with Jenna Caughlin, a Miwok Native American, with "Shepherds of the Coast" with sheep contract grazing and lamb production. Guido Frosini is an associate director of the Marin Resource Conservation District (RCD). Associate directors are appointed by the board of directors of the Marin RCD and provide advice, counsel and support for Marin RCD activities. They attend board meetings and advise the Marin RCD on best practices to be used on ranches and other lands.

True Grass Farms is part of the California Healthy Soil Initiative by participating in various programs to



Emily Fede-Frosini



Adriano Luce Frosini



implement land management practices that increase soil carbon sequestration, which improves soil health. The farm has created over 4 acres of oak and chestnut sylvopasture (the integration of trees into pasture to provide shade for livestock and increase the sequestration of carbon on rangeland through tree biomass), 1 mile of hedgerow for wildlife and pollinator habitat, and multi-acre compost application. With these land management practices, the farm sequesters carbon at an estimated rate of 56.9 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent per year.

Reflecting on the True Grass Farm improvements in soil health, Guido notes: "In our Point Blue Monitoring Findings from 2017-2022 we have seen a decrease to soil bulk density which translates to better water infiltration (we have seen this in these past storms, where we have not reached soil saturation point on most of the ranch

even after these rains). In that same time period, we saw an increase in shallow Soil Organic Matter (0-10 cm).

The hedgerows and riparian buffer plantings paired with the mosaic style grazing have given the opportunity to species like the Grasshopper Sparrow and Savannah Sparrow. Regarding vegetation diversity in 2017 there was a count of 26 species vs 2022 where it totaled 61 species. Where we have applied compost on our pastures, we have seen better gains from our cows (seems like better nutritional density and overall grass palatability) and more uniform grazing."

Guido, with the collaboration of the Marin RCD over the last few years, has started to build a relationship with the Federated Indians of the Graton Rancheria. He encourages them to review his farm plans, frequently visit the farm and inform him about traditional practices that might be

applicable to his farm. The relationship with the Tribe is developing at the speed of trust and capacity to engage. They have collaborated on a few hedgerow and riparian reforestation plantings and have welcomed input on vegetation management and collaborating on an offering of land access for cultural use and enjoyment.

To encourage the general public to better get to know about farming in Marin County, True Grass Farms offers seasonal primitive campsites. This allows people to become familiar with farming operations, eat locally grown food, see ecological grazing in action, as well as enjoy the beautiful environment of northern coastal Marin County.

True Grass Farms offers their product seasonally directly off the ranch at the farm store, online or Saturdays at the Berkeley Farmers' Market.

Partnering with Ranchers for Better Grazing and Cleaner Coastal Water

IN YEARS PAST, MANY OF THE water quality improvements made by the Marin Resource Conservation District (Marin RCD) have focused on helping dairy farmers manage manure. These efforts involve changes made to each dairy facility's hydrological footprint to either capture or divert manure, reduce or eliminate runoff, and prevent dairy waste from entering nearby streams.

Less obvious is the potential impact of range (beef) cattle on water quality. These animals are much more spread out and are rarely brought together in one place. But the manure these animals produce can still impact water quality if not managed correctly.

The San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board has regulations in place to manage water quality impacts. Unlike the permits governing particular point sources of

waste such as factories, wastewater treatment plants and so on, permits governing range cattle are more general. They require ranchers to implement best management practices and report on their progress.

Individual ranchers are required to sign up for the program and meet the new regulations. In this case, the role of the Marin RCD is to work with the ranchers and help them figure out how to comply. Marin RCD does not enforce regulations and is not a regulatory agency, but we do provide detailed advice to ranchers and help them develop compliance plans which fit the needs of their individual ranch.

Our goal is to provide aide to ranchers who need technical advice or financial assistance in enhancing water quality on their ranches that drain into coastal waters such as Tomales Bay. The Bay is home to several commercial oyster operations,

which are very sensitive to water quality impacts that can affect public health, which is why water quality standards are the highest possible. In addition, Tomales Bay is home to hundreds of species of native fish, wildlife, and birds, that rely on clean water to thrive.

Other affected watersheds include San Antonio and other creeks which drain into San Francisco Bay.

Gerhard Epke of the Marin RCD is our point person in this program. Gerhard is a hydrologist and works closely with the ranching community on this program.

If you want to deeper dive into this important issue, visit the Regional Water Quality Control Board's website at

Waterboards.ca.gov/sanfranciscobay/water_issues/programs/agriculture/grazing or by scanning the QR Code.



Scan to learn more about the Grazing Regulatory Program.





Emilie Winfield Honored as Employee of the Year by California Association Resource Conservation Districts

EMILIE WINFIELD, OUR NORTH Coast Soil Hub Director, was recently honored as Employee of Year by the California Association of Resource Conservation Districts.

Emilie is an agroecologist whose work focuses on agricultural sustainability, soil health, and impactful collaboration across the northern California coast. Emilie is dedicated to educating farmers and technicians about sustainable growing practices and soil health. She is enthusiastic about soil microbes and good food, and believes agriculture plays a key role in creating a more resilient and just future for communities and the planet.

The Association is made up of Resource Conservation Districts throughout California. Considering that there are hundreds of staff at these districts, it is a real honor for Emilie to be singled out as RCD Employee of the Year.

The North Coast Soil Hub is a community-driven network dedicated to increasing collective understanding of how to build and maintain healthy soils in the unique conditions of the coastal counties north of the Golden Gate, enhance biodiversity and improve resilience of agricultural lands.

Through regional collaboration, the Soil Hub partners on applied

research, fosters peer-to-peer knowledge exchange, improves coordination for program delivery, and secures funding to plan and implement practices that support soil health and biodiversity.

Marin is one of 8 Resource Conservation Districts in the region that provide coordination and leadership to support the network of technical assistance providers, researchers, government agencies, nonprofits, educators, and agricultural producers who are advancing on the ground stewardship of the region's working lands.



**Thanks for being part of this
place we all call home.
We're glad to be on your radar.**

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM **YOU!**

The Marin Resource Conservation District (Marin RCD) has been serving local landowners and the community for over 65 years. As we plan for the future, we want to make sure our work reflects what matters most to YOU — clean water, healthy soils, thriving wildlife, and resilient communities.

Please complete our community survey by returning the enclosed paper form or by scanning the QR code to the right. Your input will guide our priorities and help us share our impacts in ways that are meaningful to you.



**Please scan the
QR code above or
return the paper
survey in the
enclosed envelope!**