

# UC Santa Cruz

## Cultivating A Movement

### Title

Jered Lawson and Nancy Vail: Pie Ranch: A Rural Center for Urban Renewal

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## Jered Lawson & Nancy Vail



Photo by Jered Lawson

### **Pie Ranch: A Rural Center for Urban Renewal**

*Jered Lawson and Nancy Vail make up two thirds of the founding partnership that operates Pie Ranch—“a rural center for urban renewal.” With San Francisco-based colleague Karen Heisler, Lawson and Vail began establishing this working farm in 2002 as a place where city youth could learn about food. The non-profit organization’s mission, according to its website, is “to inspire and connect rural and urban people to know the source of their food, and to work together to bring greater health to the food system from seed to table.” Mission Pie, a sister business located in the city’s Mission District and overseen by Heisler, employs local young people in baking and selling pastries concocted from the farm’s products.*

*Perched on a coastal hillside in southern San Mateo County, between Santa Cruz and San Francisco, Pie Ranch's triangular slice of land now produces "everything you need to make pie"—from pumpkins, berries and tree fruits to eggs, milk, butter, honey and wheat. Students and teachers from urban high schools make monthly farm pilgrimages throughout the school year. Guided by Lawson and Vail and other Pie Ranch staff, they experience hands-on learning about soil, compost, weather, weeds and water; the cycles of planting, tending, and harvesting crops; the challenges and rewards of working as a group, and the pleasures of cooking and eating wholesome food from scratch.*

*Pie Ranch also offers year-long apprenticeships, summer internships, monthly work parties and barn dances, and a variety of educational programs and cultural events. Travelers and locals can sample the farm's wares at a roadside farm stand downhill from the farm fields, on coastal Route 1—near the historic Steele dairy lands that Pie Ranch, in cooperation with the Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST), is working to protect.*

*Jered Lawson and Nancy Vail both bring a wealth of experience to the Pie Ranch project. Lawson is a UCSC community studies graduate and a former Apprentice in Ecological Horticulture at the UCSC Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems (CASFS). Between his first two college years, Lawson spent a formative summer at Stephen and Gloria Decater's Live Power Community Farm in Covelo (Mendocino County), where Alan Chadwick—Stephen's mentor at UCSC—had been invited to establish a garden project in 1972. Live Power had recently launched the first community supported agriculture (CSA) program in California. Lawson went on to initiate and oversee a CSA program for Santa Cruz's Homeless Garden Project, and later did the same for CASFS. Increasingly interested in CSA as a marketing strategy for sustaining small farms, he organized a 1995 Western Region CSA conference and created a statewide CSA advocacy and outreach program campaigns for the Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF). He also helped establish farm-to-school and buy-local programs for CAFF, and did similar work with the Center for Ecoliteracy in Berkeley.*

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*Nancy Vail, a graduate of UC San Diego, began learning about farming in a series of post-college internships abroad. Returning to the U.S., she apprenticed with writer-farmers Eliot Coleman and Barbara Damrosch at Four Season Farm in Harborside, Maine, at Angelic Organics (whose proprietor, John Peterson, was celebrated in the 2006 documentary “The Real Dirt on Farmer John”), and at biodynamic Hawthorne Valley Farm in Columbia County, New York. Like Lawson, Vail also apprenticed in the CASFS program, eventually staying on as a second- and third-year apprentice. She went on to share oversight of the UCSC farm operations with Jim Leap, and managed the CSA that Lawson had inaugurated in 1995. After Vail and Lawson’s first child was born, she moved into a part-time position as farm-to-college program coordinator for CASFS. In early 2008, she left CASFS to attend to childrearing and Pie Ranch full-time.*

*Sarah Rabkin interviewed Jered Lawson on March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2008, at Rabkin’s home in Soquel, with a brief follow-up interview in the Science and Engineering Library at UC Santa Cruz on March 18, 2008. Rabkin interviewed Nancy Vail in the same library conference room on March 18, 2008. These interviews covered Lawson’s and Vail’s individual histories prior to the founding of Pie Ranch. On December 11, 2008, at the offices of UCSC’s Program In Community and Agroecology and Community Agroecology Network, she interviewed Lawson and Vail together about the founding and development of Pie Ranch.*

### Additional Resources:

Pie Ranch: <http://www.pieranch.org/>  
Mission Pie in San Francisco: <http://missionpie.com/>

#### *On CSAs, and the Homeless Garden Project*

Jered Lawson, "Community-supported Agriculture: Farming that Works," (Senior Thesis, Community Studies, UC Santa Cruz, 1992). Available at the UCSC Library.

Jered Lawson, "Cabbages and compassion. Community Supported Homeless Farming." *RAIN MAGAZINE* 14(3): 2-9 (Spring 1993).

"Growing Hope: the Homeless Garden Project Story" videorecording produced by Ric Howard, Len Borruso, Jered Lawson; director, Ric Howard; written by Jered Lawson. Santa Cruz, California. (Distributed by the Video Project], 1995.

Elizabeth Henderson and Robyn Van En, *Sharing the Harvest: A Citizen's Guide to Community Supported Agriculture*, Revised and Expanded, (Chelsea Green Publishing, 2007).

Steven McFadden, "The History of Community Supported Agriculture, Part I: Community Farms in the 21st Century: Poised for Another Wave of Growth? Rodale Institute.  
<http://newfarm.rodaleinstitute.org/features/0104/csa-history/part1.shtml>

Steven McFadden, "The History of Community Supported Agriculture, Part II: CSA's World of Possibilities," Rodale Institute.  
<http://newfarm.rodaleinstitute.org/features/0204/csa2/part2.shtml>

The Robyn Van En Center, a national resource center about Community Supported Agriculture. <http://www.wilson.edu/wilson/asp/content.asp?id=804>

Alternative Farming Systems Information Center at the National Agricultural Library. Site of resources about CSA: <http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/csa/csa.shtml>

#### *Other Resources*

Masanobu Fukuoka, *The One-Straw Revolution: An Introduction to Natural Farming* (Rodale Press, 1978).

Four Season Farm: <http://www.fourseasonfarm.com/>

Hawthorne Valley Farm: <http://www.hawthornevalleyfarm.org/>

Angelic Organics: <http://www.angelicorganics.com/>

Live Power Community Farm (Gloria and Stephen Decater): <http://www.livepower.org/>

Taggart Siegel, *The Real Dirt on Farmer John* (DVD) 2005.

## PART ONE: INTERVIEW WITH JERED LAWSON



Photo by Tana Butler

### **Beginnings**

**Rabkin:** So this is Tuesday, March 4, 2008, in Soquel, California. This is Sarah Rabkin and I'm talking with Jered Lawson. Jered, let's start with just a little bit of background.

**Lawson:** Okay.

**Rabkin:** Where and when were you born?

**Lawson:** That's always a good place to start. Well, I was born in Los Angeles in 1970—June 7, 1970—at UCLA Medical Center, where my mom worked.

**Rabkin:** And where did you grow up?

**Lawson:** In that little small town that used to be the top-producing ag county in the nation: Los Angeles. Yes. It was the urban upbringing, single mom, eating out at a lot of fast food restaurants. McDonald's a lot, it was not too far down the road. Taquerias. Just kind of the urban environment there that I think contributed a lot to the desire to channel concerns about how the world was evolving, and to study and work on changing food systems.

**Rabkin:** So for you, growing up eating fast food in an urban setting became a catalyst to move into interest in sustainable agriculture and changing food systems. Whereas, for a lot of people that background simply embeds them in that system of corporate food distribution.

**Lawson:** Yes.

**Rabkin:** So, I'm curious if you have some thoughts about why you had a kind of awakening?

**Lawson:** Yes. Well, in a way, I should probably take a step back. I don't necessarily think it's so direct. The motivation to be involved in food production probably stems less from the kinds of foods I was eating growing up, and more from the feelings I had in nature. It was the trips away from the city into Y camps in the summer, a week being away from the city in Big Bear, or going on a little camping trip with family. It was those moments, even in urban parks, where you got that breathing room and recognition that there's something other at work in

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the world beyond what humans have crafted—the beauty of trees growing on a hillside that haven't been planted by anybody, that feeling that you get sitting by a stream or a creek and hearing water roll over rocks—or just the beauty of nature in its own form, and the quietness that's there.

It was such a contrast to intense city life. I grew up right off Santa Monica Boulevard. It wasn't in the harshest of urban neighborhoods, though there was experience within the gang issues and whatnot in different parts of various neighborhoods that I lived in growing up. The Y camp that I went to definitely drew from a variety of economic backgrounds, cultural backgrounds. So the sense, the knowledge and recognition of what makes it hard to live in the city was there. So being out in the mountains in a supportive context of a summer camp, with all of these great activities and caring counselors, or on trips with family, there was a real sense of, "Oh, wow. Wouldn't it be great if we could incorporate this feeling into our lives in the city." And in high school those were the leanings I had about what I wanted to do when I went to college.

When I stepped onto the campus at UCSC with my folks and uncle, visiting schools, it was just so clear right away that it was like that for me. I mean, the thought of being able to walk through redwoods to get to a class— It was clear that that was something I was aligned with. The study that I was interested in was: how do environments affect our thinking, our feeling about being in the world? Is there an environmental psychology, or ways that we can engage people in nature so that there is greater mental health and social well being as a result? That's how I went in. So I started as a psychology major at UCSC.

**Rabkin:** So you were an undergraduate at UCSC?



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**Lawson:** Yes.

**Rabkin:** And you entered in what year?

**Lawson:** It was 1988.

**Rabkin:** And it sounds like by that point you had developed not only an appreciation for the qualities of undeveloped land, a connection with the natural world, but also a desire to see those qualities integrated into urban areas.

**Lawson:** Yes, in some ways, utilizing that understanding and recognition that experiences within nature can have a transformative quality to them. What is it about that quality that can be transferred, or re-created, or just utilized more— It was more focused on personal change at that stage in my life. As an eighteen-year-old you're a little bit more self-focused, though it was related to all of the other social challenges I saw around me. And environmental issues. I mean, in LA, environmental problems were on the front page a lot. We often couldn't go out of our classroom because the smog levels were so high. It was difficult for me. I liked to spend time in the ocean, and there were days when I'd come out of the water and I'd have a hard time breathing because there were refineries by where I'd go surfing. I clearly recognized that what is challenging the individuals in our culture and our society could be somehow positively impacted through an experience in a more pristine environment. But the important thing was exiting the chaos in order to experience something more pure, beautiful, as a way of coping with the challenges.

I think it was in the Kresge [College] Core Course and other classes that I was taking in that first year that I started to feel like the larger influences on the

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individual were maybe a better place to spend energy working towards preventing the personal, social, ecological ills that seemed to be pervasive, and that are pervasive still.

**Rabkin:** I want to ask you more about UCSC undergraduate experience, but for a second I want to back us up to high school, because you mentioned that you were a surfer during that time and that was part of your influence. And I'm wondering whether there were other experiences during your high school years, particular classes or mentors or out-of-school experiences during that time, that have helped shape your vision. So I wonder if you could tell me where you went to high school, and anything that you think was formative about that time?

**Lawson:** Okay. Maricosta High School in Manhattan Beach. I had moved. My parents separated when I was quite young, when I was one. And while I had wonderful opportunities to spend time with my father, being raised by my mom and with my sister, I wanted to have that experience of living with my father. So for those high school years, I moved into his home with my stepmom as well. My father was the one who would take us camping, and he was the one who had a little bit more of an interest in food and preparing food. He's definitely the one who also has a little bit more around his midsection as a result (laughs), but he just loves food so much. I think I hadn't really made that connection, just until now, actually: that passion in our family, on my father's side of the family, for food. Like any time the family would get together, the main topic at the table, besides the fact that we were eating food that was prepared by each other, was the recipes, what went into it: "How did you do that? You have to give me that recipe." A passion for flavor and for enjoying eating food has stuck with me.

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But more on the ag side of it, maybe prior to high school, I have some memories of my stepmother, Suzye, being involved in a community garden in Venice Beach. I remember another gardener in the community garden harvesting sweet corn and giving me an ear of that sweet corn. There's a memory there of that. Gardening was so much a part of my life.

While surfing, being in nature was by far an influence on me, it might have been more the— Well, summer camp for sure. Just kind of the social side of why I've done what I've done. I think through the YMCA and this program there that I was involved with for many years as a camper growing up, and then doing trainings to become junior counselor and then counselor, and working with youth in that context. It was very supportive in a way that I think I really needed and absorbed it like a sponge. I was wanting something bigger than what my family was offering me in terms of thoughts about who I could become as an individual, and the kinds of choices that you could make, and the consequences of those choices. So it was formative for sure, the structure of this summer camp program at the YMCA. Even though it was Christian-influenced, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), it was very non-denominational. The director of the camp was Jewish. My family was Jewish growing up. I was bar mitzvahed. It wasn't like I was somehow following a different religion. It wasn't religious-focused at all. It was more the principles and values that might be within a Christian way of life carried through the way that they structured youth programming, and how to become the best person you can. The motto of the Y is the balance of the body, mind, and spirit. It was quite a great way for young

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people to start to come out of their self-focus as a twelve-year-old and thirteen-year-old, into beginning to become aware of others, and being able to recognize others and the consequences of relationship. And so it was really kind of formative about social justice.

Just after high school and before starting at UCSC, I was inspired to go to Central America. My dad and stepmom had spent their honeymoon backpacking through Guatemala. So a father and son who I was working with, Guatemalan employees of the same restaurant that I was working at, doing the same work, [I] was invited to come and stay at their house. He was a chef. The son and I were barbacks. Anyway, so I ended up at his family's village in Gueguetenango, and then language school. It was in a rural community, a tight-knit small farming community. I hadn't made the connection yet about agriculture, but the feeling I had being in that environment with those families in a rural, culturally rich experience, left an impression on me that I think still influences me today in terms of what I feel is lacking in a larger industrial food production model, and what is more possible when you have tighter-knit communities where multiple households either work together, or share equipment, or share seeds, or have some sort of a relationship to each other in a supportive way.

**Rabkin:** That was the summer between high school and college?

**Lawson:** Yes, between high school and college. That was pre-college.

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## UC Santa Cruz

**Rabkin:** And then once you got to UCSC, were there particular people, or organizations or institutions within the university, that became important for you?

**Lawson:** (pause) It wasn't until later that I was introduced to the Farm. In fact, I don't even remember knowing that it was there until I was in my last year, or maybe even just before graduating. It wasn't as connected as it is now.

There was a writing class I had with [Writing Program lecturer] Jeff Arnett, who was on the board of the Friends of the Farm and Garden, which I didn't really know at the time. But I can see where his writing selections might have been influenced by the link that he had made.

**Rabkin:** Anything in particular?

**Lawson:** He shared some Wendell Berry. I think it was *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture*, which was on the reading list. There might have been some other writers too, but I think that was what stuck with me in terms of this larger "aha!" moment of: oh, here you have influences that have changed the way people relate to the land in such a way that has created this culture that's unsettled. And so, I began to connect the dots, to understand why there might be discontent in our world that has people that don't have a link to the sources of their food, or who don't share in meaningful work related to food; I started to see the problems of just anonymous food consumption and disconnection from nature— Yes, it became pretty clear to me through reading Berry and others that there's a rationale, through the agricultural lens, for the kind of repair I was

interested in, and thinking about using experiences in nature as a way for healing.

**Rabkin:** So you came in with this eye on something like educational environmental psychology.

**Lawson:** Right.

**Rabkin:** And did you graduate in a major close to that?

**Lawson:** No, I ended up, I think because of those readings and other classes I had, being somewhat—not so much being disillusioned with focusing on the individual as a way through change, but really seeing that these larger social, political, economic forces that were increasingly complex might be part of the cause of ill mental health, or social challenges. All of the environmental problems that face us were inextricably linked to these larger forces at play. Wendell Berry provided the argument of how we've unraveled our relationships to ourselves, each other, and our environment by the specialization and the industrialization of our culture. He happened to use food to talk to us about that, but it's clear that in other aspects of our life that that was also true. So here was this argument about why we're in the kind of shape that we're in. And he talked about the pathway out of it. It was a critique at the time that was motivating for me. I was concerned about addressing some of these larger issues. And that's what led me to [major in] community studies.

### **Live Power Farm**

But before community studies, I had another really formative experience (if I can digress for another minute)—and this ties it in, makes the link back, to summer

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camp. One of my counselors at camp actually was my swim coach at the YMCA. He had some health issues. He wasn't quite clear what was happening to him. He was from Canada, a legal resident here, and was wanting to resolve that [health] issue and move back to Canada—but before he did, he wanted to go apprentice on a farm somewhere and use that as a way of getting good, clean food. He was interested in macrobiotic diet as a way of addressing some of his immune system challenges that he was facing. So he was choosing between UCSC's apprenticeship program and Live Power Community Farm in Covelo [California], [run by] Steve and Gloria Decater, which had the link back to the UCSC Farm in his early years.<sup>1</sup>

**Rabkin:** [Alan] Chadwick.

**Lawson:** Yes, Chadwick. So Eric invited me up to visit while he was an apprentice there and I was nineteen. It was my first summer I was at UCSC. I went and spent a week in July, sometime in the middle of summer. It was a week-long experience not unlike my week-long experiences up at summer camp, and it gave me a feeling not unlike the feeling I had being up in the mountains at Big Bear outside of LA. Being in this valley on this farm with the surrounding—

**Rabkin:** Round Valley.

**Lawson:** Yes, the Yolla Bolly Mountains, and the Eel River. It was this beautiful place. But what was transformative for me was the recognition that at summer camp (this is where it's different), we were *removed* from productive life and were there to have a structured play experience with other youth. To get away from the city and to go camping was to relax and then to come back into it. Well, here it was these people working really hard in this environment and creating

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something that had value in the process. So it was clearly an economic activity and a cultural activity. There was the feeling I had there of the way this family related to their apprentices, to the community of people who were eating the food from that farm. It was that year that they had just started their CSA program, in the summer of '89.

