

Marin County Board of Supervisors  
3501 Civic Center Drive  
San Rafael, CA 94903

Local Coastal Program Amendments (LCPA)  
Agriculture and Biological Resources  
Attention Kristin Drumm [Kdrumm@marincounty.org](mailto:Kdrumm@marincounty.org)

Dear Chairman Steve Kinsey and Supervisors,

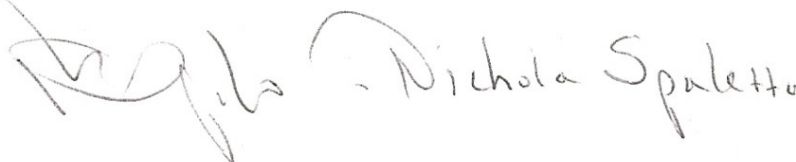
You state that you want to "Strengthen the viability of the local agriculture economy and community." Marin county farmers want this also. Farmers and ranchers in Marin County do not want more county development restrictions placed on them in order to maintain their agricultural heritage. Our family wishes that you take into consideration the letters from Marin County Farm Bureau and University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources regarding agriculture and biological resources for the LCPA. These organizations have put a lot of time and thought into the update process of the LCP. They represent the farmers and ranchers of Marin County that also helped in implementing written policies to continue to protect both agriculture and the environment of Marin.

With longstanding stewardship practices of ranchers, Marin County residents have enjoyed the beautiful landscapes and wonderful bounty from farmers for generations. Marin County produces large amounts of milk and beef. These last few years proved to be an extreme challenge to be profitable. Historical prices on corn due to the drought across the states along with over 40% of the crop going to ethanol made income plunge for the farmer. (See West Marin Citizen 9/20/12-"Dairy task force set to begin" By Lynn Axelrod) In over 60 years farmers have made significant progress reducing their carbon footprint mainly do to technology. Farmers have gotten more efficient using fewer acres and less water to produce food for us. Farmers have to utilize the land that they farm to be twice as productive to make a profit in today's world of demand with out harming the environment. On average California loses approximately 55,000 acres of farmland per year or about one square mile every four days. Between 1984 and 2008, more than 1.3 million acres of farm and grazing lands were lost in California.

Marin County Farm Bureau has proposed policies to promote flexibility and long-term viability of family farms and ranches. Mandatory conservation easements as conditions of permit approval and other takings without compensating the landowner must comply with the U.S. Supreme Court's holdings in *Nollan v. California Coastal Commission* and *Dolan v. city of Tigard*. *Nollan*, 438 U.S. 825 (1987); *Dolan*, 512 U.S. 374 (1994) Under these cases the burden falls on the County to make an individualized determination that a proposed land use will adversely impact public infrastructure, public access or other public good. All farmers have a stake in following regulations and best management practices to protect the health of people, their farm and the environment. Caring for the land, air and water is a responsibility farmers share with the local community. Farmers work with government agencies and university experts to develop new technologies aimed at conserving natural resources and the environment.

Our family would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your support of agriculture in Marin County as well as in the Point Reyes National Seashore.

Sincerely, The Spalettas 22000 S.F.D. blvd., Pt.Reyes, Ca 94956

 Nicholas Spalletta 10/2/12





**Jade Ismail and Nick Whitney were two of over a dozen locals that strutted on the runway for 'Funk and Flash' – a fundraiser for the 25th Anniversary of the West Marin Community Services and its thrift store – that played to a packed house last Saturday night at the Dance Palace. Photos by Matt Gallagher**



## IN THE LAND OF MILK AND MONEY

# Dairy task force set to begin

By Lynn Axelrod

When California Food and Agriculture Secretary Karen Ross began organizing a 32-member California Dairy Future Task Force she may have been thinking about the kind of distress that dairyman Dominic Grossi described to the *Citizen* last week:

"Imagine waking up and working all day long seven days a week as dairymen do and not only do you not get paid, you then have to borrow money to stay in business and feed your family."

Grossi, who heads the Marin Farm Bureau and runs his family's dairy in Novato, was summing up the anguish of many farmers who are coping with one of the bleakest economic periods in living memory.

Secretary Ross said the task force was needed to change an outdated system and to create new markets. The group will have its

first meeting in Modesto on October 23 and 24. Their charge is to produce recommendations by the end of the year.

## THE COST IN LIVES

The need for change was driven home by this summer's drought – the worst in more than 60 years, with officially declared disaster areas in 32 states. It drove up feed prices at the same time dairies continued coping with losses sustained by the national economic collapse of 2008 to 2009.

Milk production costs had soared by 28 percent from 2006 to 2009. Feed costs alone increased 33 percent in 2007 and went up another 12 percent in 2008, according to a study issued by McKinsey and Company in 2010. The reasons included the conversion of corn, a dairy feed staple, to produce ethanol; crop shortfalls from bad weather around the world; and speculation on anticipated poor grain harvests.

Most dairy producers' margins of profit "went negative" by the spring of 2009 and large chunks of equity were lost. That year 100 California dairies closed and several farmers committed suicide.

