

California Farm Futures

Summer 2010

The newsletter of California FarmLink, a non-profit organization working to promote family farming and preserve farmland through facilitating farm transfers



Urban Farming is Coming of Age

Virtually every day you see another news story about city community gardens, neighborhood food security initiatives, downtown farmers markets, or urban farming programs. There appears to be plenty of low-cost or free urban land available for farming. Add to that, the strong and growing demand for affordable, high-quality, fresh, local farm products.

The USDA recently unveiled new initiatives to promote and support urban agriculture. Unfortunately there's a dire shortage of trained organic farmers who understand how to setup and operate profitable commercial farm businesses in urban settings.

Commercial urban farms can provide financial benefits to adjacent building owners, operators, developers and tenants, such as: reduced building operating and maintenance costs; higher lease rates; elimination of weed abatement costs; stormwater surge mitigation solutions; reduced carbon footprint; lowered building heating and cooling costs; and higher building "return on investment" due to improved financial bottom line. Urban farmers can share financially in these benefits, increasing their own farm's revenue and profitability.

An urban farmer could benefit by integrating the farm into the structures and systems of a building or neighborhood - using adjacent building waste heat for cold season heating of hoop houses or greenhouses; capture of building or ground stormwater for irrigation; diversion of food and green waste for farm composting; and direct sales of farm produce to building tenants and neighbors through CSA programs, farm stands and neighborhood farmers markets.

Networks of profitable local urban farms generate economic, social and environmental benefits that help revitalize communities and contribute to efforts to redevelop cities to be more prosperous and sustainable.

Because commercial urban farmers encounter challenges and opportunities substantially different from those faced by rural farmers, commercial urban farm incubator programs differ in many ways from their rural counterparts.



James Kalin with prospective Farmers looking at land in Concord

Urban land available for farming in Concord:

The Sustainable Commercial Urban Farm Incubator (SCUFI) program is establishing its first commercial urban farm incubator in Concord, California. This program seeks aspiring farmers to setup and operate commercial urban organic farms as trainees on plots on the SCUFI land. The program will provide plots that selected trainees will run as a farm business. Trainees will have the option of operating their plots individually or as members of a farming cooperative. The Concord SCUFI program will provide aspiring farmer trainees with organic farming and business training, land to farm, help with financing, and assistance with marketing and sales. The Concord SCUFI **also seeks** trainers for the program.

If interested in becoming a trainee or trainer with the Concord SCUFI program please contact: James Kalin, 510-387-1031, jamesk@virtuallygreen.com.

Donate – How you can help.

As a small non-profit organization, we welcome your support. Your contribution, no matter how small, makes a difference! You can now donate on line through PayPal, or by mailing your check to us at P.O. Box 2224, Sebastopol, CA 95473.

Young Couple Seeks to Start Diversified Livestock Farm in Yolo County

Alexis Vertolli and Gillies Robertson—a young couple with a combination of good skills and boundless energy—seek land to start their own diversified livestock operation. Each has developed a strong background in natural resource management and farming. Thus far, they’ve earned their experience as interns or employees for someone else. Now they’re ready to strike out on their own.

Vertolli, articulate and enthusiastic, currently works for the Butte County Resource Conservation District on conservation planning and projects with local landowners, farmers and ranchers. She graduated several years ago from UC Santa Cruz with a focus on agro-ecology, and later developed a successful cut flower CSA program.



Gillies Robertson and Alexis Vertolli, young farmers

Vertolli headed south to work in Tasmania as State Coordinator for an Australian environmental cleanup effort, and met Robertson, a native of Scotland, who has since joined her in the US. They found work at the Book Family Farm

where she learned to drive draft horses, help with livestock and farm events. She’s raised vegetables and a small flock of laying hens successfully for several seasons. Attending UC Davis graduate school in the fall, she will focus on soil biogeochemistry and range management.