It was new to me. The CSA—I didn't quite grasp it at the time. What I grasped was the feeling I had. The kind of work that they were doing was so moving to me, and the results from that work. It just felt like, aha! This is it! Here's people taking what I had gotten from reading *Unsettling of America*; here are people trying to resettle and create opportunities for urban folks to get that settling experience, which was exactly what I was wanting to do. So it suddenly said, okay, here's how you can engage in the world, engage with people on all these levels—personal, social, spiritual even, political, economic, ecological. It all kind of came together around how we organize ourselves through the way we grow and obtain the food that we need to eat, because we all obviously can't escape that reality.

**Rabkin:** How long was that first stay at Live Power Farm?

**Lawson:** A week. And I remember— I'd often cry leaving camp. There was that feeling like, oh, God. I'd cry either from the fear of the loss— Like, I just know that I'm leaving this special place and these great people. Or, from the happiness of knowing that I had had this experience for the week. I don't know. Or some combination of the two. But that was the feeling. I had a hard time leaving that farm because of that same quality of feeling. I thought, oh, so that's the sign. It's clear to me that this is meaningful to me. And I remember saying to Gloria, "I'd



love to come back. I'd definitely want to come back to learn more from you guys." I didn't know if it was because I wanted to be an intern, or just that I knew there was something more for me to learn from them. And they're definitely woven into the rest of this story that we can talk more about as we go today. But that experience as a nineteen-year-old definitely has stuck with me for the last, almost twenty years now.

### **The Homeless Garden Project CSA Program**

**Rabkin:** And how did you get from that experience to apprenticing at the Farm and Garden?

**Lawson:** Well, so then coming back, in my second year at school I started to re-think: I don't want to just be a psychology major. I wanted to figure out how to weave this new thinking about how the world has gotten into the shape that it has, and how we can get out of it. I was looking into maybe doing a year abroad to figure that out somewhere. And then I came across community studies and it was like: oh, the theory and practice of community-level social change and how your theories about the world's challenges come out of that, and then taking that kind of analysis and engaging in the world to test it, and come back and reflect on that, and be engaged in—what is it—the theoretical implications of practice and the practical implications of theory? I don't know if that's exactly what was talked about at the time. But it was clear to me that here was this amazing undergrad program that was exactly what I felt would support me in that inquiry about how to be in the world and work towards greater health. And it was through the internship program there—

**Rabkin:** Is that the same as the Field Study Program?

**Lawson:** It's the Field Study Program. It was a part-time field study before you do your full-time field study. And the part-time field study was right at the time that the Homeless Garden Project was forming. There was a new group that Paul Lee was hosting to work on the garden project.<sup>2</sup> And I thought, ah, this is perfect. Horticultural therapy was the way it was framed. So in terms of combining the actual, more clinical psychology interests earlier on— My uncle, I should say (just to throw it out there and at some point it could come back in if necessary) was also influential to me as a holistic clinical psychologist. I always admired him growing up. He was to me this example of someone who was really concerned about health and well-being—the way he ate and the way he related to people. He was an influential model for me.

So I was thinking in terms of horticultural therapy, using food as a way of engaging people in meaningful work who had been marginalized in our community, and also a way of providing the community a way of addressing the social challenge of homelessness. And at the time, with that class, the garden was starting to produce enough food to sell, as a way to earn some income back to pay the stipends to the trainees, the homeless people who were involved in that work. Most of the trainees were long-term unemployed, living on the streets for longer periods of time. There was a Korean War veteran, a Vietnam vet, other folks who had more challenges with substance abuse. The garden was a place where they could let down the guard that they needed to have up in the streets—even in Santa Cruz, police not letting them sleep and— just in general, the challenges that they faced. So we had to think about the best way to sell that

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produce to generate income to pay employees a wage, besides also cooking up a meal, using the food to feed the staff employees and trainees and others. (Some food got donated as well.) Farmers' markets were explored. We did set up a stand at the Santa Cruz farmers' market. And then I said, "Let's go take a field trip up to Live Power Community Farm, because there's this other way that they're organizing the relationship to the food and still generating income. And it's not so much selling produce, as it is people supporting the farm. In this case it would be supporting the garden project and in return getting the share of the bounty."

**Rabkin:** Live Power was your first exposure to the CSA model?

**Lawson:** Yes.

**Rabkin:** And were there not active CSAs in this area at the time?

**Lawson:** No. I think that same year— 1991, in the summer, is when we went up and visited Steve and Gloria to talk with them more about what it is they were doing and how they did it and started it.

**Rabkin:** Who else did you go up there with?

**Lawson:** It was Lynne Basehore, the [Homeless Garden Project] director. And it was right away kind of evident that this was a good pathway, but we wanted to make sure and check it with everybody. So in one of the circle meetings with all of the trainees and employees where decisions like that got made, we raised the idea and sought people's comments and thoughts on it. Everyone seemed to be enthusiastic about it, so we went ahead that fall and organized a meeting at the Loudon Nelson Community Center [in downtown Santa Cruz] to invite people in

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to help create it. Because that's part of what was exciting to us, was that a CSA can be something that we engage the community in helping with. It wasn't something we were going to just set up and offer and sell something. It was more like it was a way of the community working together to support the production, and in this case the production by homeless people, of good quality food in a semi-urban context.

**Rabkin:** So you opened this meeting up. You advertised it for the public?

**Lawson:** For the public. I was hoping for fifty people all banging at the door wanting to jump in and really make this thing go. I was very enthusiastic about it and excited, and somewhat initially disappointed when we had, maybe eight or ten people show up.

But one of the goals for the meeting was to find a couple of volunteers who would be willing to help with some next stage of development. A key person was there at that meeting. There were a number of folks in that initial group who ended up being really helpful. But one in particular, Max Montgomery, had been part of the computer world here and was familiar with different software programs, and said he'd be willing to help us with the creation of the little brochure that we'd use to be able to share the project with the rest of the community. So I ended up spending a lot of time working with him on the creation of the initial flyers and materials that outlined how the CSA would work.

Part of the benefit of being a community studies student and having the time to research the theory of this work— Well, I suddenly was researching and gravitating towards all of the various CSA-related materials that were out there

to date, and so started to collect a lot of brochures and examples of what other people were doing. I was able to show that, “Well, we don’t have to reinvent the wheel here. In fact, there’s clearly something that they’re onto. Let’s just utilize what’s available and put the Homeless Garden Project information in these templates and move forward.” Max was really helpful with that. We took those materials all around the neighborhood and town with volunteers, other students, homeless people. Usually it was me and Michael Wallow, Bill, or somebody from the project and we’d do outreach together—

**Rabkin:** Who was Bill?

**Lawson:** Bill Tracey was one of the trainees at the time who was really involved in the garden, both on the production side, but also helping with meetings and facilitating communication with other homeless people.

**Rabkin:** So you were really instrumental in getting the Homeless Garden CSA up and running, while you were still an undergraduate?

**Lawson:** Yes, very much so. We are indebted to the [Community Studies] program there for really providing students an opportunity to have a meaningful role in whatever community project that they choose to work with in their field study. I was lucky enough to be in a very young organization and project that really did allow for engagement in something like starting a CSA. I mean, I might have worked with another sustainable-ag-focused organization that had more history. You’ve probably interviewed some of those folks who are involved in those organizations—CCOF or CAFF or OFRF—organizations that have been around quite a lot longer than the Homeless Garden. But here was this

opportunity to step in and be able to contribute something significant. It was quite lucky.

**Rabkin:** How long did it take to get a CSA program on its feet, up and running?

**Lawson:** Well, we started in the fall of '91, just pulling materials together and doing outreach and engaging the community, with the intent of starting that next spring. We were shooting for, I think it was like a hundred members at the time. We started with, maybe sixty percent of that. I think we had sixty members at first— And similar to that first meeting, I felt slightly deflated because we didn't reach our goal right away. But it became very clear that as soon as it began, word of mouth spread very quickly and the rest of the shares filled up. Especially that first year and subsequent years it maintained that level of community support. It took a little while but we got there.

**Rabkin:** And where is it at now?

**Lawson:** It's gone through various iterations and undulations, of both production and membership and approach to what's being offered. It's been a while since I've been in any longer conversations with any of the people who are still involved in the project. When the garden lost the site at Pelton [Street, on the westside of Santa Cruz] and moved to Natural Bridges [also on the westside], there were certain soil conditions at Natural Bridges that presented some challenges that just weren't there at the Pelton Street site. So there was, I think, a drop in the number of members because of the challenge of production out there. And then there was an increase in membership, but also a broadening of where the food was coming from. I think they partnered with another farm. Since a couple of years ago it's been with Maria Inés Catalan, who had the first Latina-

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run CSA, out of Salinas and then more recently out of Hollister.<sup>3</sup> And now, circling back, Paul Glowaski is the production manager.<sup>4</sup> He is a recent UCSC Farm [apprenticeship] graduate who came and spent five or six months with us this last year.

**Rabkin:** With you at Pie Ranch?

**Lawson:** At Pie Ranch. And so with [Paul] spending time with us [at Pie Ranch] and now [at the Homeless Garden Project], it's afforded me a greater connection back to the project. When I left it in 1994 to do the apprenticeship program, eventually returning to the campus to be an apprentice, while I would occasionally run into people at the [Homeless] garden or go to an occasional event at the garden, there wasn't as much collaboration or tie-in, knowing what was happening. So it's kind of nice to now start to learn more about where the garden's at, what they're doing. Paul is really wanting to continue to strengthen the CSA, and grow it. It's survived all these years, so it's nice to know that it still has resonance for both the organization, and what it offers people connecting more meaningfully to the work that they're doing, both horticulturally and socially, with the training program. And it's also kind of a testament to the [CSA] concept in general as a way for people to have more of that connection to a particular place where their food comes from.

I think CSA—and we can talk more about it—works for those that have the inclination to utilize more produce in the kitchen, and have the time, and if the grower has a need for resources up front, if it's to fulfill the idea of paying in advance for a twenty-week-or-more season's worth of fresh produce to enable the farmer to have more working capital up front, or in this case the Homeless

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Garden Project, for seed, and covering other costs, of irrigation repair, whatnot, other costs that you bear at the beginning of a farming season.

**Rabkin:** So I want to jump us ahead a little bit. Is there anything else you want to cover about the undergraduate time before we move on?

**Lawson:** Well, yes. There are a couple of things that I think are helpful in that story. In the beginning of the full-time field study, before I knew the Homeless Garden Project was even there, I had thought about doing study abroad, and so was trying to weave the community studies interest with having that year in another culture. In this case, I was interested in spending time in a Spanish-speaking country to improve Spanish language skills. So I worked with an organization that I thought was going to be for six months, and it ended up being for two. I don't need to go into a great deal of explanation of why that happened, but it was a combination of the practice not aligning completely with the theory of what the organization said they were doing, and sort of my disillusionment of that after being there for a couple of months. But also more my excitement [about the Homeless Garden Project back home], was even more the reason and should be the emphasis. The early part-time internship I had with the Homeless Garden Project, and realizing there was so much potential there. I knew that if I could just dig in full time at the Homeless Garden I could be a part of something more meaningful, rather than where I was. I was on a farm project outside of Madrid in Spain working with ex drug addicts and criminals, *marginados*, they're referred to, in a really interesting theory, a combination of Rogerian psychotherapy and group process and Freireian popular education. The project involved engaging people who— They could either spend more time in the prison system or they



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could go work on this farm. It was this reflection/action praxis idea, but within a real nurturing Rogerian, therapeutic kind of dialogue group think. So kind of combining nurturing therapy with critical thinking around justice and reflection on why they ended up in the place that they're in, and using that reflection as motivation for changing the circumstances which led them to be criminals, or drugs, or whatever it was that they were struggling with.

So clearly: one, not having the language; two, not being culturally experienced, I ended up being more of an observer and less a participant in that work there. It was fascinating and interesting to me, and I learned a lot. I recently ran into the person who helped sponsor the airfare to get there and heard that it's still going, and has its challenges as well. One thing that was challenging for me when I was there was that the project had just gotten this greenhouse going. It was a government-funded greenhouse project and they were going to be growing flowers to sell. They were using conventional methods to raise those flowers, and chemicals were being brought onto the farm, and it just wasn't quite in sync with the broader theory and practice that I was incorporating into the personal social-change work around ecological farming practices. So anyway— I got to come back and spend the rest of my full-time field study with the Homeless Garden Project. And that was really when the idea of the CSA came forward, after that trip in '91. It was coming back that really created the space to do that.

### **The Community Supported Agriculture Movement**

You have the option to do a senior thesis with community studies. I really was interested in the theory and practice of CSA. So I engaged in a national survey (since there weren't that many farms [back then] it was easier to do a national

survey). (laughs) It's hard to get everybody's address right and get their surveys back, but I was able to get a pretty decent response rate from a national survey of CSAs at the time that helped inform my senior thesis. It was really useful for us locally to have all these— One of the things that was part of the survey was having people send their materials. So having that available for other people was the goal—to compile all of these materials and make it a resource. But being able to then pull the best ideas that we saw in all of those various iterations—

**Rabkin:** How many CSAs around the country were you able to document at the time?

**Lawson:** Oh, gosh. The number ninety comes to mind, but I don't know if that was the total number that I sent it to, or the total number I got back. It was over a fifty-percent response rate, so it was probably ninety was what I sent to at the time. There weren't that many nationally. It's been a while. I'll have to look. I haven't looked at that project in a while.

**Rabkin:** And you had the sense that you were able to locate most of the CSAs that were operating around the country?

**Lawson:** From the list that I had. The Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association was keeping a national list at the time. And then there were also the conferences. The BDFA had sponsored an annual CSA conference. And I got to go. That part of my undergraduate experience was very transformative for me. It was one of the first times I'd flown to another state by myself, to get off the plane and be wearing this hat of a student researching this idea, but also really as a community organizer researching this idea for application at the Homeless Garden. The winter of 1991 was that CSA conference.

**Rabkin:** And this conference was sponsored by—

**Lawson:** The Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association. It was in Kimberton, Pennsylvania. Trauger Groh gave the keynote presentation in this real thick German accent. It was very clear, with great charts and diagrams. The way he was framing the theory of the change potential of CSA as it relates to the economics of farming was really powerful to me, and informed the thesis as well as a commitment to this idea as a meaningful tool for rural communities, and for urban communities that saw in some way a desire to re-engage in rural activity—if not as farmers, [then] as active citizens helping to take a little bit more responsibility for where their food is coming from, in a very direct way, beyond farmers' markets, which at the time were clearly booming, and continue to grow at a greater pace than CSA.

There was another conference at UC Davis in '93. It was the first California CSA gathering. I had just graduated in '92. Having been born and raised in LA (this is another digression)—Rodney King and the riots in LA were happening at that time in '92. It was clear to me—what phoenix is going to rise from these ashes? The whole community food-security work in LA, I think a lot of it grew quickly out of the challenges there. What are the community-based solutions that can bring people together? But the idea occurred to me at this Davis event—the rationale for wanting to get involved in food systems and organizing. I was thinking about CSA, or the way people get food, and how when you go into a supermarket you just pick something off the shelf; there's no display at all of where that piece of fruit or vegetable came from. It's this anonymous

relationship. There's just no real relationship there. And then farmers' markets were like a one-day stand, I think I remember referring to them—

**Rabkin:** (laughter)

**Lawson:** (laughs) You know, some intimacy happens, but there's no commitment there. You might show up the next week, or you might not. CSA, in its year-long commitment, starts to get at this idea of a relationship-based food system. I think I referred to it at the time as more like dating, heavy dating. You're not really planning a family together, but you're going pretty steady. You're willing to say, "I'll stick with you for at least a year."

**Rabkin:** (laughs)

**Lawson:** And through thick and thin I'm with you. Almost like vows. You've signed a form, almost like pre-nuptials or something. So I asked that question at the '93 conference to the panel of CSA farmers (I think it was just farmers): "Do you ever see CSA embodying more of the principles of marriage, where people make lifelong commitments to each other, and say, 'I want to be part of this farm until we can no longer do that because one of us passes away?'"

**Rabkin:** Wow. Death do us part.

**Lawson:** Or at least to stretch the thinking— We can make commitments in our personal lives with our mates, or partners, to create structure that enhances our place in our community, on our planet, our home. And is there a way in our economic, productive life, the way I guess villages or tribes used to have some greater degree of, we're here until death do us part. Now, in our modern lives we don't, beyond the household, and even then it's broken down considerably. Not

that these structures are what we need to be holding up as *the* ways of creating stability and health in our communities. It clearly, for me, is evident that we need some effort towards stabilization and an understanding of a place and a people in order for there to be the best kind of stewardship, both of the people and the place, whether it's the people that are growing the food, the people who are eating the food, and the land which is providing the context for that. So that's still a question. I know that there are CSA members that have been involved with the same farms [for long periods]. Gloria and Steve [of Live Power Farms], I know, have members that have been with them for the last twenty years, and that might continue to be with them until they die. I guess there are some CSAs (maybe it's Angelic Organics and some others) that have created five-year commitment forms, and incentivized people joining for more than a season, to make some of those longer-term investments in a farm.

**Rabkin:** So those formalized long-term commitments are still the exception rather than the rule in the CSA world?

**Lawson:** Oh, yes. In fact, the opposite has been more of the trend, especially in the West Coast, and especially in an effort to try and create greater accessibility to more limited-resource communities who can't make that payment for even a season up front.<sup>5</sup> Even in that model I've tried to stress that you can ask a limited-resource, low-income household to make a commitment for a year but not necessarily pay up front. They can pay in—weekly even, installments if there's a system for that. Like, there's the question of whether or not food stamps can be used, and the USDA not liking the idea of a kind of futures approach to sharing the risk with the farm about that food. The food-stamp dollar really

needs to be connected to a receipt of some food. It can't be on the support of a farm in the hopes that that farm has a bounty and shares it. I mean, if we look at just the really core theory of CSA.