Ross asked members to read an earlier re-

# Locals push for more time on Tomales Bay vessel plan

By Summer Brennan

At a public hearing for the new Draft Tomales Bay Vessel Management Plan held Tuesday at the Dance Palace, West Marin residents and boaters voiced concern over the new plan's recommendations, asking for more time to consider options and for public comment.

Together with the California State Lands Commission, the Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary last month published a draft of the new plan that aims to streamline the permitting process for moorings and reduce environmental harm. But despite the involvement of a 2007 working group representing boating associations, shellfish growers, commercial fishermen, shore-side property owners and others, many feel the plan is flawed and that more public input is needed.

After a hurried presentation by Sanctuary superintendent Maria Brown, speakers were given two minutes each to publicly voice their comments about the plan. Many expressed distress over what they saw as poor science on eelgrass habitat in Tomales Bay, flawed recommendations for mooring technology, and a lack of communication with stakeholders.

"My main concern is that we still don't

have enough input from locals," Marshall resident George Clyde, who served on the original working group, said during the public comment period. "We should reopen the working group process." He encouraged the Sanctuary to establish a new working group to help address the issues being raised by the public before publishing another draft, let alone before issuing a final one. "As one who cares about the credibility and the reputation of the Sanctuary, I

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port by McKinsey that was issued in two parts in 2006 and 2007. It examined how to create a "Consumer-Driven Dairy Growth Strategy." "The Secretary believes it is a foundation upon which to begin building a future for the dairy industry," Steve Lyle, the department's public affairs director, told the Citizen.

The study made five core recommendations: minimize environmental costs; continue investing in promotion, marketing and product innovation; increase investments in production efficiencies; reform laws and regulations; and refinance the state's quota system. Quota is an entitlement system that dairies must qualify for. It allows a dairy to receive a minimum share of the revenue that is pooled from all California dairies.

#### MARIN COSTS SKYROCKET

Milk is the "long-standing premier commodity for Marin," county Agricultural Commissioner Stacy Carlsen wrote in his 2011 crop report. It produced 44.7 percent of the total agricultural value.

Marin has 27 cow dairies according to Ellie Rilla, the Community Development Advisor at U.C. Cooperative Extension. Of these, 17 are what she terms "non-organic," with three to four transitioning to organic production. Rilla was the U.C.C.E. Marin director for 21 years until 2009.

Marin's conventional dairies today receive \$16 to \$18 for every hundred pounds of milk, according to Farm Bureau president Grossi. The return to dairies is based on a highly complicated state formula. He told the *Citizen*, "This is actually a pretty high price by historical standards and is looking like it may go up another dollar in the near months, but unfortunately our cost of production has continued to skyrocket.

"I can't speak for other dairymen but I can tell you that our cost per CWT [every 100 lbs.] is about \$19 right now. This is the highest it has ever been."

So the bottom line is that costs are greater than return by about \$1. This may not seem much by itself but if an average conventional Marin dairy milks about 400 cows that produce about 26,000 lbs. of milk per day, the daily loss is \$260 per day, or \$95,000 per year. The number of cows in Central Valley dairies, Rilla said, run between 5,000 and 10,000.

Ethanol production has dramatically impacted what Grossi pays for corn feed. Before

2006 he never paid more than \$145 per ton, and often \$120. Last year the cost was between \$270 and \$300. Recently he was quoted \$374. Alfalfa, another feed staple, is also "at all time highs."

Local organic milk producers in Marin and Sonoma are not immune from price fluctuations. In 2011 they were asked by their processor Clover Stornetta to accept a steep cut in milk prices and to cut production. A number of them broke their long ties to Clover and switched to another processor, Organic Valley, because of a soured relationship.

#### GLOBAL FORCES IMPACT DAIRIES

The impact of globalism also hit U.S. dairies hard during the so-called Great Recession, according to the 2010 McKinsey report. Exports shrank from 11 percent in 2008 to five percent the next year.

There were several reasons. A strong U.S. dollar reduced buying by traditional importers such as Japan and India. Aggressive cost-cutting in New Zealand and the European Union outstripped sales by domestic producers who did not do the same. They lost 15 percent of global market share. Other burdens included drying up of credit, less eating away from home, and a continuing trend of decreased domestic demand.

India and China are developing their own dairy industries, which foretells ever-shrinking markets for U.S. exports.

Since 1996 the dairy industry has endured five increasingly severe boom-and-bust cycles. The export market is unpredictable. The federal dairy price support program ("buyer of last resort") is increasingly less useful in stabilizing prices because of domestic and global politics. The U.S. milk pricing system lags in signaling consumers' behavior, leaving producers unclear on when to reduce production.

Despite the series of crises and individual tragedies, California is ranked first in the nation in production of total milk, butter, ice cream, yogurt, nonfat dry milk, and whey protein concentrate, and is second in producing cheese, according to the California Food and Ag Dept.

Dairy farms produced \$7.6 billion in annual sales in 2011 from 41.4 billion pounds of milk, more than one-fifth the nation's total production. To keep its place amid natural challenges and global politics, the state appears to be rebooting for the 21st century.