Robertson continues working in livestock management and as general handyman at the Book Family farm. He and Vertolli have a small herd of grass-fed cattle in partnership with the farm—another layer of expertise. Robertson has interned with Chaffin Family Orchards, a diverse and environmentally sustainable livestock and fruit tree ranch in Oroville. His formal college education in Australia studying natural resource management gave him a good foundation in habitat restoration techniques, sustainable land management and environmental policy. Putting theory to work as a park ranger in Tasmania, he helped return some of Sydney’s native bush land areas more toward their natural state.

Ready to farm on their own, probably in the Capay Valley on one or two small parcels they’ve found through FarmLink, they will start with sheep and chickens, hoping eventually to incorporate beef cattle and pigs. They want to establish a successful farm business, build community and develop a sense of purpose through farming. FarmLink Regional Program Coordinator Kendra Johnson looks forward to working with the couple to reach that goal!

Mother and Son Partnership

Jessica Ayala and her 16-year old son Devon Sanders have been working with FarmLink for about a year to find a suitable place to launch a small livestock business specializing in heritage meat chickens. Sanders wants to farm for a living. He’s currently running Live Earth Farm’s chicken operation in Watsonville. He has years of 4-H livestock experience, and manages a flock at his house and another backyard goat and chicken unit for family friends, demonstrating maturity beyond his years.



Young Devon Sanders with his goats

Art, Sander's father, has been in ag irrigation 30 years. The family is well-connected in the ag community and would like to start their own commercial chicken operation, (they have several buyers and restaurants lined up). Jessica plans to work with her son, and the family plans to finance the operation, which they envision ultimately as young Sander's own. He has fairly extensive field experience in poultry, and also with veggies and irrigation systems. He wants to open a poultry processing plant eventually. Contact Reggie Knox for more information: 831-425-0303.

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Diverse Petaluma Ranch Operation adds Hay Growing to the Mix

Nathalie Guion first approached California FarmLink in the spring of 2009 when she applied for our Farm Opportunities Loan Program. Guion applied for a loan to build operating and infrastructure to fund her start up hay business. In October 2009, Nathalie and partner Drew received a loan from California FarmLink to help them begin farming 160 acres in beautiful west Petaluma. They also have vineyards and a horse boarding/training operation on the property.

Guion’s efforts to start a hay growing business did not come without experience. As part of her undergraduate studies, she earned a Diploma as a General Agriculture Technician from Cantarel College in Avignon, France. The program was a three-year study of equipment, basic crop management, farm economics, and agricultural politics. Guion’s education also included equine studies at the highly regarded French Equestrian School in Samur France.

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Through her education, as well as her experience successfully running numerous equestrian facilities, the hay growing start up seemed a complementary business strategy and good way to provide a custom hay product for equine consumers.

Guion possesses a true entrepreneurial spirit as an aspiring farmer and business woman. Beside planting and successfully harvesting 160 acres of oat and rye hay, Nathalie and Drew welcomed their new daughter, Marie Charlotte, into the world of farming last December. Congratulations to this successful ranch family!

For information about purchasing hay, contact:
nat@natguion.com



***Chai, the watchdog, baby in buggy,
and Nathalie Guion chest high in hay***

There is still an opportunity for CCOF certification fee waivers!

FarmLink can still help 2-3 clients who've not previously been certified. Priority is being given to FarmLink clients, so anyone who's gone on a tour, received linking technical assistance, attended a workshop, or been in our database prior to 2010. Farmers who get certified could be bringing that "something extra" to the landowner they're leasing from. Contact your Regional Coordinator for details – and hurry!

Saving One Farm at a Time

California Farmlink is pleased to join a new collaborative of nonprofits and food co-ops in the Yolo/Sacramento region in its work to preserve "One Farm at a Time."

The collaborative provides a means for Sacramento Natural Foods Co-op and Davis Food Co-op communities to participate in securing the future of small farms that feed them. The members represent a significant pool of capital which, when invested collectively, can be leveraged to create a mutually beneficial partnership between the farmers and their communities.

This method of investing will help those farms to grow and mature over many generations, offering rare opportunities for promising farmers to get on "solid ground" without signing up for a lifetime of debt.