But anyway, I think the trend on the West Coast has been less commitment, in the sense of wrapping yourself as a member around a farm's budget, and a farm's plans for the future as a CSA farm. Most of the CSAs that have started on the West Coast already have had a longer history of other markets and marketing. CSA becomes an addition to what they're doing. And as a consequence, people's relationship to it is more of a subscription, or a structured economic unit. Like, you pay this much and commit for this long, and you get this kind of a box with this kind of diversity. And if the farm isn't able to provide, if something happens with a crop failure, they might barter or swap with another farm, or buy in produce to make it so that the customer (which is more of the model in that case) isn't dissatisfied and moves on to another box.

**Rabkin:** You've talked and written in other places about your initial disappointment or disillusionment with this model of the sort of hybrid CSA, the CSA as part of an economic base for a farm that involves other sources of support. And you've talked about how, initially, that put you off, because you had this vision of a more intimate relationship between the eaters and the farmers.

**Lawson:** Yes.

**Rabkin:** But [you wrote] that you've come to see that as perhaps necessary, and also in some ways even a good thing. I'm wondering if you could talk about where your thinking is now about those kinds of hybrid, diversified CSAs.

**Lawson:** I think my reflection now (I go back and forth on this, but) [pause]—The stronger idealism of the earlier years [meant] not wanting to sacrifice the power of the original idea of people really covering the true costs of running a healthy farm entity, and having that budget be transparent, which the community can see and wrap themselves around. I still firmly believe that is a very powerful model and may be one of the only true examples I know of, of an effort that can really be kind of the triple-bottom-line sustainable enterprise, that is, a community enterprise.

**Rabkin:** Triple bottom line?

**Lawson:** The social, ecological, and economic—addressing issues of solvency from [all of] those perspectives. Or health and well-being within those main arenas of a farm and food production business—if “business” is the right word. Community enterprise effort. I would encourage, and still do, that people work towards that, if they can, with what they have. Or, if they’re starting something new, that they really consider that [deep and long-term commitment between farmer and eater] as a way to go. And I’m also, at this stage, very much recognizing that there’re a lot more people that aren’t going to take the effort and engage in the way that we would hope or imagine in organizing a CSA for themselves and within their communities. Either on the community side of it, or even on the farmer side of it, there just aren’t [that many willing participants]. The way the system has evolved there’re a lot fewer farmers, for one, farmers that would kind of embrace this idea in the way that we’ve just described. So at this stage, we need some— It’s kind of like triage. I think there needs to be a

greater effort to move more people from a place of anonymity in their relationship to food, to some form of relationship and understanding.

In some ways I'm lately really excited about an idea that would work with some of the mid-scale farmers and aggregate products. It would be more of a subscription— Just in a way, the opposite of wrapping yourself around a particular farm, and a farm unit and land, a particular piece of land. And in the interest of seeing if there's a way that we can engage a greater percentage of the urban population in beginning to have a more meaningful relationship, even beyond the farmers' market. It's starting to get closer to the farms through a CSA-like relationship. Retailer on wheels is how I describe it.

**Rabkin:** Would this be something like the People's Grocery in Oakland?

**Lawson:** The People's Grocery in Oakland is kind of like that retailer on wheels in a way, but there's a more CSA-like retailer on wheels that is more of the kind of business model— I'm not necessarily saying this is what I'm thinking of, but just that it's somewhat more of a corollary, but that lacks what I see as the heart of CSA—the relationship, the real opportunity to get to know the farmers. So in this case we are thinking of aggregating product from multiple mid-scale farmers. It could be like those who have a considerable presence in the wholesale market that would like to reduce that and create a new [plan]— And may also be going to multiple farmers' markets. Maybe like Pinnacle Ranch (Phil and Katherine Foster's) effort; Full Belly Farm; Swanton Berry Farm.<sup>6</sup> Some of these farms that have a retail farmers' market and wholesale presence in the world.

I've also thought about a "Netflix" for local food, using the kind of technology brainpower that we have over the hill [in the Silicon Valley] to help with the



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web-based and systems thinking necessary and the tools necessary for aggregating product, and then creating the materials and the mechanism for which the product can get out to thousands and thousands of households. I'm thinking about a fifty-thousand-member CSA, almost completely the opposite of— (laughs) [what] I always thought of. And the classroom is a good example. Like, we've been debating for many years, what's the healthy learning relationship [ratio] between an educator and a group of students? At what point does a classroom become too many kids and the quality of the education is diminished, relative to the number of teachers. And the same is true with a CSA: a farm and a number of members. At some point, they just become these numbers. It's number 458 who lives somewhere in this area who picks up at this location. But there's no real heart connection to them, or meaningful relationship. In the formative years—elementary school, for example—it's a lot more about social skills and other things that kids are learning besides science and math. And so you hope for some greater ratio of adult to child.

Anyway, so I think it's going to be a real big challenge. But that's what I'm interested in looking at: is there a way to have a system that can host fifty thousand households, but that has a heart, and that has the lives of the people that are involved in the production of that food in the forefront of the consumption of that food, and the economics of that all transparent? So, I'm kind of going in the other direction— (laughs) It sounds crazy but it's where I feel like we need to start questioning: how can we take these principles and make them work so that the seven million people over the hill right now in the Bay Area—

Only a very small fraction of them have a direct relationship to farms in the area. I think we can do better than that.

**Rabkin:** So it sounds like you're acknowledging (to go back to your marriage and dating analogy) that in the world of eater-farmer relationships, not everybody is going to get married.

**Lawson:** Right.

**Rabkin:** And you still want to provide some kind of relationship between the people who grow the food and the people who eat the food that makes farming continue to be viable. It sounds like you're entertaining a vision of a spectrum of arrangements, where you don't stop having the more committed kinds of CSA relationships, but you don't try to limit those relationships to that deep of a commitment.

**Lawson:** Right. Exactly. Well said. (laughs)

**Rabkin:** I'd like to ask you a couple more questions about CSAs, about both the work you've done and the ideas you have. And then maybe we could jump back and talk about CASFS and the apprentice work that you did.

**Lawson:** Okay.

**Rabkin:** [In relation to CSAs], you've mentioned a couple of times: "On the West Coast it's like this, as opposed to the rest of the country." And I wonder if you could speak to—are there conditions, land prices, other kinds of pressures that make the CSA world different for people in California or on the West Coast in general?

**Lawson:** Oh, yes. Historically, California has always been an industrial-ag state. I mean, there are smaller farms and more community-based efforts, for sure. But from the Spanish period all the way through, there've been larger operations—cattle, grain, orchards, on up to row-crop ag for export. The organic farming movement and the back-to-the-land movement was an effort to try and carve up the estates in a way that would create different relationships to the land here within California. So a lot of the organic farms that began in the late sixties and seventies that continue today, started small in serving the local health food stores, the co-ops, or households, collective households, or restaurants. As those farms matured, they grew in both scale and complexity in production, and marketing and distribution, [into models] that mimic the conventional system. It's been written about, the history of organic farming in California.<sup>7</sup>

When CSA entered the picture, it was, in a way, offered to the hosts of farms that had already had a history and a development that might have led them down this more conventional marketplace path, and were already larger-scale farms. And so the CSA came into a landscape, if you will, that provided an opportunity for these farms to add another element to their operation, not necessarily giving the community something that they can wrap themselves around with in terms of the original idea of a full farm, saying, "Here, this is what it takes for me to grow food for you (in a simplified form), and can we work together to make this possible? You help me with outreach and education and even administration for this economic relationship, and I'll just focus on growing food on these ten acres." You had farms that were already doing farmers' markets, wholesale accounts, direct to restaurants, whatnot. So it became an additional marketing

channel, in the conventional term[inology]. So you could say the landscape and history of organic farming in California shaped the way—limited or provided opportunity for CSA to grow here.

Some people would argue that, oh, it must have been really difficult for CSAs to form and get members because of such abundance and availability of fresh produce year round. Like, why would you even need a CSA, you know, thinking with the hat of, “I need to join a farm because that will be my way of accessing fresh produce.” In some communities that might be true, in the Midwest or the East, because all of the production is geared towards ethanol (laughs) or something else, GM soy, or there are commodity crops that dominate huge swaths of the American landscape. But in the Northeast, where really CSA began, and took root, and has flourished, the topography favors pockets of small diversified farms. Little valleys here and there limit the scale of production, and the seasonality limits the scale and scope of production. [This] lends itself more naturally to have communities form relationships with those more human-scale farm enterprises. They’re just, by the nature of the landscape, small. And it’s easier to think of organizing a CSA.

**Rabkin:** So is it generally less viable in California, given both the landscape and the history of the way the land and the agricultural economy has been carved up, to have those kinds of [small, intimate] models of CSA?

**Lawson:** No. I just think it’s harder— In some ways, soon it might be a lot easier, because we’re going to see a huge land shift, land transfer with the age of conventional farmers, as they are. And either employees of those farms will be taking on production and maybe keeping it at the same scale, or there might be a

kind of subtle land reform opportunity that could creep in and actually make it easier. That's what we're kind of hoping for in our area now, the San Mateo [County] coast. One of our goals is to begin that conversation with the farmers that are looking at not having heirs that are fifth generation. Italian immigrant farmers aren't going to grow Brussels sprouts anymore, in terms of the conditions they're currently functioning under. And so, who's going to take over the two hundred-, or three hundred-, or four hundred-acre Brussels sprouts operations, and peas and other things that are grown on the coast. Artichokes.

**Rabkin:** When you talk about "the conditions that they're currently functioning under," you mean—

**Lawson:** The business entities that they have formed. If they're going to pass on that business, and the relationships that that business has with other businesses that get their product, that enable that production— whether it's the chemical companies that come and offer their advice and their resources to keep the aphids in check on Brussels sprouts, or it's the packers and shippers that keep the markets open when they don't have the light brown apple moth limiting export to Canada. Those conditions could radically change if the current decision-makers in those institutions stop what they're doing and don't have a way of transferring those rights and responsibilities to anyone else. A number of the farmers that I talk with don't have people, heirs, that either want to take it on, or they are just not there. So who is going to do it, maintain the status quo of those operations? I just see change with that transfer as inevitable. How and what is still the big question. I think there could be the combined efforts of ag land preservation, open space preservation-focused groups that have done a

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tremendous job of partially, if not entirely, removing large swaths of productive ag land from the speculative market. Because that's obviously another limiting factor in California for anyone to enter into farming: the price of land. It's true most places now around the U.S. Obviously it's inflated in this state. It's so relative to what the market can bear for a piece of farmland, for what a farmer can pay for. This makes it pretty tough to break up those lands and start small CSAs that feed the local community.

But if the land question is resolved through both public and private nonprofit means of retiring speculation on farmland, and having easement programs or other tools that affirm active farming, and [if] we have UCSC (CASFS) and ALBA [Agriculture & Land-Based Training Association] and other training programs, and farm workers who are involved in those programs who have an inkling towards smaller diversified farming, [we will] be able to have this new group of people prepared to assume responsibility of this new production, new face of the landscape. I'm hopeful that we can actually achieve another era of refocusing production and distribution of food.

I mean, it's crazy. Brussels sprouts, for example. It's amazing that these farms are there and these farmers have so much knowledge about the land. But we're growing all this great food that ends up getting shipped to other parts of the world. And we, at the same time, are importing that same product. It just doesn't make sense. [Maybe] there's a way that they could be applying their knowledge and expertise in growing a diversity of foods that we clearly haven't maxed out of our consumption potential. If we think about, okay, do we really need to be importing all of what we're importing? And not to negate the challenge that

would pose on those countries that are exporting to us. But I would present the same opportunity to those countries, and say, “What if (as you probably had prior) you take on the challenge of localizing your food system?” It may not be as lucrative for the businesses that are involved in that production, but it would certainly be more healthy for their community. And if there was some way that those countries had a program that enabled that kind of local food system development then it would be the best of all worlds. (laughs) So anyway—

### The Future of Food Systems

**Rabkin:** So, since we’re looking forward and ahead: I know that you’re the father of a couple of small children. I’m really curious to ask you what gives you hope when you think about their generation and their future *vis-à-vis* food systems and agriculture—especially locally—and also, what keeps you up at night thinking (if anything)? What are your worries about what this landscape is going to look like, figuratively and literally, when they’re coming of age?

**Lawson:** (sigh) Well, I think the whole last commentary on the potential changes on the horizon in the next ten to twenty years — I mean, most of the farmers are in their early sixties, late fifties. Some are in their later sixties. Maybe they’ll go until they’re ninety—farming, driving around in their trucks and ordering people around. But my sense is that that kind of system is coming up against a change. It’s just obvious to me that there’s going to be a huge shift when those farmers stop farming, for whatever reason. Already in our community there was a farmer who is still farming, but he gave up a number of leases on some lands that he’s had for fifty years, that’ve been in their family for fifty years. We’re collaborating with a neighbor in trialing some grains and doing some different

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things on that site. We're trying to do things that are relatively easy and that have some tie-in with our goals that we have at Pie Ranch around being in relationship with a pie shop. (We'll talk more about that next time.) [We are] trying to grow all of the wheat flour needs for the crusts of all the baked goods at this particular institution, and modeling how you can create that direct relationship with a source of food for a community.

So what gives me hope is that we'll be able to do that transition well. [I hope that] there will be enough private landowners who want to utilize their resources for the benefit of this larger effort to provide an affordable place for local production and relationship-based food systems to evolve, and there will be the institutions that have been active for the last thirty-plus years in preserving open space that includes agricultural land—that we'll be able to work together with the farming community to make that transfer of knowledge of local conditions available to the next generation of farmers, and [farmer-]educators, [and] interpreters of wildlands next to food-producing lands, next to urban areas.

A new definition of farmer has to emerge: people who are engaged in production for local consumption but have these other hats that they can wear, or want to wear. Maybe a number of the farmers of this next generation are going to be schooled in ways that might broaden their own sense of what work they want to do in the world beyond food production in and of itself. There are some early examples of that in our neighborhood, and my hope is that we'll be multiplying that in the next ten, twenty years.

Lucas and Rosa are three and one now. When they're out of school, and if they like what work we're doing, of course it would be great if they are interested in



being part of that. But if not, [I hope] at least that their generation would be able to easily find opportunities in this kind of work. That's what gives me hope. And also what keeps me up at night, because I think, God: (laughs) how is that really going to happen? Is it too Pie in the Sky? Or are we onto something? Because there are clearly a lot of people interested in it, both on the urban side wanting to support it, and the young generation. Like one farm worker [couple] in our neighborhood really wants to branch out on [their] own and be a small-scale diversified organic farmer. And I could see that being a really likely place for this next generation— Or [I can imagine it taking hold in] other immigrant farm communities, the Hmong in the Central Valley, or other [communities] where there's clearly a link of diversified small-scale food production for local consumption because wherever they are immigrating from, that's their experience. That gives me hope that we'll actually have a real diversified producer base reflecting the food interests and the diverse cultures of our urban base, and that this relationship-based food system vision will be embraced by both urban and rural communities, enabling those new relationships to form in a healthful way.

**Rabkin:** It sounds like the price of land in California must be one of the major barriers that has to be overcome for that vision to be realized. Is that an accurate—

**Lawson:** Oh, very much so. Yes.

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## Conservation Easements

**Rabkin:** And you've written, of course, about the way that Live Power Farm was eventually able to preserve its land in perpetuity for agriculture through a conservation easement.

**Lawson:** Right.

**Rabkin:** Is that one of the main mechanisms you see as a source of hope for overcoming that barrier?

**Lawson:** Yes. In their example it was predominantly private funding that enabled the land to be divided between what would be considered broader social and ecological interests in that land, versus what the private farmer interests are in that land. And there are state-funded programs now at the Department of Conservation that assist in especially very sensitive urban-fringe farmscapes, and are helping with paying for that portion of property that can be held in an easement, that would remove a certain amount of the market price because of the removal of the rights to develop that property.

What the Decaters did gives me hope. But it's also yet to be seen how the traditional land-trust movement and legal systems, whatnot, and the laws of California, relate to more of the model of an affirmative easement, which goes beyond just removing the development rights, and actively requires firm uses on the land, to say that the land has to be farmed by a resident farmer earning at least fifty percent of their income from farming, just as an example. That throws up a lot of red flags for lawyers who are concerned about the perpetuity qualities of easements. The easement could be threatened if there're too many

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requirements that run with the land. So someone can challenge it more easily in court and throw this easement out because we can't find a farmer who wants to farm organically and who wants to earn fifty percent of their income from farming. So you know what? We need to get rid of this easement because it isn't working anymore for this land, and then sell it off to the highest bidder.

But I feel like there's such a strong local-food-systems movement happening that we can [succeed with this effort.] And that will continue to grow, not just out of a trend, but out of recognition of the real necessity of maintaining these relationships and food security, and the value—economically, ecologically, socially—by having a more relationship-based food system, that just the opposite will happen. We'll have more farmers who want to farm organically earning fifty percent of their income from farming (laughs), or maybe we create mechanisms for a certain amount of flexibility, but [mechanisms] that affirm more with the easement than just removing the development rights—that give greater likelihood that the properties that have a strong ag potential will remain in farming and not be sold for non-farm uses.

So I think if we can [preserve] the majority of privately-held lands and then utilize public lands with this lens of agricultural preservation and access, we'll actually have an incredible pool of affordable, accessible land. The challenge will then become: do we have the skill and interested stewards available to take on the production and really be there? If you carve up a chunk, three hundred acres of coastal terrace that doesn't have housing— I mean, there's other complexities that come into the question of land reform and repopulating the landscape with diverse, small-scale farming operations.

I think right now, even, there is a lot of farmland that is available and at affordable leases. But there are issues of housing that come into play. There's issues of scale and access to markets. There's all sorts of other barriers that I think prevent people from jumping into it. Even though there's CSA as an option, it's still not a widely-embraced option and it's not easy to do, and it's not easy to have such a huge diversity of crops to grow. There are some issues there that we need to be thinking of. It's really hard to do what a lot of the diversified organic producers are doing. I don't know how most of them do it, (laughs) to be honest. I mean, we're now in our fourth year of starting some production ourselves. I spent the last decade and a half being more on the community side of the food production, of trying to support and encourage relationships between farmers and eaters. Now, being on the farming side, it's amazing the challenges that are thrown at you. Maybe it's heightened with where we are in terms of the soils and the climate and whatnot.

### **Supporting New Farmers**

I think finding new farmers is going to be the biggest hurdle to overcome. That's why we need programs like the UCSC Farm and Garden to be strengthened and supported and expanded, and not the other way around. And ALBA [Agriculture & Land-Based Training Association] is a great example of working with former farm workers, who in some ways are maybe more prepared to assume a lot of responsibility with existing agricultural land availability.<sup>8</sup> And then you couple all of that, the work that— I don't know if you've set up interviews with Reggie Knox.

**Rabkin:** He's on our list.<sup>9</sup>

**Lawson:** He's on your list, great. Because the whole effort that California FarmLink has engaged in with this sort of matchmaking, that's going to be—

**Rabkin:** Matching up young farmers with land.

**Lawson:** Yes. Anybody who is able to take on farming and wants to do [it] in the way that we're imagining— Yes, matchmaking people who want to farm with available land. And then getting that list of that pool of land to them, so that people have more of a choice to— It's really this incredibly rich and dynamic matchmaking center. I think California FarmLink is going to play an increasingly significant role in that; at least we'd like to get them to do that in our area.

I think around the state there's going to be a large transfer of land that we're not ready for. That's what keeps me awake at night, is that we're not ready for it. And that's what gives me hope throughout the day and at night, that we're *getting* ready for it. It's happening now and it will continue to happen, but before the big shift happens, I think we'll be more prepared for it.

**Rabkin:** It is Tuesday, March 18, 2008, and we're sitting in the conference room in the Science and Engineering Library at UC Santa Cruz. We're going to do some follow-up questions from the interview we had a couple of weeks ago. Jered, one of the topics that we touched on, but didn't really explore at length, was your ongoing relationship with Stephen and Gloria Decater at Live Power Farm. And we're interested because you mention that the two of them are (you said), "woven into the rest of your story" since the time when you first visited Live Power. So we were interested in hearing a little more about how they have stayed connected in your life and in your work.

## **Stephen and Gloria Decater at Live Power Farm**

**Lawson:** That's a good question. I think we talked about their [CSA as the] inspiration for the CSA for the Homeless Garden Project. I returned to visit [the Decaters] because their experience clearly had an impact on decisions I was making and the way I was organizing my life. I was drawn to return to visit them and learn more from them when I had the opportunity. Almost every year, for a number of years, I would take a trip up to Covelo and spend at least a few days getting to know them.

We ended up becoming more connected via work through the organizing of CSA West, which was the program that grew out of an interest to start providing more resources and advocacy, outreach, for CSAs in California—for getting new ones started, inspiring urban folks to sign up with CSAs. Gloria [Decater], in particular, was— That was her role for the farm itself, as an outreach person, to get membership to their CSA, and maintaining social relations with the “C” in the CSA. So as an advisor to me, among other CSA folks, farmers and members in the Bay Area, we'd be in conversation a lot on the phone. And then we were involved in helping to pull together the 1995 Western Regions CSA Conference that was funded by the Western Region of USDA's SARE program, the Sustainable Ag Research and Education program. So that conference in '95, and a grant from the Foundation for Deep Ecology, launched the CSA West program in the fall of '94, but mostly in '95, which was also the time that the CSA at the UCSC Farm [and Garden] was starting. Their first season was 1995. And I can't recall how much we talked about that.

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## Western Regional CSA Conference

**Rabkin:** Almost not at all. Right. So that's something we want to talk about. Let's stay with the Western Regional CSA conference for a moment.

**Lawson:** Sure. Gloria was on a steering committee of farmers and CSA members and organizations or research institutions that were active in sustainable ag in California: UC SAREP [Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program] out of Davis; Small Farm Center out of Davis; the Center for Agroecology [and Sustainable Food Systems]; CAFF [Community Alliance with Family Farmers], and the Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association, which had just opened up its West Coast office at the time and was involved in organizing CSA conferences, national conferences up to that point as well. We had a group of people that were helping to pull this conference together in San Francisco.

Ultimately it was a very inspiring and fun event to be a part of, bringing farmers and community members together, as well as researchers and the media, and people just beginning to explore the idea, and people who had been engaged in it for maybe a half a decade in California. We had about 450 people at Fort Mason. We used the Cowell Theater there and a number of the rooms, and had a sold-out public event, with Alice Waters and Catherine Sneed and Helena Norberg-Hodge—a powerful trio of folks who have influenced the food system in deep ways. We were honored to have them help champion the CSA message that evening, and local food-system organizing. It was a great event that helped launch a number of CSAs. I have heard stories saying, “Oh, I met so-and-so there

and we ended up working together on the CSA.” And, “I learned about crop planting more which convinced me that I could do it.” That kind of thing.

It’s hard with conferences to really know what the ripple effect of a gathering of like-minded folks is, but we knew intuitively that it would be helpful to bring people together. I think people would enjoy a[nother] focused get together. There’s been a CSA pre-conference to the Ecological Farming Conference at Asilomar. This last year it was just integrated into the program for a longer period than just a session. But I think a larger, multiple-day, really in-depth CSA conference is due on the West Coast. There have been some in Michigan. But there’re a lot more people involved in CSA. I think if they had the opportunity to get together and share stories and best practices, it would be well received as well as a way to invite new farmer interest in the idea.

**Rabkin:** So that 1995 conference was a one-shot deal? They haven’t been annual since then, the CSA West?

**Lawson:** No. It’s been incorporated into the Eco-Farm conference pretty much every year. There’ve always been CSA workshops, but that was the big, “let’s get folks together.” It’s tricky with so many conferences [happening]. There’s the Small Farm conference, and there’s other meetings that happen around the topic of agriculture and direct marketing.

And that’s kind of what happened with CAFF as well, and the CSA West program. CSA became recognized as one part of an overall direct marketing program area. So CSA gets included in a lot of conferences, but it hasn’t had somebody take the lead and say, “Let’s do just a CSA-focused, multiple-day get-together.” Again, I think we’re overdue for one. It would be a great reunion, in a



way. We thought about doing it in '05 and put it out to some folks, and there was interest, but no one really jumped forward to take the lead. And we [Nancy and I], at the time, with starting Pie Ranch and a new family, we weren't quite ready to take that on ourselves. What we need is another naive, idealist college student who wants to— (laughter)

**Rabkin:** (laughter)

**Lawson:** —put all the effort into pulling it together. (laughs) Or a really seasoned crew like Eco-Farm folks to take it on as a new venue. I think they're just so steeped in doing what they've done so well for so many years, that the thought of doing another big, multiple-day conference doesn't really come up that often. I'm guessing that they would be really careful [about taking] on a whole new venue, although this year Eco-Farm sold out, so maybe there is the recognition that there might be ways to divide it up and have multiple events throughout the year.

**Rabkin:** And maybe the launching of a conference like this might come out of a session at an Eco-Farm?

**Lawson:** Right. Yes. I think every year someone mentions it, and then no one raises their hand to say, "Okay, I'll write the proposal. I'll kind of keep the flame going until the funding comes in." At the time I wrote that proposal to Western Region SARE, it was the first proposal I had ever written. I had no idea what I was doing and was surprised to get the "yes" in the mail. Because it was through the Homeless Garden Project that we submitted the proposal as the 501(c)3 that could receive the charitable contribution. And the Homeless Garden Project, being a young CSA project— If I was a Western Region SARE reviewer of a

proposal, I might think: well, are these folks really able to pull together such a conference? I might have had my doubts. Granted, we did have letters of support from more seasoned conference organizers, like people at UC SAREP, Gail Feenstra and others like that, that we were able to get the support to pull that event together. It was a great opportunity for me as a young person interested in getting the CSA idea out far and wide.

A lot happened in that year, in 1995, with the start-up of the CSA at the UCSC Farm, and the conference, and CSA West with CAFF.

**Rabkin:** And what kinds of topics do CSA people want to talk about? I mean, if you had a whole conference of California CSA people—farmers, and community members, and so forth—what kinds of issues come up that it would be useful for folks to talk about, all in one room at one time?

**Lawson:** It would vary depending on the skill set. There are new CSA farmers that would be really excited about talking about issues of land access, and capitalization of a new farm, and what kind of equipment would be particularly helpful for CSAs, and pulling together the pieces of a CSA, a distribution system, a database—kind of all the fundamentals of what it takes to run a CSA. The more seasoned CSA farmers, I imagine, would like to get together just to swap stories of what's worked, what hasn't—you know, just the feeling of being in a room full of people who have shared your successes and your struggles. It's always a pleasure to be amongst cohorts, in that regard. So it would be practical but also maybe more inspirational, just sharing the time together. And then, students and researchers and the media— I think, especially now with the interest in local food really surging nationally, there would be a renewed interest in CSA.

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Because CSA always gets touted as—well, if you're interested in local food, either go to the farmers' market or find a CSA in your area. And the reality is we're kind of— not hitting the wall. I mean, there're new farmers. There was just that *New York Times* article about some farmers in the Northeast, Ben Shute, who was at the international CSA conference and just visited us before that article came out.<sup>10</sup> A young guy. Had started a CSA through Just Food.<sup>11</sup> They're going into their third year and are very enthusiastic about it and feel hopeful that it's possible to be a farmer now because he has the direct support of the community.

So there's the fertile ground for new farmer support, and also for farmers that are transitioning. We've met a number of larger-scale farmers that have decided that they wanted to scale back and start a small CSA as their antidote for survival, because the kind of commodity agriculture that they had been engaged in— Like, there's this one farm in France, I think of in particular, that we visited, that [had been] a large exporter of cereal and legumes, and has started a small CSA with area residents with potatoes, just one crop, and then has diversified over the last five years and strengthened their operation. He sees hope in the CSA, [in the], as they call it, the AMAP, which translates as the Association for the Maintenance of Peasant Agriculture. It's their version of a CSA.<sup>12</sup>

But anyway, I think we would find in a multiple-day conference hopefully a new level of interest on the production side to attend. And that's where I feel like it's most critical. Because we're kind of at that stalling ground. There're not that many more CSAs that are emerging that I'm hearing of, that people can join or be a part of, or that are looking for members. There are a lot of folks out there who would like to join a CSA. And every CSA I talk to has a waiting list. So I know

that the supply is not equaling the demand. We're at that crossroads where we need to create more farmers, basically.

### **More on the Homeless Garden Project CSA**

**Rabkin:** Interesting. Let's go back to another topic that we didn't really get into very deeply in the longer interview, about your work with the Homeless Garden Project CSA. We talked a bit about beginning to get it up and running, but not much about what kinds of veggies you guys were offering, or how you guys distributed the food at first, how that changed over time. Can you share a little detail about that?

**Lawson:** Sure. Well, it was based on the models that we had been familiar with, and it was sort of what was [growing] at the garden anyway. There was a diversity of fresh summer produce—vegetables, primarily—and some fruits like strawberries. The method for distribution was right there at the garden— putting the twice-weekly harvest out in bushel baskets on a table, and items listed on a chalkboard, and people coming to the garden and seeing what was available to them as a shareholder, and just going down the tables and filling up their bags and putting them on their bikes or in their car, and heading back to their home.

Some shares did go to a Families in Transition program. Those shares were subsidized by donations, either from other members, or [from] general members of the community who wanted to support making the CSA membership more accessible to families with limited income.

In terms of it changing over time, there really wasn't, during my time there, any shift from the pickup method. I know subsequently, though, they did go towards

the box. The CSA shares were boxed and then distributed. But I don't know the details about that system. So while I was there that was how we did it.

**Rabkin:** Okay. Great.

**Lawson:** And then I really wanted to do the apprenticeship program. At the garden, I could work in the garden, and come visit and be there while I was working on the CSA, but there was something about that experience up in Covelo, of waking up and being at the site of where you work—I wanted to experience what that was like. That was offered through the six-month program, as well as other apprenticeships, like in Covelo. And I thought, well, if I don't get into the apprenticeship program maybe I would pursue apprenticing at Live Power or another farm. But I liked the idea of daily work in a farm, a working farm, that also afforded more guided instruction and opportunity to really ask a lot of questions and try and take in more. But also, I had this sneaking suspicion that the [UCSC] Farm would be a great candidate to start another CSA.

**Rabkin:** And that turned out to be the case, yes? (laughs)

**Lawson:** Yes, well it took a little bit of proposal-writing and talking amongst the staff to see if it was do-able. But by the end of my six months there, there was a commitment. In fact, it ended up being really great. Both Jim Leap<sup>13</sup>, who is the manager of the field-scale production, and Orin [Martin]<sup>14</sup> [were] really interested in the CSA idea. Most of the CSAs in the U.S. were more field-scale, so it seemed appropriate to focus it in the field. We went back and forth for a while: what was the best way to structure the CSA within the Farm and Garden, and where would the produce be coming from? The Cart at the base of campus Tuesdays and Fridays would draw from all the sites, the two garden sites and

the field site. But it ended up being decided ultimately that the fields would be the best teaching model of a contained crop plan and budget, and just easier to wrap around as an apprentice, the whole CSA idea.

**Rabkin:** So the CSA became not only a CSA in its own right, but also a source of education for the apprentices about how CSAs run.

**Lawson:** Oh, yes. Exactly, yes. So that was part of my excitement. Here was this incredible opportunity. If our idea is to create more farmers capable of running their own CSA, then we definitely need more apprentices that are a part of commercial farms where CSA is either a part of, or the heart of the operation.

**Rabkin:** Have you seen that bear fruit? I don't know if it's possible to track these things, but do you know of apprentices who have come out of the program and have begun their own CSAs in part because of their exposure to it here?

**Lawson:** Oh, yes. Very much so. I can name a number of them. There are some interviews that are happening right now by the Center for Agroecology [and Sustainable Food Systems] apprenticeship program to tease out more of these stories from alumni. A survey would be a great idea, because that would be a great number to find out: how many of the graduates since 1995 have gone on to be involved in CSA? Good friends of ours here in Watsonville, Live Earth Farm, Tom and Constance—they've got a pretty developed CSA.

**Rabkin:** Seven hundred members I've heard. And a big waiting list.

**Lawson:** Yes, exactly. And a number of others— Freewheelin' Farm, on the other end of the scale. Bicycle-distributed produce. Amy [Courtney] was an apprentice.<sup>15</sup> And a number of local, as well national and international examples

stem from that. We've gone, as a part of the international CSA work just this last January, and presented the idea of the Center for Agroecology [and Sustainable Food Systems] being a place to host more international short courses, trainings specific to CSA, as the idea is taking off in other countries. Even France, where the International CSA Network is based, has only a more recent history, five years of CSA development. It's really taking off and it's exciting to see. It's partly as a result of us bringing that information there, and farmers getting excited about the ideas through other examples of CSA. One of the daughters of the farmer that started the first CSA in France was involved with Just Food in New York. The potential for expanding the number of CSAs internationally through people having a practical experience at the UCSC Farm is huge. It's still wide open. There is lots of opportunity.

### **Starting a CSA at the UCSC Farm and Garden**

**Rabkin:** That's great. So, just to be clear. You did go into the apprentice program in 1995?

**Lawson:** '94.

**Rabkin:** 1994. And by the end of that time you had presented a proposal for a CASFS CSA.

**Lawson:** Yes.

**Rabkin:** And then it got off the ground shortly after that?

**Lawson:** The next season. In '94, we did the organizing for it, the same way that in '91, in the fall, [we were] starting to pull together the materials and outreach for the start-up in the spring of '92 with the Homeless Garden Project.

Jim [Leap] was excited about pulling together what it would take in the field to harvest twelve or so items a week. That was his domain. As well as with the second-year apprentices—Kathy and Cindy, I believe. (I’m forgetting who exactly was there at the time.) I was involved more on the administrative and outreach side, pulling together the materials for it. We had written a grant. Somebody who was an apprentice that year, Marcy, had friends involved with the people responsible for grant-making around sustainable agriculture through the Foundation for Deep Ecology, and arranged for us to have a meeting and talk about this potential of a CSA happening there, and the conference, and some other statewide organizing around CSA. It was at that meeting that Quincey Tompkins Imhoff from the foundation, who was the director at the time, said, “Let’s see if CAFF would be interested in co-hosting, or being the nonprofit, as they have been and continue to be one of the leading nonprofits in the state for promoting sustainable agriculture in general.” They were very much interested in hosting the CSA-specific organizing work that I was wanting to do, and did so out of the office and provided me the office space to coordinate the conference, and to coordinate the CSA at the Farm, and to begin coordinating CSA work statewide.

**Rabkin:** And that was all lumped under the aegis of CSA West? Is that right?

**Lawson:** Yes, exactly. We put out a directory of CSAs in California at the time, and would field questions, from both farmers and interested community members. You know, at that time Internet search engines weren’t as easy as the LocalHarvest is now, for people to find CSAs.<sup>16</sup>



**Rabkin:** Yes. Is that the best place for people to go now if they are looking for a CSA?

**Lawson:** I think so. Yes. That, and CAFF's site as well, I think is still very relevant, and has some other information there that is germane to the organizing work that CAFF is doing related to CSAs in California. That would be helpful for people. LocalHarvest is really wonderful, kind of just strictly matchmaking— And you can find other useful things on the LocalHarvest site as well. But as far as more of the nonprofit advocacy, other resources that CAFF provides, information about land access, about policy, things that are affecting CSAs in other ways, CAFF would be a good site to go to.