By raising local dollars to preserve smaller farms, we can provide a much-needed leg up to regional land trusts and other

conservation groups that might not otherwise be able to afford to work on small farm projects. By purchasing conservation easements, or even buying farms outright and offering lifetime tenure to select farmers, this network of local consumers will offer much-needed opportunities to the next generation of producers, while keeping alive productive family farms in this fertile region.

The One Farm at a Time project dovetails with California FarmLink's mission. FarmLink looks forward to participating in this initiative by assisting farmer-landowners to analyze their farm succession options, helping the co-op community assess models for future small farm preservation projects; and helping new farmers understand and negotiate their land tenure agreements, prepare solid business plans, and secure financing necessary to become successful participants in our local food economy.

http://www.sacfoodcoop.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1224%3Aone-farm-at-a-time-&catid=33%3Alocal-growersmain-content&Itemid=99



Summer's HOT Land Opportunities

North Coast properties – contact Andrea Krout
andrea@californiafarmlink.org:

Sonoma County ID #1210: Live and farm in Penngrove on six acres for lease with a 2 bd/2 ba home. The house was built in 1938, a large hay barn and shop, many livestock shelters, two outdoor offices, tank house structure and garage. Property set up for farm stand and owner willing to negotiate designated spot for that. Large private garden area, or could be used for farm events. Property close to Penngrove, Petaluma, Cotati and Sonoma. Private well and city water - four separate meters on the property. Second residence currently leased (with tenant who is supportive of agriculture). Barn is wired with 220 that can support large welder or refrigeration truck for cold storage. Additional fruit and nut trees and gardens. Owner asking \$2,000/month for property, house and outbuildings; also willing to negotiate for crop trade/share agreement.

Sonoma County ID #1186: 80 farmable acres for lease in Penngrove. This flat farmable property has two wells, large barn and lambing infrastructure, a 7030 DT Kubota Tractor with mower and attachments, round baler and 30 sheep. Owner would like to see diverse farm and ranch operation. Property is cross fenced for grazing. Longer term lease agreement can be negotiated.



North Coast Outreach Coordinator Andrea Krout and Penngrove land owner.

Central Valley properties - contact Kendra Johnson
kendra@californiafarmlink.org:

Shasta County ID# 976: Beautiful, 22-acre farm for lease/option or sale by owner-mentors.

For the last 14 years, on a foothill property in Shasta County, Allan and Mineca Griggs have been fostering a diverse, productive farm and an elegant wholesome lifestyle. Now in their 70's but spry as can be, this dedicated couple is looking for a successor to whom they can pass on their knowledge, land and business.

Under the name "Cove Crest," the Griggs grow wine and table grapes, blueberries, cane berries, and vegetables, and operate a small bonded winery—all on about five of their 22 acres. Roughly seven additional acres are arable, with good potential to expand existing berries and vineyards. The remainder of the property is wooded. Al and Mineca are known at the Redding farmer's markets (just over an hour's drive away) for their wonderful fruit, vegetables and wines. They sell wine successfully online.

About 2,400 feet above sea level, the property is surrounded by national forests, lakes, streams - with hot springs close by. A lovely year-round creek runs along the bottom of the property. Soil is good Cohasset Loam, and well, ditch and creek water provide ample irrigation. There is also a good spring which could be developed further. There is a working greenhouse and small operational winery, as well as farming and winemaking equipment. The barn, which houses a workshop and the winery, also includes a guest apartment which could be expanded.

The owners have invested a great deal in their land, business and quality of life. More than anything, they wish to see a younger farmer or farm family pick up and run with it. They will do all they can to set up a viable, win-win transition.



Al Griggs tending the boysenberries.

Central Coast properties – contact Reggie Knox
reggie@californiafarmlink.org:

Monterey County ID #1205: 39 organic acres for lease, Carmel Valley: This historic operation was farmed organically starting in 1947 and has been certified since the 70s, though fallow for the last two years. It consists of flat sandy loam in several benches. The well produces 400 gpm and serves 39 acres with buried mainline. The land is 90% deer fenced and was last leased at \$1,600/acre/year. Flexible lease terms - one year minimum. Crops recently grown: cole crops, corn, summer and winter squash, tomatoes. No lodging, barns or storage facilities on site. The owners are experienced organic farmers, live on site and would consider more than one farmer if one takes the master lease and works out a water sharing arrangement with tenants. FarmLink is exploring several other Carmel Valley properties for lease of 10 to 30 acres each.