**Rabkin:** Did you do work with CAFF's Buy Fresh, Buy Local program as well?

**Lawson:** Yes, in fact that was what drew me back to Santa Cruz after a leave. I went and did some traveling, visited CSA farms in Japan, and other sites in different parts of the world, in 1997. I stayed at the Farm for two seasons after my '94 apprenticeship, and then left in January of '97 after a CSA event down in the LA area.

### **Farm Fresh Choice in Berkeley**

And came back broke and in need of employment, and thought about looking for opportunities in the Bay Area. I wanted to see what it was like to work in a more metropolitan area, more urban. I grew up in a more urban environment and thought it would be a good experience to be more on the urban side of things, working particularly with low-income communities and their interest in gaining

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greater access to higher quality produce. So I worked with the Center for Ecoliteracy on a farm-to-school program there.

**Rabkin:** In Berkeley.

**Lawson:** In Berkeley, with the Berkeley Unified School District and a food policy council that was addressing more of these community food security goals that I was really excited about. One of the projects that we worked on that was CSA-related was called Farm Fresh Choice. It was an idea that emerged in discussions with the people that we were working with: how can the CSA idea be more adapted to fit the need of the community? I mean, why was it that limited-income and -resource communities of color in West Berkeley, for example, [were not] joining rapidly Full Belly Farm and some of the other farms that served the East Bay? The lack of choice in what you get in a CSA box was one of the issues that emerged, [plus having to pay] any bit up front for produce, even if it was [just] a month in advance or even a week in advance. Or the idea of committing to receive produce from a farm, especially produce that you weren't familiar with, wasn't something that was making it really palatable [for those groups] to participate. And just the cost in general was geared toward organic farmers' market prices. Same issue there. And [the fact that it can take more] time to prepare [fresh whole] foods— A lot of factors come into what enables or disables people from participation in CSA.

The antidote, we thought, was more of a souped-up farmers' market and a watered-down CSA, where you can have almost like a pre-paid phone card, where you committed by paying for a certain amount of food dollars that would go to these farms that were participating in this market at an after school

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program. You come and you pick up your kids from after school—convenient—you can pick up some produce too and use this card to do that. The minimum commitment was a dollar a day. We thought that could be affordable. So seven dollars a week for a card, and then you can get multiple cards if you wanted more, and extend your support further.

And it's still going, Farm Fresh Choice. It's taken on different forms, but the general principle of engaging the community more in connecting with the farm and supporting that farm, while getting really high-quality, affordable fresh produce is still the main theme. So that was an outgrowth of the Berkeley Food Policy Council work, as well as school food policy, which helped trigger national farm-to-school interest increasing on the policy level, but more practically, in the cafeterias—more fresh, local, organic, seasonal produce in the meals that kids are eating. Salad bars were one great way to make that happen. A whole other host of both opportunities and challenges have been worked on since. Part of our work right now with Pie Ranch is looking at those opportunities and challenges at the high school that we're most connected with, in San Francisco Unified [School District].

So that work continues. But when that three-year USDA community food security grant ended at the Center for Ecoliteracy, I thought it was an opportunity to move back to Santa Cruz and put more energy into helping to manifest the same kind of farm-to-school, food policy work. And Nancy [Vail] — we had kindled a connection, a relationship, and so there were was motivation there, for sure (laughs). She was based here at the university. So we decided it

was time to join forces and I'd move to Santa Cruz and work on these efforts here.

### **Developing the Buy Fresh, Buy Local Program with CAFF**

At that time, Reggie Knox at CAFF was exploring how to go forward with more of a Buy Local initiative. We had received an announcement, a call for proposals from Food Routes. At the time there was another name for the organization. It was a Kellogg-funded learning-community two-year process to get ten organizations from around the U.S. to share best practices and experiences in their nascent local food campaigns. Their premise [was] that if you not only have people sharing information to enhance the local work that was going on, but also couple that with some national research that would infuse the proposals and rationales for this work, as well as a communication strategy and maybe some resource sharing that would cross state boundaries and regions, that would enhance the on-the-ground work in each locale. And that was very true. There were four of us out of the ten that decided to band together more closely and work with a design firm to come up with the collateral necessary to run a successful campaign. We pooled our resources to come up with this Buy Fresh, Buy Local logo that could then be utilized by each local region, change the produce that's in that logo but use the fruit crate image to help inspire, that you have, I think, on your refrigerator (laughter).

**Rabkin:** Oh, yes. (laughs)

**Lawson:** —and use the same kind of messaging after the national research. There was this firm in D.C. that was hired, that did kind of more political polling work.

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They did some pre-market research for us to determine who was the target audience, what was the best messaging to convey to that target audience, and what media outlets would be the best way to enhance the penetration of that message to that target audience.

**Rabkin:** So a lot of strategizing went into that program.

**Lawson:** Yes, exactly. The tools that emerged from that sharing were great. We had Charlie, at the Appalachian Sustainable Ag project, who had this local food guide that he was very excited about. He was able to give us this template that we could use in our regions, that has since also become the *[UCSC] Campus Food Guide* and other iterations of it. So in terms of its impact on the Central Coast, the whole Buy Fresh, Buy Local new program area—that was initiated on the Central Coast for CAFF. It has since moved to other regions within the state, with other CAFF offices around the state. And most recently, the Bay Area program this last couple of years has really taken off. Now we have the big Slow Food Nation [conference] happening that's also going to give the Bay Area another big boost this summer.<sup>17</sup>

So anyway, Buy Fresh, Buy Local was a wonderful opportunity to be part of this learning community, and [there are] friendships that still exist as a result of that unique way of pulling folks together from around the country to work together over multiple years. There would be these meetings that would take place in different regions that we would, over the course of those two years, participate in. I think it really helped everybody out a lot, and hope that other organizations or funders that ever see this [oral history] will recognize that it's worth it to

support that kind of collaborative approach to strategy and on-the-ground organizing.

**Rabkin:** And this all came from Kellogg's grant, initially?

**Lawson:** Yes. Kellogg's grant to the Food Routes Network, which has hosted this. Now it's kind of emerged as a real meaningful— Other organizations outside of that initial ten have joined to utilize the materials, all the collateral and the work that went into those new campaigns. And I'd like to think that those, as well as the amazing literature that's come out in the last couple of years, with *Omnivore's Dilemma* (Michael Pollan's work)<sup>18</sup> and Barbara Kingsolver's book<sup>19</sup>, and other media, have lifted the banner for local food nationally and internationally. And researchers like Ken Meter out of Minneapolis at the Crossroads Resource Center are worth looking at, [and are] identifying more of the economic and social benefits of having those food dollars stay closer to home.

**Rabkin:** It's an exciting time.

**Lawson:** Yes. There are interesting challenges to it, with carbon footprint analysis and debate going on. But I think in the end, overall, there is the recognition that if we encourage people around the world to be strengthening their own local food systems, continuing trade where necessary, and where luxury is possible and enjoyable, by all means, let's do it. I love my cup of coffee in the morning and my kids love their easy-to-peel bananas, but I think for the most part we need to be doing a lot more effort in making it easier to eat simple, whole foods from neighboring farms. We have a lot of opportunity here in California that we're not taking advantage of nearly enough. In other states, people complain about the long, cold winters: "How can we just eat from our foodshed?" But

there have been historically great solutions to that. I think it is very possible, given our capacity to think creatively, [to] build systems that will satisfy eaters, while at the same time maintaining a local food economy as we go forward.

## **Part Two: INTERVIEW WITH NANCY VAIL**



Photo by Telestar Logistics

### **Beginnings**

**Rabkin:** This is Sarah Rabkin, and I'm here with Nancy Vail at UCSC. It is Tuesday, March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2008. Let's start with a bit of background about your early days, Nancy.

**Vail:** Sure.

**Rabkin:** First, where were you born and when?

**Vail:** Okay, I was born in Riverside, California, in 1968.

**Rabkin:** And where did you grow up?

**Vail:** In Riverside. I was born and raised there, and was there until I was seventeen.

**Rabkin:** And tell me about your educational background. Where did you go to school? Any other important schooling or educational experiences?

**Vail:** Well, I went to school at Riverside Poly High School and was really into a variety of different things: running and choir and all sorts of activities. And then I ended up going to UC San Diego, to go to college, which felt like this exciting thing to do at that time when I was seventeen. I'd probably do it differently now, but that's where I was in college.

**Rabkin:** What did you major in?

**Vail:** A combination of history and Spanish literature, so I spent a summer in Mexico and a year in Spain, studying Spanish and Spanish literature and history.

**Rabkin:** And how did you start to get interested in agriculture and sustainable food systems?

**Vail:** When I returned to UCSD, I got involved in a place called the Che Cafe. It's a student co-op on the campus. My last year of college, I was hanging out with people at this vegetarian co-op and was getting into being a vegetarian (which I'm not anymore, but)—was discovering myself and my friends through food. And we would all sit around and talk about how great it would be to find land and farm. You know, the ideal sort of dreamy thing that some college students think about.

I had a boyfriend, who became my husband (who I'm no longer with), David, and we got serious about the whole thing, I guess it was a year after college. I



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taught for a while as a substitute teacher and as a bilingual aide, and then we decided that we really wanted to pursue this farming thing, and the two of us realized we needed to save money in order to afford to be able to apprentice and learn farming, because you don't get paid a lot to do that. So we applied to go to the JET program in Japan.

**Rabkin:** That's the Japan English teaching program?

**Vail:** Yes, so we lived in Japan for three years and saved up a lot of money and did community gardening while we were there and learned little bit about farming in Japan, but then after that, ended up traveling all over the place, all around Asia. Did some "WWOOFing" [Willing Workers on Organic Farms, now World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms] in New Zealand, then came back to the U.S. and pursued apprenticeships in the United States, and ended up apprenticing with Eliot Coleman in Maine. He's a well-known organic gardener. He's written books on the subject. And [I] worked at Angelic Organics, which is one of the largest CSAs in the country, and also at Hawthorne Valley Farm in New York, which is a pretty big biodynamic farm that has a CSA [community supported agriculture] and a dairy and a bakery, and they do sales at the green market in Union Square in New York City. And then after all of that, decided to do the apprenticeship program at UCSC, so came in 1997 to be an apprentice.

### **Apprenticeship at Angelic Organics**

**Rabkin:** Before we dive into the apprentice program, I'd love to hear more about some of those apprenticeship experiences. I guess one of the ones people know

most about is Angelic Organics, because of the film about Farmer John [Peterson].<sup>20</sup>

**Vail:** Right, Crazy Farmer John. Yes. (laughs)

**Rabkin:** Can you tell me a little bit about what that experience was like?

**Vail:** Sure. Well, after working for Eliot Coleman—it was before he had set up his moveable greenhouses. We were actually helping him build the moveable greenhouses. Before he re-entered the marketing of his vegetables, he was setting up his garden and there was a PBS series that was based at his house. Although I was learning a lot from him about gardening, I really wanted an experience on a farm and a CSA program. When we ended up visiting Angelic Organics, we ran into John, the farmer, and he was covered in mud. He was tilling, and it was too wet, and he was really stressed out. But that encounter, and then walking into the kitchen and seeing how everything was so organized, made me think, okay, I need to be here.

**Rabkin:** What year was that?

**Vail:** That was 1996. At that time, they had a CSA—let's see, it was 360 members, and they're now up to over a thousand members that they serve. But it just felt like, okay, I'm going to learn a lot here about how to run a CSA, how to farm on this scale. It was a huge scale compared to anything I'd worked on before.

**Rabkin:** How big was the farm?

**Vail:** At that time, it was, I think, sixteen acres. They have more acreage now. But it was fascinating to me that John grew up on that farm. His whole story that's outlined in *The Real Dirt on Farmer John*—I fell in love with it. It was my first

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experience with CSA, so I was head-over-heels with that whole concept, and worked really hard. We were up at five thirty in the morning, and we'd work until it got dark. But somehow that didn't bother me, and I was just thrilled to be there. I was only there for a season.

**Rabkin:** How old were you at this point?

**Vail:** I was twenty-six or –seven.

**Rabkin:** And how many apprentices were there at the time on the farm?

**Vail:** There were about six of us that were there, and it was a combination of maybe four or five—well, I guess sometimes six apprentices, but then there were two men from Mexico, Moises and Primo, who were the main guys that came back every year. They would return to Mexico, then come back to the farm and were extremely skilled in tractor work and irrigation. So they focused on that and would help us learn how to harvest vegetables. We worked alongside with them. But they were much more skilled than we were.

**Rabkin:** What kinds of skills did you learn there?

**Vail:** I learned a lot about how a variety of different vegetables grow and their requirements—from sowing them in the greenhouse to transplanting them and different kinds of implements that are used. John loves tractors and farm equipment, so I learned a lot about farm equipment and then how [the crops] are taken care of—from transplanting through harvest and post-harvest handling and boxing up produce—and then the whole structure of the CSA. They deliver to Chicago. They're two hours from Chicago, so there were deliveries twice a week to a number of different distribution sites, and learning about how that's

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set up, how the members sign up, how the newsletter is done, how potlucks and volunteer days happen. They're a biodynamic farm, and that was my first introduction to biodynamics and Rudolf Steiner. So I learned a bit about that.

**Rabkin:** Were there ways in which the Angelic Organics apprenticeship influenced your outlook about agriculture and/or agricultural education?

**Vail:** From that experience, I felt like I found my calling, in a sense. Community supported agriculture was something that really made sense to me. Having a direct relationship between farmers and consumers was something that was very clear. It could be done in a variety of ways, and that was my first experience. I wasn't necessarily thinking that that was going to be how I was going to do it. I wanted to explore other CSAs, how other CSAs operate. There were things about that scale that felt a little over my head. But in general, I think having a farm that other people in the community are welcome to visit, and feel ownership in, and have a direct relationship [with]—that was clear to me.

### **WWOOFing (Willing Workers on Organic Farms)**

**Rabkin:** Let's talk about your other apprenticeships. You mentioned before you came back to the U.S. to do some apprenticing, you did some WWOOFing, which is Willing Workers on Organic Farms.

**Vail:** Right.

**Rabkin:** Were any of those experiences especially influential for you?

**Vail:** The farms I worked on in New Zealand were mostly homestead-type operations, where a family or a couple were not necessarily making their entire living off of the land. They weren't production farms. There was one farm I

worked on that was more of a production farm. I think getting a sense of the rhythm of working on the land was what I learned. I enjoyed it. I enjoyed being outside. I enjoyed doing physical work, especially with people.

### Helen and Scott Nearing's books

This is reminding me that what I left out was—not just through college did I get into this idea that farming was something I was interested in. I was also reading Helen and Scott Nearing's *Living the Good Life*. I dove into their whole series of books that they'd written, and then visited their homestead in Vermont and in Maine and was really interested in them and fascinated by their life, and realized through some of the farms in New Zealand, and reflecting on who I am as a person, that I didn't really want to be a homesteader out by myself trying to make a living off the land. I wanted to have a sense of community. It wasn't just about me. It was also about other people, people who didn't have access to the experience of farming or access to good food. I felt this desire to be more in the world. So I wasn't really drawn to places that had more of that homesteading quality. Even though I loved working outside and the physical work, I missed the activism and social side of things.

### Sustainable Agriculture in Japan

**Rabkin:** How about the experiences in Japan? Were they influential for you, working with the gardens there?

**Vail:** Yes. I learned a lot about what I don't know, or didn't know. A lot of my early farming experience happened in Japan. I remember I was in a community garden space and got a big truckload of manure and just plunked it onto my tiny

little space and tried to grow beets right away, and then realized, oh, (laughs) it was too much non-composted manure on this space, and it burned up what I was trying to grow. And the other farmers, the Japanese farmers, were laughing at the way David and I were trying to do things. They were very meticulous. No weeds. Everything was very neat and tidy. Everywhere you go in Japan, they make good use of their land. You see crops growing alongside the train tracks. I think what was interesting to me was the older generations really valuing agriculture and being involved in agriculture. A lot of the families' grandparents were the ones that were out there working on the farm or in the rice paddies. That was fascinating to me.

I didn't get the opportunity, like Jered [Lawson] did—he visited Japan also, separately from me. He got to visit a number of CSA farms or *teikei* farms in Japan. I wasn't as aware of the *teikei* movement in Japan at that time when I was there, which is too bad. I became more interested in it after I left.

**Rabkin:** How do you spell the anglicized version of that word?

**Vail:** *Teikei* is *t-e-i-k-e-i*. I've heard different translations, but most often I hear "food with the farmer's face on it." *Teikei* started in, I think, the late sixties, early seventies. It was mainly a group of housewives or homemakers that were educated and came together with the realization that— Well, there was a number of food safety issues that were happening at the time. There was Minamata—

**Rabkin:** The mercury poisoning?

**Vail:** The mercury poisoning that happened there.<sup>21</sup> Then there was a dairy poisoning. These women were worried about their children's food source. There

were farmers who were more interested in organic farming, maybe seeing the effects of chemical agriculture and not wanting to go in that direction. So there were back-to-the-land type folks in Japan as well. And there were these farmers' cooperatives and consumers' cooperatives that were a historic thing in Japan. I guess since the 1800s there have been strong cooperatives in Japan, so it was really easy to form a group of consumers and a group of farmers and then have them relate together. This group of women initiated some of the first *teikei* relationships. And it wasn't like here, where you have one farm looking for a bunch of consumers. It was this group of consumers and a group of farmers who met together to form these relationships.

**Rabkin:** Did you have important mentors or teachers in these apprentice programs? Are there people who stand out for you as having taught you a great deal?

**Vail:** Yes. Eliot Coleman. I was only with him for a brief period of time, but he's amazing. Also just reading his books. And his wife, Barbara Damrosch, is an amazing gardener and has written a book called *The Garden Primer*.<sup>22</sup> I learned a lot from her. John Peterson, of course, is a mentor. Rachel and Steffan Schneider at Hawthorne Valley Farm—they're the farm managers there.

**Rabkin:** That's the one in New York State?

**Vail:** The one in New York. And then at the UCSC Farm, mentors like Jim Leap, John Farrell, Orin Martin<sup>23</sup>, and Christof Bernau. And then just mentors out there in the world—through going to conferences and reading about things, like Gloria and Stephen Decater, and Jeff and Annie Main, and Judith Redmond, and Maria Inés Catalan<sup>24</sup>, and Joy Moore. There're so many people that I regard as my

mentors, who are a part of the sustainable ag movement. I feel lucky to be in this world, because I feel a lot of hope and inspiration from the people that are part of it.

## **Apprenticing at the UCSC Farm and Garden**

**Rabkin:** Let's talk about the UCSC farm.

**Vail:** Sure.

**Rabkin:** How did you find out about the CASFS [The Center for Agroecology & Sustainable Food Systems] apprenticeship? What led you here?

**Rabkin:** Well, it's funny, because when I was fifteen, my brother went to college here. He's five years older than I am. He brought me to the Alan Chadwick Garden, and we walked around there. I didn't really know that there was this apprenticeship program. It wasn't until later that I had that memory: Oh, yeah, I remember visiting the garden.

I saw an advertisement for it. I was in Hawaii. (This was when I was living in Japan.) I took a trip to Hawaii and saw this advertisement in a *Smith & Hawken* magazine, I think. They had done a photo shoot at the Farm of apprentices gardening, and there was a description of the apprenticeship program. I thought, oh, wow, look at this! And my friend Tim from UC San Diego, who was a part of this group of friends that was interested in food and farming, was an apprentice there. So I visited Tim when he was a second-year apprentice at the Farm and took too many apples off the tree, probably, than I should have. [Both chuckle.] But—yes, so discovered it in my early twenties.



And then I applied to the program right after Japan and didn't get in. I was still with my first husband, David, at the time, and we applied after we worked on all these farms, and then we both got into the program. We applied together.

**Rabkin:** By then you had worked in Maine and New York and Illinois. So then you came for which season to the UCSC farm?

**Vail:** In '97, in April, I was an apprentice. I think through my farming and CSA experience, I knew right away that I wanted to work in the Field. There're three sites in the apprenticeship: the Alan Chadwick Garden, the garden at the Farm, and then the Field. I knew that's where I wanted to be. Jim was somebody that I had wanted to work closely with, and so I—

**Rabkin:** Jim Leap.<sup>25</sup>

**Vail:** Yes, Jim Leap. I knew right away I wanted to be a second-year apprentice, and so applied, and luckily got to do that. Then there was the opportunity to stay for a third year. They don't do third-year apprenticeships anymore. But it was a unique opportunity to do that, so I had that experience.

Jim Leap's job has gotten more and more complex through the years. He used to just be the farm manager and do the farming and the teaching, but with increasing administrative responsibilities, and having to be the outreach face of the Center for farmers and Extension, he's had a number of different hats to wear.

## CSA Coordinator for the

### Center for Agroecology & Sustainable Food Systems

So they decided that they needed to create another position to manage the CSA and help train the apprentices. So they created this—it's called the CSA coordinator position—which doesn't totally accurately explain what that position was, but I applied for that and got it, luckily.

**Rabkin:** So this was right after you had done the third-year apprenticeship.

**Vail:** Right, exactly. They did an open hire, and nineteen people applied. I thought for sure somebody with a master's would come in and get it. But luckily, I got to stay on. That position, as I grew into it, I ended up taking on more and more responsibility. Then I was out there, sharing the management of the Farm with Jim and being the field site manager. I was the person that the apprentices would come to in their rotations through the three sites. Jim was also there too. We definitely were sharing in that. It was a combination of overseeing the farming for the CSA and the market cart stand; doing the administration for the CSA, getting the members signed up, making sure the checks were all in and overseeing the newsletter; and then helping to train the apprentices.

**Rabkin:** (laughs) This sounds like a big job.

**Vail:** Yes, it's a big job. When I left, it got divided into—there's another half-time job that oversees the administration for the CSA, so—[Laughs.] Yes.

**Rabkin:** And you said that one of your responsibilities was to be available to the apprentices as they cycled through the three sites of the apprenticeship?

**Vail:** Right, exactly.

**Rabkin:** So what were you doing there? Were you orienting the apprentices?

**Vail:** Yes. Each site has a manager. There's Orin Martin in the Alan Chadwick Garden; Christof Bernau, the "down gardener" [at] the Farm's garden; and then I was the site manager in the Field. The apprentices who were with me, they do these six-week rotations. So I would meet twelve or thirteen apprentices each day, and we would go on a field walk. Jim was always there on the field walks, so we were doing this together. But then it was up to us, me and the apprentices, to identify, okay, what tasks were going to happen for the week. And then guiding that process and orienting them for the harvest for the CSA, and all of the activities that happen in the field, the sowings in the greenhouse, what got transplanted, irrigation that needed to happen, tractor work that needed to happen—managing that. It's a lot, because six weeks isn't very long, and you've got everybody, and then they kind of know what to do, and you've got them trained. And then they're out of there, and you've got a new batch to get up to speed. So it's a demanding, but very fulfilling job. It was my dream job, so I was happy to be there.

**Rabkin:** And then in addition to that, you were essentially running the CSA program for the Farm and Garden. Tell me about that. Was the CSA already up and running when you came in?

**Vail:** Yes, yes. Jered, my husband—he started the CSA. I always like to say he created my job, in 1995. Jered was an apprentice in '94. He had started the CSA at the Homeless Garden Project, I think in '92. I might have that wrong. He came to the apprenticeship program already with the knowledge of CSA, and having had

that experience as a community studies student, starting the CSA at the Homeless Garden. So as an apprentice, I think he saw, oh, wouldn't this be great to have the CSA here at the Farm as a training and demonstration project. So he made the proposal, presented it to the CASFS staff. Originally I guess it was going to be at the "up garden," at the Chadwick Garden, but somehow—I don't totally know the story; if you're ever interested, I have his original proposal.

Jim, I think, was really interested in having it in the Field, so they decided to go for it. They started with sixteen shareholders in 1995, and Jered stayed on to do the administrative side of things. He wasn't a typical second-year [apprentice], but he was there administrating things and also stayed on to start CSA West.

But the second-years in the field—I think Cathy Colon was one of the original people that helped start the CSA at the UCSC farm. It went from sixteen shareholders, to, I think, sixty or seventy the next year. And then it grew to—When I came on in '97, '98 it was around a hundred shares. Then we backed off a little bit as I got up to speed on things, when I was managing. When I left, just this January [2008], they're up to 140 shares.

**Rabkin:** What were some of the big challenges of running the CSA?

**Vail:** It was a big juggling act for me. There are the members and their needs, and the office work, the administration. And then my role as a site manager with the apprentices in facilitating their educational experience; the needs of the farm: the weeds, the compost, the soil, the greenhouse—all of the life of the farm that needed attention. It was bouncing around from all of these—the people, the education, the production and the administration for the CSA. But I loved it. I love all those things and the challenge of balancing.

But it wasn't really my ideal form of a CSA. It's more of a subscription-style CSA, where the members just sign up and give you a check, and you don't have a lot of interaction with them because, given the structure of the apprenticeship program where the needs are really focused on the apprentices, we don't have a lot of time or energy left to focus on the CSA members. I tried my best to start core groups and have volunteer days and potlucks. But it was tricky because everybody in Santa Cruz is busy and trying to make a living, so not a lot of people would show up for these things. We had a couple of core groups happening for a few years there, but—

**Rabkin:** Can you explain that, “core group”?

**Vail:** Sure. Well, it manifests itself differently for different farms, but generally speaking, it's a group of members who have more responsibility or more involvement or commitment to a farm. Like, in the case of Live Power Community Farm, which was the first CSA in California, their core group—one person manages and takes care of the newsletter; there're people within the core group that are communicating and managing the distribution. All of the produce from Live Power Community Farm is harvested in bulk and sent to the Presidio in San Francisco, and then the core members sign up different people who are part of the CSA in different neighborhoods. They have these responsibilities to come and do the sort. So they sort the produce into baskets and then carry those baskets back to their cluster, or their neighborhood. They take care of organizing the members and setting up the structure, and that leaves Gloria and Stephen, the farmers, time to really focus on the farming. They don't have to do all of the distribution and outreach.

The core group meets regularly. Different core groups operate differently. Like I'm saying, the core group at UCSC—it was mainly a group of people that just wanted to come together and try and plan these fun events: potlucks and festivals. They weren't really taking on responsibility for the administration, because that was my job. I was supposed to be doing that. And I didn't quite know, given the context of the university, because there's a whole system of how money works here, I couldn't really give that responsibility over to somebody. But on other farms a core group member could take on that role of overseeing the administration, checks and depositing.

**Rabkin:** And in those kind of situations—not so much UCSC necessarily, but Live Power and other farms that have CSAs with active core groups—do the core group members volunteer to do that extra work? Do they get something extra in terms of their relationship with the farm?

**Vail:** I think it varies. Some people are volunteering their time; some people are getting something in exchange. If somebody volunteers to be a distribution site—and that means they would open up their garage and have fifty boxes of produce that people are coming to get—they might get a free box for the season. It depends on the farm and what the arrangement is.

Elizabeth Henderson, who wrote the book *Sharing the Harvest*, has Peacework Organic Farm.<sup>26</sup> Their core group, I don't think they get produce in exchange. I don't know if I have this right, but they're just volunteering their time. And Elizabeth would say that in a way she feels like she's doing them a favor; she's giving them a role that they're wanting to fulfill. Like, somebody might be good at Web design, and they're able to fulfill their gifts by getting to offer this to the

farm. It can vary. Maybe they get extra produce on the side, or they just get to enjoy having more of a say or a role in the CSA.

**Rabkin:** A deeper relationship with the farm.

**Vail:** A deeper relationship with the farm.

**Rabkin:** Yes, and the farmers.

**Vail:** Right.

**Rabkin:** So coming back to the UCSC CSA, this is kind of a different situation, in part, as you pointed out, because it's connected with the apprenticeship program, and also because it's connected with the university. Were there aspects of running this CSA that were particular to being at a university, in terms of your membership or anything else?

**Vail:** Yes. Well, we have always tried to keep our prices higher than neighboring and local farms because we're not wanting to compete with local farms. We have this group of apprentices, forty apprentices, who are paying to learn farming. Granted, they are unskilled labor and take a lot more time than somebody who would be skilled. But it's a large workforce, and, because we're not wanting to compete with local farms, we try to keep our CSA prices higher, try to keep the prices at the market cart stand a little bit higher, I think, than farmers' market prices, and then only advertise on the campus. There were a couple of years when I did advertise in town, because we were having a hard time getting members. But for the most part, most of the years it was easy getting members just from the campus. The nice thing was, here's this large group of people on this campus that we can sell to. That was nice: here's this campus farm. I think it

also improved relationships between the Farm and the campus. People got their box and ate their strawberries and realized, “Oh, wow! There’s a farm on the campus that grows this yummy food. That’s great. Let’s go visit. Let’s support them more.” There was more awareness of the Farm when the CSA started. Like, the people in Parking were a lot nicer to us. [Laughs.]

**Rabkin:** [Laughs.] That’s important.

**Vail:** Bringing them extra strawberries or whatever. I think it improved relations all around, having a farm on the campus.

**Rabkin:** So all told, between your apprenticeship years and then moving into this paid position, you have had a direct association with CASFS for more than a decade?

**Vail:** Yes, since 1997, up until January [of 2008].

**Rabkin:** And have you seen any significant changes in the apprenticeship program, or the Farm and Garden in general?

**Vail:** Definitely. We went from just growing food for the CSA and the market cart stand, to growing food for the dining halls.

### **Farm-to-College Coordinator**

Then my job changed. I had my son, and went to half time, and took on this farm-to-college coordination, which was an exciting, new role. There was this emerging and new opportunity to interact with the students on the campus. Here’s this farm. Most students don’t know there’s a farm. There’s a problem. The [Farm] food isn’t in the dining halls. What’s wrong with this picture? You know, we’ve been here for what? We had the fortieth anniversary last year. It’s



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taken *this long* to really create a special relationship with the campus? What's going on? So I got to—along with a number of other people, with Tim Galarneau<sup>27</sup>, to be a part of a group that was trying to create more positive relationships on the campus, and connect students with the Farm and connect the Farm with the dining halls. So that's been a positive change, for sure.

I'd love to see more students have the opportunity to do the apprenticeship program or other types of programs. There're more practicums that have started. There's the [Environmental Studies] 133 [agroecology] practicum in the winter, and now there's a summer practicum that's being developed. There're more opportunities for students to come to the farm. There's PICA [Program in Community and Agroecology]. There's that whole relationship [between the Farm and the undergraduate curriculum]. I see a lot of opportunity for bridging all the different efforts that are happening on the campus around environmental work, food work. Tim [Galarneau] luckily is still here, and hopefully building those bridges.

**Rabkin:** I'll be talking to Tim tomorrow. So I'll get a chance to hear more about farm-to-college, farm-to-institution. I'd love to hear more about your experiences with the farm-to-college program at UCSC. What's that been like for you? What have been some of the most exciting or challenging parts of that?

**Vail:** The most exciting thing was working with the students. We started this little two-unit class called Introduction to Organic Farming for freshmen from College Eight. It was really intended for—there's this other program, Harvest for Health, that is a service-learning program of the sustainability core course. All of the freshmen at College Eight go through this sustainability core course, and

they get to choose a service-learning project. There're, I think, four or five of them. Harvest for Health is one of them. Those students would come down to the Farm, have a tour, learn about organic farming, learn about the Farm and the history, and then harvest some produce. They take that food up to the dining hall, and it would be prepared for their dinner that night. That experience was great. It was somewhat limited, because it was different students each time. It was a one- to two-hour experience with a group of folks, and then you'd get a new batch.

The Introduction to Organic Farming class was intended for people that had their interest sparked by their experience on the Farm. They could take this class and have more of an in-depth introduction to organic farming, and get to do some physical, hands-on work.

**Rabkin:** So that was a two-unit class through College Eight?

**Vail:** Two-unit class through College Eight, in the spring.

**Rabkin:** So a lot of students presumably who took the core course in the fall, and got turned onto organic farming and such, could go on and take this in the spring.

**Vail:** Exactly.

**Rabkin:** And how many students did you have in that class?

**Vail:** Like ten. It wasn't very big. But it was perfect, that number, I thought, because it allowed them to feel a little more comfortable asking questions. It was very informal. We would sit under an apple tree and talk about compost, and then we'd go build a compost pile together. A very rich experience, watching

them have their hands in the soil, you know, that first experience of pulling a carrot out of the ground. It could be a third grader or a college student, and it's still this amazing moment where, wow, here's food that comes from dirt. Just that thrill. And then the class getting to go more in depth: How *does* this carrot grow in the soil? And what kind of soil do you want to have? The importance of soil, and the importance of water, and all the different resources you're working with to grow this food. Then where does the food go? The question of marketing and access. There's so much that can come out of looking at a carrot growing in the ground. So that was, for me, thrilling to have that opportunity to get to share that experience with students.

**Rabkin:** How many times did you teach that class?

**Vail:** I think I only did it for two quarters, for two years. And the Harvest for Health program— I think that was for three years. I don't know if the Introduction to Organic Farming class will happen in the spring, like who would [teach] that. But Harvest for Health will likely happen in the fall. It's a little easier for the staff at the Farm to take that on.

**Rabkin:** Great. Any other aspects of your farm-to-college work that we haven't talked about?

**Vail:** There's the Monterey Bay Organic Farmers Consortium, which is more of a name than a reality. It's a group of farmers. Most of those farmers market their produce through ALBA [Agriculture & Land-Based Training Association]. ALBA is the one that's delivering the produce to the campus. We've been trying to figure out: do we connect with the chefs separately from ALBA? Is that confusing to the chefs? Because they have to talk to ALBA; they have to talk to the UCSC

farm; they have to talk to Ledyard [food service company]. When I was at the Farm, we were trying to figure out what would be an easier way to do this. Dina [Izzo] at ALBA, who is the person leading the connection to this campus—do we send her our availability list and then she's the voice for the campus, and the chefs in the dining hall can see what's available from these other farms, and what's available from the UCSC farm, and then they can pick and choose? The logistics of it have been tricky to figure out.

And then, does the UCSC farm have priority because they're the closest farm? So there were a lot of questions like that. But it's been exciting. The chefs are totally behind it, and positive, and wanting more local and organic food. I think there needs to be more training with the cooks. What do you do with this fennel and this head of cabbage? How do you cook it? How do you present it in a way that students are going to eat it?

**Rabkin:** So those are still big questions that the university is grappling with.

**Vail:** Yes, and I think the Food Systems Working Group is working on the issues around education and outreach, continually providing opportunities for the students to engage in the food system on the campus and creating the opportunities to expand their awareness around that. And then, on the other side, the guidelines and policies, and working on those areas with different staff and faculty. There's a lot of work to be done.

**Rabkin:** Do you have visions of how this system might look, say, five, ten, fifteen years from now if all goes well? Are there sort of futures that you imagine ideally for the campus food system?

**Vail:** I think UC Santa Cruz, of all places, being in the location where we are, ideally we would figure out a way to source as much local and organic produce as possible. There's availability. There're farmers that are wanting to grow for the campus. So increasing the percentage that's offered here. And not just fruits and vegetables, also looking at meat and dairy and grains, and really having a commitment to working on that and increasing the percentage of what's offered. And then that has to be alongside an experience for the students where they're getting credit and having an educational experience offered to them, whether that's a food system major that's within environmental studies—I don't know how that would look, but there's so much opportunity and a lot already happening.