SLO County ID# 1197(BRAND NEW LAND LISTING!): 17 to 20 acres row crop land available for lease just south of San Luis Obispo: This land has been farmed in beans and bell peppers, and for the last three years was used by a native plant seed grower. It is close to SLO city limits and gently sloped. There is a good ag well with a three-phase pump. The owner believes it is eligible for organic certification - would need to check with Ag Commissioner's office. There is a 3 - 4 bd/2 ba rental house on site available in July for \$1,600/mo. Land lease is negotiable and competitive with lease rates in the area.

San Mateo County #1150: Multiple three to ten acre parcels available for lease in beautiful San Gregorio. This is loamy bottom land adjacent with ample riparian water rights. Rental house on site currently rented. The entire property is physically and biologically diverse and breathtakingly gorgeous. Painters and photographers often park along the shoulder of the highway. The owners have lived on the land for thirty years - and the family before spanned three generations.

The property is made up of several contiguous parcels straddling a creek with farmable plots on horseshoe bends along the creek, and discrete plots available for mini-farms throughout the property. Additional plots are on slightly higher ground and can be irrigated. A few of the larger tracts are currently under farming contract and the majority of this large ranch is grazed. Owners are not farmers, but envision working with a few good tenants over a long period of time, understanding that startup farmers may come and go.

New concept... for our newsletter at least!

Classifieds – could be sharing of equipment, supplies, barn building, purchasing in bulk, you suggest it; we'll vet and post it if it seems relevant to our audience!

Farming Collective in Petaluma (Sonoma County) starting up on a dozen acres, seeks double-axle trailer for sale, trade, or to borrow to transport their tractor (could do high-weed mowing in exchange). Contact Clint at: clint.thankfulvibes@yahoo.com.

Send your classified selections to info@californiafarmlink.org – with "For CFL Newsletter Classified" in the subject line, or your gem of an opportunity might get lost!

Summer Update From the Editor

FarmLink's newsletter continues to evolve, with increased focus this issue on some of our outstanding beginning farmers, new opportunities for farming on urban land, a new "cooperative effort" to save farmland, and a new "classified" section. We appreciate your input going forward. Tell us what would make this newsletter more useful to YOU. And remember, if you're getting a paper version of this and want to receive digital newsletter instead, please send us an email request so we can make that change for you and save another tree!

Linda Peterson, Editor





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Farmlink in the News

Fox News broadcasts Farmlink’s efforts to match up experienced farmers with young farmers:

<http://liveshots.blogs.foxnews.com/2010/06/30/growing-trend-saving-family-farms/>

http://video.foxnews.com/v/4266681/saving-family-farms?playlist_id=86856

Online Bakersfield.com story – Agriculture struggles with lack of young farmers:

<http://www.bakersfield.com/news/business/economy/x1008891541/Agriculture-struggles-with-lack-of-young-farmers>

FarmLink appears as example of USDA’s “Know Your Farmer Know Your Food” – Beginning Farmer & Rancher Program:

http://www.wirec2008.gov/wps/portal/usda/knowyourfarmer?contentid=kyf_grants_nifa1_content.html&navtype=KYF&edeploymentaction=changenav

Staffer Reggie Knox interview archived on newly unveiled University California at Santa Cruz “Cultivating a Movement: An Oral History Series on Sustainable Agriculture and Organic Farming on California’s Central Coast”:

<http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/cultiv/home>
<http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/cultiv/knox>

FarmLink Programs

- Linking beginning farmers and ranchers to landowners and retiring farmers
- Farm Opportunities Loan Program – infrastructure, equipment, land purchase
- Technical Assistance – including business planning and finance, land tenure, farm transition/succession.
- Workshops and conferences on above topics

For current information, go to our website:
<http://www.californiafarmlink.org>

Donate – How you can help.

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Contributors: Reggie Knox, Andrea Krout, Kendra Johnson, James Kalin