But more ideally, in a few more years, if there could be more opportunity for every—whether it's environmental studies students or food systems major student[s] or—you know, I don't know who we'd focus on. Maybe it's every freshman that comes in at least has a tour of the Farm. That there's more awareness that: here's this farm on the campus that's a resource, and here are the ways that you can engage in it, and here are some other places and groups on campus that are working on these food systems-related things, and more opportunities for students to, not just work on the farm on campus, but get out in the community and see what else is happening on farms, in organizations like CAFF [Community Alliance with Family Farmers]. There's a lot of work in the youth side of things with social justice groups. There's so much happening. So how could UC Santa Cruz students tap into that, and get credit for it, and enrich their academic experience? I think there's a lot of possibility.

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## Reflections on CASFS

**Rabkin:** Great. So we were talking about changes you've seen over the years that you've been involved with CASFS, and that's how we got into talking about the Food Systems Working Group and farm-to-college. I wonder if there are other changes that you want to comment on: changes in the apprenticeship program, or other aspects of CASFS that you were close to.

**Vail:** Well, when the directorship changed, there's been a big change. Patricia Allen, who's the director now—there's more of a collaborative sense maybe that's developed, which I think is positive for CASFS.<sup>28</sup>

**Rabkin:** Collaboration among CASFS staff?

**Vail:** Among CASFS staffers. There's definitely just a better feeling right now, even though there's a multitude of challenges, the biggest one being funding, I think that there're a good sense among the staff. People feel appreciated. That wasn't always the case. And I think for many, many, many, many, many years there was this feeling, like: oh, here's this hippie farm on the campus and everybody hates us. Or there's kind of this, like, feeling of (how true it is, I don't know, but) that there is some kind of, like, a square-peg-in-a-round-hole sort of a thing. Which might still exist to some degree because the apprenticeship program is a practical training program.

**Rabkin:** Not an academic degree program.

**Vail:** Right. Within the University of California, how does that work? So maybe that's still a problem, will always be a problem. I don't know. I think as much as the students can somehow get woven into the apprenticeship— And that *has*

happened more since I've been there. There're more internships. There're more students that are working alongside apprentices. That's been a positive change.

And then there's just more support for CASFS. There's the apprenticeship program. There's all the research that goes on. There's a lot that CASFS is engaged in. It seems like there's more support and increasing, now that there's a full-time development director, Bill Leland. He used to be at the Santa Cruz Community Credit Union. He's through the social sciences [division]. He's paid for, like, a third by CASFS, a third by social sciences and I forget what the other third is. So he's going to, and is already, I think, really helping a lot in garnering more support for the Center. So it feels like it's on an up, positive trajectory.

### Training Manuals for Apprentices

**Rabkin:** One of the things we haven't talked about is that you contributed significantly to a couple of training manuals for the apprentices.

**Vail:** Yes.

**Rabkin:** Are those being used now?

**Vail:** Yes, there's *Teaching Organic Farming and Gardening*, and *Teaching Direct Marketing and Small Farm Viability*. There are two training manuals that were developed. Before these manuals were developed, each year the apprentices would get this binder full of articles, handouts—just an immense amount of information.

**Rabkin:** Kind of miscellaneous?

**Vail:** Yes, and there was the realization, like, oh, we have enough information here. We have this program. There's already this curriculum, this thing that

happens every year. Why don't we put it into a manual that could be used by other people and that we could use?

**Rabkin:** So [by] both the apprentice program here, and at other institutions and training programs.

**Vail:** Right. Albie Miles was hired to work on that. He was the editor, along with Martha Brown on that. Basically, it was collecting from the site managers and other people their outlines of: how do you teach compost in the garden? How do you teach it in the field? How do you teach tillage in the garden? How do you teach it in the field? Albie took all this information from all of us and others and made it into an outline format that was easy for us to teach off of, and then was great for other farmers who have apprentices, or other schools where there's a garden. Or if you're a K-6 teacher and have a school garden, it's pretty easy to use. Or even if you're just a backyard gardener and you want to learn about compost, even though it's in outline format like a class, it's still great information that's usable.

**Rabkin:** Is it available online?

**Vail:** It's available online, downloadable for free, or you can purchase the binders.<sup>29</sup> I think it's forty-five dollars for the *Organic Farming and Gardening* one and twenty-five for the *Teaching Direct Marketing* one.

**Rabkin:** And how are people outside of CASFS learning about the availability of this resource?

**Vail:** Well, there's the website. There're conferences. The staff would go to different conferences. Even since I haven't been staff at CASFS, I went to the



international CSA conference just this January and presented about the manuals. People are excited about it. They're wanting to translate them into different languages, which is great. I don't know who or how the funding would happen for that, but there's interest. There's a whole international community of CSA folks that would love that information.

**Rabkin:** And you and Jered have been pretty involved with this international community, it sounds like.

**Vail:** Yes, Jered more than I have. He just got off of the committee because we're too busy.

**Rabkin:** Which committee is that?

**Vail:** It's the international network of CSAs. There's an organization called Urgenci that has sponsored these international CSA conferences. The first one happened in France in '04, I think, or '03; the second one, in Portugal; and then this last one was back in France. We've gotten to go to each one, which has been fun—and present, and then talk to different farmers and people from all over the world engaged in CSA. It's been exciting.

**Rabkin:** How big are these conferences?

**Vail:** I think the first one, there were five hundred people and fifteen different countries were represented. This last one, maybe a little bit less, maybe four hundred people, but the same number of countries represented. A lot of the same people we've seen over the years.

**Rabkin:** So you've been involved with CSA in your position with CASFS, and you did a lot of CSA work at Angelic Organics. What are some of your other CSA involvements?

### **Community Supported Eggriculture**

**Vail:** Well, now I'm at Pie Ranch full time—well, half time, because Jered and I are splitting a position at Pie Ranch and taking care of our kids in the other half of the time. We initiated a community supported eggriculture project with our eggs.

**Rabkin:** Oh: eggriculture.

**Vail:** Eggriculture.

**Rabkin:** I get it. [Laughter.]

**Vail:** We sell our eggs through a CSA model to thirty households right now. And we might expand. We're going to be getting another flock pretty soon. So that's a very new thing for me. Chickens are new for me, eggs. Doing our own CSA is great because I think both of us have been in the whole CSA thing for many years but haven't had our own CSA. So now it's like, okay, time to walk the talk, guys. And we're already noticing areas where, oh, maybe we should be doing this differently.

**Rabkin:** Such as?

**Vail:** Well, for example, this guy Ben, he's one of the farm managers for Hardy Roots Farm in [Brooklyn,] New York. He came out for a tour of Pie Ranch, and he was reminding me—because the way they have set up their CSAs, they just do the farming and then they've got these little core groups. There're three or

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four core groups that do everything else. The group over in this neighborhood gathers the checks, and then one person sends a check to Ben, the farmer. They're in charge of the distribution. They're in charge of the newsletter. And already I can see how Jered and I have taken on too much. We're doing the newsletter. Well, actually, we haven't done a newsletter yet, but we're wanting to. We're doing the distribution. You know, we tried at the beginning to— We held a meeting where we shared our budget with people and showed them what this was going to cost to do this egg enterprise—from building a coop to how much seed costs or chicken feed. And that felt good, but I think we need to be doing that regularly with the members, sharing information with them. And then giving them more responsibility or encouraging that, or having them come together and look at, okay, how can we do this together rather than Pie Ranch doing it all?

So I can see how we already are— Sometimes people call it the West Coast versus East Coast model. West Coast is more subscription style, like CSA is another market, whereas East Coast is more community-oriented type farming, where there's more involvement with the members. So I can see us slipping into the "West Coast style." [Chuckles.]

**Rabkin:** And you're interested in the East Coast style.

**Vail:** Jered is very much a visionary. I think I hold these ideals of how our world should be, and how to put that into practice. I think we need to challenge ourselves to look at how we're doing things. So, yes. But it's tricky because we're busy. I think before we expand, taking some time to step back and look at how we're doing things would be a good thing for us.

**Rabkin:** So you have two small children.

**Vail:** Yes.

**Rabkin:** And was your leaving the CASFS position in part about spending more time with them?

**Vail:** The main goal—when I went to the apprenticeship program as an apprentice in '97, I wanted to start an educational farm, was my goal. So I needed to eventually graduate from the apprenticeship program.

**Rabkin:** [Laughs.]

**Vail:** It took me longer than I thought.

**Rabkin:** Do you see your employment with CASFS as a kind of paid extension of your time as an apprentice?

**Vail:** Well, definitely. I mean, it was also— Like I said earlier, it was my dream job. I loved it. I loved the people there. I loved everything about it, and I wanted to try it out on my own. So definitely having two little ones and going to half-time, I was gradually slipping out of there. But it was already in the plans maybe before the kids, too. So both. And it's wonderful not being as divided between UCSC farm and Pie Ranch and children. Now it's just trying to figure it out at Pie Ranch with the kids. [Laughs.]

### **Playing with the Rolling Cultivators**

**Rabkin:** Well, I want to jump over to a whole different aspect of your involvement in agriculture, and that's the Rolling Cultivators.

**Vail:** Oh, fun! [Laughs.]

**Rabkin:** I'd really like to hear about this band of farmer-musicians in which you play— fiddle? Is that right?

**Vail:** Yes.

**Rabkin:** Who else is in that group with you, and how long have you guys been together?

**Vail:** Well, that's all changed now too, since I left. Originally I started playing violin when I was living in Japan, as an adult. And then when I came to the Farm I got interested in Irish and bluegrass music and started practicing more fiddle style.

**Rabkin:** Had you started out as a classical musician?

**Vail:** Yes. Well, as an adult, too. So very screechy and slow. As a second-year apprentice, I started playing with Jim Leap. Jim and I would play at lunch together.

**Rabkin:** And he plays—

**Vail:** He plays guitar—well, and banjo and piano and—[chuckles.] Now he's taking up fiddle because I'm not playing with the Rolling Cultivators as much anymore. But the two of us played a lot, just about every lunch, because we worked together and we'd play music. It was a great way to split up the day. It was wonderful to have the ability to do that every day at lunch. And sometimes, different apprentices, different years played instruments and would join in with us. And then different people at CASFS started playing with us. Joni, the receptionist—she plays flute, so she would come out at lunch and play with us. Joji [Muramoto], who's a post-doc researcher with Steve Gliessman<sup>30</sup>, and at

CASFS—he plays guitar. Then that helped Jim be able to play banjo. And Jan Perez plays mandolin or has been learning mandolin, as staff at the Farm. She’s been playing with us. Amy at Life Lab is a singer. Gerhard Epke, he’s through environmental studies. He plays mandolin. So it was a fun way to share lunch together and play music. Then we started getting invited to play for apprentice dances. Every year there’s a dance that happens the first week of the apprenticeship program, and we would play for that. That was always pretty exciting. And then other groups on campus started inviting us to play. That was a fun way to share with the campus what the Farm is about. We’d go and play for some event and then say, “We’re from the Farm.” And some people wouldn’t know there was a farm on the campus.

**Rabkin:** So you were musical ambassadors for the Farm.

**Vail:** Yes. [Laughs.] So that’s been fun.

**Rabkin:** And what kind of gigs have you played beyond UCSC?

**Vail:** Let’s see, we played at Eco-Farm [the Ecological Farming Conference] and—

**Rabkin:** Just this past January?

**Vail:** Well, I think it was the January before [2007]. We played at Eco-Farm, and we’ve played for CCOF [California Certified Organic Farmers] events. At Pie Ranch now we have a monthly barn dance every third Saturday of the month. And I’m now part of another band called the County Line Pickers, and that’s a group of musicians up in that area. Because I don’t work at the Farm, I don’t get to play with Jim and everybody else anymore. And having kids, it’s tricky with

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our schedules. I think some of the Rolling Cultivators try to meet also during the week at night, and I can't do that. So I'm not able to play as much on campus, of course. But I feel glad. It's like I left the Farm, and I have a farm to go to and I have a band to play with, so I'm still intact. [Laughs.]

**Rabkin:** It seems like a lot of your enthusiasms that you've been talking about connected with the work that you do have to do with building community, in one way or another. Do you see music as playing a part in that?

### **Barn Dances at Pie Ranch**

**Vail:** A huge role. Yes, it's been pretty amazing, these barn dances at Pie Ranch. There's a caller who really brings it all together, Andy Wilson, who lives at Coastways, which is another farm. That's where the "pick your own" olallieberries are that Swanton Berry Farm manages now. He's a professional caller. That's what he does for a living, and he's our neighbor. He called some of the dances for the apprentices. I guess that's how I met him. And then he was responsible for Jered and I getting together. He called at the dance at Eco-Farm, where Jered and I realized, oh, we like each other. [Chuckles.] And he's been calling for these monthly barn dances.

And it *is* interesting. I want to find this quote of something Wendell Berry wrote. I forget exactly how he said it, but he said something about how we went from a culture where we all danced together with each other, interrelating, to a culture that danced in pairs, to a culture that danced as an individual by him- or herself. And that's kind of an interesting analogy.

These contra dances are neat because it's not like square dancing, where you're just dancing with four people; you're dancing with the whole room and then interacting, weaving around, dancing with different people. And the incredible joy and enthusiasm and fun that comes from that is pretty remarkable—looking at people's faces and your face hurting from laughing or smiling so much, and different groups coming together. There're the Mission Pie and Mission District folks that come down. There's Pescadero environmental ed/wilderness awareness people that come, and Santa Cruz people that come. So it's a fun mixing of folks.

**Rabkin:** How many people do you get at these dances?

**Vail:** The most we've had is two hundred, but somewhere around seventy to two hundred come every time. A lot of people. I think one of the challenges, though, with this type of music—you know, it's generally Irish/bluegrass—is that—and sustainable ag in general—mostly educated white people are a part of this culture. So how do you bring in other cultures? This is something I've struggled with, that the apprenticeship has struggled with, with the music even. Like, that first dance: Do we have the Rolling Cultivators play or do we have a DJ come? So it's interesting. Music and culture—it's not just all fun; it also raises a lot of questions. And being somebody who loves and wants to interact and be with a diverse mix of people, and feel that comfort and sharing of cultures, sometimes I feel like I'm limited or limiting myself by this music that I play. So even though it's fun, and definitely builds community and it's hopeful, I feel like there's room for expanding that to other forms of music and expression, and that we need to do that, especially with the youth. Most of the Mission High School



youth—they don't like that kind of music. They don't want to dance that kind of dance. So we need to work on that.

**Rabkin:** Have you had experiences that have been models for you of that intercultural community experience?

**Vail:** That's a good question. Here and there. What's the event on campus here, on the East Field? OPERS Fall Festival. I went to one of those last year or the year before, and we played music there, and also tabled for CASFS and the Food Systems Working Group. And walking around that field, here are all these different student organizations. There was some Filipino dancing happening. There were all of these different cultures, too, and celebrations and clubs. That was fascinating to me. There're multicultural festivals that I've gone to that embrace a lot of different styles of dancing or music. That's been neat. And then different talent shows. There's that possibility of sharing different ways. There's spoken word; there's somebody playing the violin; there's the interaction of culture.

### **Rooted in Community Conference**

And now that I'm more involved with Mission High School and youth, I'm being exposed to that more and learning about that more, so I'm excited about it. I'm helping, as a part of a committee, to work on the Rooted In Community Conference that happens every year. It's been going on for ten years nationwide and the next conference is coming up in July in Berkeley. It's a youth conference of around two hundred youth that come together. So we're already talking about what's going to happen at the dance—what's that going to look like, what kind

of music is there going to be? What are opportunities for youth to help lead this whole planning of the conference so that we're not the ones making all the decisions? So I'm learning as I go.

### **Diversity Issues at CASFS**

**Rabkin:** You mentioned that the apprentice program has also wrestled with these questions about diversity.

**Vail:** Definitely.

**Rabkin:** Can you talk about that?

**Vail:** Yes. That's been exciting. Something that has changed a lot within the apprenticeship program since I've been there, is more of an effort and awareness and desire to think about and engage in diversity. There've been different multicultural alliance-building workshops or diversity workshops (they've had different names) that happen each year and have gotten better and better with each year.

There's been a social justice advocacy committee that's been developed since I've been there, not because of me. I've definitely been somebody to advocate for that type of work, but it's also been other people within the apprenticeship who've wanted to see that happen, and apprentices themselves who are asking for that. And there've been some painful experiences of apprentices of color who have not felt welcome there, and haven't felt accepted, and have felt very uncomfortable in their experience as an apprentice. We've had the opportunity to learn from them, and they've come to speak to us. And through also evaluations of the apprenticeship program, we've learned a lot. It's been hard and really painful,

definitely. But I think as much as we can open to the painful parts of it, I think as a program it will grow and become better. The challenge is that—you know, I think in order to reach a more diverse pool of applicants, there's a lot that needs to happen from kindergarten, on many levels. But there're things that we're already trying to do in getting past apprentices to reach out to different communities of color to share information about the apprenticeship program offering scholarships. And then within the structure of the apprenticeship program, having speakers and lecturers, trying to diversify—having more women, having more people of color teaching the apprenticeship.

And then how do you do that within—like, we've had challenges because we're in the university and there's no longer affirmative action. How do you hire a person of color if you're wanting to diversify your staff? How can you do that legally? We've struggled with that.

**Rabkin:** Because you're not allowed legally to make it a criterion.

**Vail:** Yes. You can try to reach out to a diverse pool of applicants, but when it comes time to hiring somebody, you can't hire somebody based on the color of their skin. So that's been a challenge. But also the pool of applicants. It's hard to diversify the pool of applicants.

**Rabkin:** Is there a specific experience that comes to mind when you talk about painful growing times, dealing with diversity issues?

**Vail:** Yes. There was an apprentice that felt like the apprentices and some of the staff never looked at them directly and never really spoke to them for the duration of the program. I remember one apprentice in particular—it was almost

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at the end of the program. I think she was in the field last. I said to her, “How are you doing? How are you doing with the program? How’s it going?” And she almost broke out in tears, because she felt like nobody had asked her how she was doing for the whole apprenticeship. That was definitely painful.

There was a group that formed [of] apprentices of color who came together as a support system and came to the staff with a number of grievances. I think it was painful for the staff and for the apprentices, because I think some of the staff felt like, “Well, we *are* working on these things.” You know, there’s kind of a defensive reaction: “We aren’t racist, and we aren’t this”—and then apprentices feeling like they’re not being heard, or not being taken seriously, or they’re throwing the race card, or—you know.

So all of that, I think, has been painful. But I always kind of get excited when painful things happen, too, because there’s the opportunity to grow and learn, and we all need to do that. The staff needs to do that. We need to continue raising our own awareness of ourselves within this society, and how to improve as a program. I loved all of the diversity trainings. A lot of them were painful for apprentices. There’s a number of different exercises that we did that made staff uncomfortable, made apprentices uncomfortable. Like, there’s a Race for the American Dream exercise, where you start at one side of the room, and a series of questions are asked, and you take a step forward or a step back, depending on—you know, did you go to college? You take a step forward if you did; you take a step back if you didn’t. Those types of things. And, you know, every time all of the white people are at the front of the room, and the people of color are at the back of the room. It’s a very visual experience of what happens, and very

painful, and people are in tears, and people are defensive and angry. It brings up a lot of emotion. I think as a program, it's like we don't quite know what to do with all of that emotion. And also, I think some of the feeling is, "Well, we're here to just teach farming," and some of the apprentices are, "Well, we're just here to learn farming. What does this have to do with anything?" So how do you explain yourselves as a program, why this is important?

### **Training Young Farmers**

**Rabkin:** Somewhat related to that is a question I wanted to ask you about the training of young farmers in general, and particularly people who are going to be doing sustainable kinds of farming. You've been around this apprenticeship program for a long time, and perhaps you've given a lot of thought to what the future looks like for bringing new farmers on. I wonder what your thoughts are about how that future looks, and how the training programs that exist are doing to prepare new farmers for sustainable agriculture.

**Vail:** That's a good question. It kind of depends on where I am and my frame of mind. I was in Riverside [in southern California] this past week, and I felt so hopeless and, like, oh, my God, the world is coming to an end. I had to go to Carl's Jr. to get change to make a phone call at a pay phone, and just had that realization: this is the way a lot of people relate in the world. You look around. A lot of people are overweight and are eating—you know, the pictures of hamburgers on the wall. Not to say I don't eat hamburgers. Hamburgers are fine. But, you know, the combination of your food in a week: like, what is it? And your relation to each other and the earth. What is it? It felt really oppressive. And the smog. And where are the farmers?

But then you go to the Eco-Farm conference, or you're at the apprenticeship program on the first day, and there's all of this hope—oh, the world is changing for the better. The apprenticeship program has definitely improved the world in its small way. Only forty apprentices go through the program each year, but a number of them are very actively involved in sustainable agriculture. And through farming. Like, our neighbors, Blue House Farm—the two farmers, Ned [Conwell] and Ryan [Casey], are graduates of the apprenticeship program. They've started a CSA. We sell our produce together at the farm stand.

You look around this area. Dennis Tamura, he was one of the staff at the farm. He's from Blue Heron [Farms]. And Tim Vos and— There're a lot of people out there that have been touched by the apprenticeship program and that are out there in the community, either farming or doing advocacy work. So I think it has a very positive and powerful impact. There could be more. It's hard because there's access-to-land questions for people. You leave the apprenticeship; how do you buy land? How do you have the capital to start a farm? It's huge. You're up against a lot. It's hard to make a living farming. We're an educational farm at Pie Ranch, so we're trying to piece together production and grants to make it happen somehow. People are doing it, but it's definitely a challenge. It's not easy.

I don't have enough experience with other programs out there. There're apprenticeship programs that are training people in farming, and I was an apprentice on different farms, and there're opportunities. What was interesting at the international CSA conference, is that it really felt like, wow, in the U.S.— there's a lot of opportunity and a lot happening for young people to learn about farming and to get into farming—a lot of support, a lot of organizations, a lot of

movement compared to some of these other countries where it's just, like, there's nothing happening. So, you know, depending on what you're comparing it to, there's hope, and there's also—like, we're just a drop in a wide ocean of disease. [Chuckles.] So, yes, there's a lot of work to be done, and there's a lot of positive things that are happening, too. It's hard to answer.

### Hope for the Future

**Rabkin:** Tell me about one recent experience, or one aspect of the work you've been doing over the past few years, that gives you real hope for the future in sustainable agriculture. Something you've experienced, or people you've worked with: a program, a conference, just a moment that you witnessed.

**Vail:** Well, the first thing that came to mind: Pie Ranch got to be on *Bay Area Back Roads*, just a little five-minute segment. We've watched that over and over and over. Lucas, my son, loves to watch it. And the thing that gets me every single time—like, I'm brought to tears every single time—is this student named Jasmine, who is walking through the field and she's being interviewed, and she's speaking to what she likes about Pie Ranch, and that—I can't even repeat it. You'd have to hear her say it. But she says that she feels like she can be herself. She feels like she can open up, that she doesn't have to watch her back. She's somebody that likes to have fun and be funny, and she feels like she can be that person, that she can be her authentic self when she's there at Pie Ranch. And it's not just because of us and Pie Ranch, it's because of her with the other students that have gotten to know that place over a period of time and come back and work together, I think is where she's coming from. It's the way she says it. It's so real, how she says it. It really gives me hope, feeling that when you feel

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connected to a place and the people and the activity, there's something that happens that resonates and that feels right. She speaks to that.

**Rabkin:** Thank you. That's a lovely note to end on.

### **PART THREE:**

#### **INTERVIEW WITH JERED LAWSON AND NANCY VAIL TOGETHER**

##### **The Land for Pie Ranch**

**Rabkin:** It's December 11, 2008, and this is Sarah Rabkin. I'm here with Nancy Vail and Jered Lawson to talk about Pie Ranch. We are at UC Santa Cruz. So I'm going to start with your original vision. I'm curious, first, how the idea for Pie Ranch originally came about.

**Lawson:** It's interesting, because we could probably tie it into to where each of our interviews left off last, in a way (not knowing exactly where that was), but in our own personal histories. Nancy and I had this vision, this desire, to begin an educational farm together. I think actually, respective of our personal histories, there was this desire to at some point in our lives be farm-based, and utilizing that farm as a place to continue to inspire change in the food system.

**Rabkin:** So you each independently had that dream even before you came together as a couple?

**Vail:** Before we came together, yes.

**Lawson:** I think the recognition of that common path was one of the sparks or glue that kept us on the relationship path. We had this common dream, a vision of starting an educational farm. And we didn't know where. But at the time I was



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living in the Bay Area, in San Francisco for a bit and Berkeley in the East Bay, working with the Center for Eco-Literacy, and coming to visit Nancy in Santa Cruz, and vice versa. And we'd often take the coast route. I think that was kind of a constant viewshed of farmland that was close to urban areas that would be ideal for that vision to take root.

I had the opportunity to visit this one site with a co-apprentice, Tom Broz, who is now at Live Earth Farm with an amazing CSA program. He had originally looked at this site. It was three parcels together at the time, and it was a little more than they could afford, but they thought this was an ideal location to start their farm. And they were looking for others to be involved in that at the time. I was interested, but not quite ready. And then they ended up also not really thinking that that was the spot. There were some other concerns that came up for them, and they decided to pursue a farm closer to town, in Watsonville and Corralitos. But when I visited the site with them in '95, I thought—that always just stuck in my head: wow, someday a place like the one that Tom and Constance were looking at could be where Nancy and I start our farm.

And the opportunity came to visit again that site. Because next door, just north, there was a meeting of Life Lab science program staff, and I was invited. I can't recall why (laughs). The folks who were at that meeting had just come from a garden tour at the site I had (it must have been six years earlier) visited with Tom and Constance. They said that the couple that had purchased the farm wanted to sell a portion of it in order to make it viable for them. It was the lower fourteen acres that was sort of shaped like a slice of pie. (laughs)

So we visited the site, met the couple that was wanting to sell it, and very much shared a similar vision for stewardship and small farm development. They had started a small CSA selling at a local farmers' market. We thought, wow, this is amazing. This is an incredible opportunity for us to manifest a vision, by just the sheer fact that the land was available at a size and a price that it was actually possible. It was still beyond our means, but it seemed like maybe there was some way that we could figure out affording it.

**Rabkin:** What was the name of the couple that was selling this land?

**Lawson:** It was Paul Pfluke and Stephanie Jennings. It's Green Oaks Creek Farm.

We spent a year or so kind of pursuing resources. Can we afford it? It was a half million dollars. It was way beyond our means. It was clearly beyond the agricultural value of the property.

**Rabkin:** This was for fourteen acres and structures as well?

**Vail:** No, no structures.

**Lawson:** No structures. Unimproved.

**Rabkin:** *Any* improvements? Water?

**Vail:** There's a creek, and there was a well that Tom and Constance Broz had put in. There was a well already.

**Rabkin:** So Tom and Constance had gotten involved enough in this piece of land to actually put in a well.

**Lawson:** They were really close. They were about to sign a lease for a year with the option to purchase at the end of that year. And then at the last minute they

backed out. There was a bit of concern because it's right near a state park that at some point eminent domain could take effect, and the state would acquire the property to expand the parks.

**Rabkin:** Were you guys worried about that?

**Lawson:** (sighs) No.

**Vail:** (laughs) No, maybe we're naïve. No, there hasn't been that concern. In fact, there's been more of support from state parks. We've become friends with one of the rangers. They really believe in what we're doing, and value that we're doing organic agriculture as opposed to conventional agriculture in a sensitive area. So I think there's support of the effort.

**Rabkin:** And which state park is this?

**Vail:** Well, there's Año Nuevo State Reserve.

**Lawson:** To the west.

**Vail:** And then there's Big Basin [State Park] that we're almost butting up against, but not quite.

**Lawson:** We're sandwiched between, yes.

**Vail:** Well, there's Stephanie and Paul's place, and then there's one more property, and then Big Basin, which is thousands of acres.

**Lawson:** Yes, Big Basin is 18,000 acres to the east, and Año Nuevo State Reserve is about 4000 acres to the west.

**Rabkin:** And who is the ranger you've befriended?

**Vail:** Gary Strachan.

**Lawson:** Who is the supervising ranger. And there's a number of other wonderful—Chuck and Ziad and Terry.

**Vail:** They all come to the farmstand now and get coffee.

**Lawson:** And produce and eggs and pie.

**Rabkin:** Nice relationship.

**Lawson:** Yes, it's been great.

**Vail:** But getting back to—

### **Partnering with Karen Heisler**

**Lawson:** Yes. So we didn't have the resources. We were looking into loans, Farm Service Agency loans. At the time the cap on an FSA loan was \$250,000. We thought, maybe we can cobble together some savings, and ask family for more, and combine it with a loan from the government. But then, the day after— Well, we had been sharing the idea with friends, trying to get other suggestions or ideas from them, and Karen [Heisler], who I was—when I was living in San Francisco, I was residing in her home for a while.

**Rabkin:** Karen Heisler is your third partner in the project.

**Lawson:** Yes. And we'd been good friends through a connection with the first CSA in California, with Live Power Community Farm. She worked on the land acquisition, or shared equity arrangement, with Live Power and their CSA members in Covelo. So she was quite familiar with our interest in the site, and we shared discussions about farm-based work together earlier on. So when— Do you want to take over that story?

**Vail:** Sure. So Jered and I got married May 18th of 2002. And the day after we got married we had a party at our house where we were renting. And there Karen said to us, “Why don’t we think about doing this land together?” So she was able financially to help us acquire the fourteen acres, and go into an arrangement where we would split ownership. We created an LLC. Jered and I each had twenty-five percent and Karen had fifty percent ownership in the property, and an arrangement where, through a combination of sweat equity and cash loans to Karen, we would be able to acquire equal ownership in the land, really a unique arrangement.

**Lawson:** Yes, I’ll also say something about that. Karen had this family property that was meaningful to her. It was her grandparents’ land and home, and their commercial property where they did their work in Carmel. It was an asset for her to hold onto, as well as transfer to her daughter at some point. So it was a really big decision for her to say, okay, this will be a way to mobilize that capital towards something that I can be a part of in my lifetime that might be more meaningful to me. One, it’s closer to her. She’s based in San Francisco. And two, it would be a way to actualize her vision as well, of being engaged in a project that was about social change in the food system.

So it was an amazing step forward for Nancy and I—our vision of being farm-based and beginning this educational farm. But it was clear that it was becoming bigger than us immediately, if we were interested in that, of building something together. So it was enabling for us, but broadening the vision.

And we, to this day, feel incredibly awed by that model and the way it represents an urban-rural partnership. It’s almost like the way a CSA

[community supported agriculture] is enabling for the operating expenses of a working farm. This is enabling for the initial access to be able to begin a working farm, and working, in this case, with one urban resident. So the model could be similar, where you have a number of urban residents that are mobilizing their capital to help new farmers get on the land, and have this urban-rural relationship.

**Vail:** And maybe what's more in line with a true community/community supported agriculture project is that the urban people, in this case Karen, have an active role in the shaping of the farm, in the educational programming, in rooting in the city—bringing what we learn on the farm, bringing it back to the city—and being that anchor in the city to represent the rural. So she wasn't just somebody that gave up her resources. She made this possible and is an active participant in making the vision come alive.

**Lawson:** We each brought resources to the table to make Pie Ranch happen. She wanted to be a part of something like this but didn't have the farming background or skills. And we clearly wanted to be a part of it but needed both the capitalization for the land and the farm, but also the connection to the city in a deep way. She was born and raised in San Francisco. One of our early partnerships with the schools that we work with, is the school that she went to and her daughter went to, the Urban School of San Francisco. That kind of unification of resources we feel is critical for us to get off to a good start. Often young farmers might be carrying one set of resources to bring to bear on the farm start-up. I think why we're not seeing that many new farmers able to begin and succeed at the rate that we would like to see, is because of those formidable

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barriers of access to land, and access to resources and markets. So we hope that what we've been doing will also, just in that basic collaboration and partnership, be inspiring to other young folks and urban residents that are in the same, similar position that Karen was.

**Rabkin:** You were, all three of you, making enormous commitments to this project—financially, and in terms of your life energies. Were you apprehensive at all about entering into a three-way partnership?

**Vail:** That's a good question. Sure. I definitely had some of that, and I felt a little bit like I wasn't asking enough questions, or if I had really talked thoroughly about the whole idea with my dad or my mom that they would— And they were already worried about what we were doing, going into partnership with somebody they didn't know, that's not in the family. And just farming itself being a risky enterprise. And there not being a house, and so we put up a yurt to live in. Just everything. It *was* taking a big risk, but we believed in it so much and we believed in each other so much, and saw this greater need in the world of connecting ourselves, and each other, and people with the land and how food is grown. I think the belief and the faith in it is really what brought us through any kind of fear. We're still working on all the areas that are scary or hard. We're committed to working through that stuff together. Just yesterday we were in an all-day organizational development meeting, the three of us, which is a lot also about the—

**Lawson:** —tending to the health of the relationship.

**Vail:** Yes.

**Lawson:** And I think for me, there was a bit of a longer history of friendship with Karen. So that was maybe part of it for you, too, is getting to know Karen in a deeper way, and establishing that same sense of trust. I mean, there was sort of your experiencing it somewhat vicariously through me at that point at the beginning. I remember valuing and appreciating your willingness to jump in without— You trusted me, so there was a sense of— I mean, your intuition and knowledge of Karen as well, was a part of that. But because we had worked together on CSA efforts, and there was a history there, I think that— It wasn't like we put out an ad and there was somebody who showed up that we didn't really know and have an understanding of how they are in relationship to a project. We didn't have that personal experience, nor did Karen.

So there was a certain amount of blind faith jumping into this particular form of partnership. But I think there was enough precedent of attention to what is fair and what is just and what is helpful, that there was a belief that we would be drawing upon those values and principles, that if something were to be a challenge to us in some way, we would be grounded in those values and principles as a partnership. I think that overcame, for me, any of the fears of jumping in.

**Vail:** I think also, just geographically, where the land is, a half hour north of Santa Cruz and an hour south of San Francisco. At the time I was working here at the UCSC farm, and having that community of people as a resource, organic agriculture on the coast being pretty established and growing—there was that overall support as well. If we were out in the middle of nowhere, I can't really imagine how we would have done this. And then, the proximity to urban areas—



an urban population, schools, was really key. Karen, like Jered said, being anchored in San Francisco from when she was born, was a huge part of that. So I think it was also, not just the three of us, but the larger community around us that made it feel possible.

**Rabkin:** What advice, practical or philosophical, would you give to a group of people wanting to embark on a project similar to yours, with an urban-rural partnership? Do you have any words of wisdom based on your years of experience?

**Vail:** Hmm.

**Rabkin:** Specifically related to working in partnership.

**Vail:** I think creating space for regular check-ins and communication, a lot of communication. Which is the hard part, because there's always so much work to do, so how do you do that? And that's been something that's hard for the three of us, partly because we're not all in the same [geographic] place. So how do we make sure to stay in communication? Now we're making these dates every month or every two months where we spend all day working together, and going over past stuff, or present structuring, and role development. It's great. It's really great doing that work, but you have to commit the time and the resources to doing that work.

**Lawson:** We were lucky in that sense that there was history in the friendship prior to the partnership. So to the degree to which you can get to know the potential partner ahead of making any attempt at long-term commitments, the better. Treat it in the same way that one would treat a long-term relationship,

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knowing that this is somebody that you want to spend a good portion, if not the rest, of your life with. I think with a business partnership or an organizational partnership there's a need to also be really clear about all of the worst-case scenarios, and talk about that up front, and be able to be really frank with each other. What happens if somebody dies? What happens if you just don't like each other anymore? What happens if you change your mind and you want to do something else that's motivating to you? All of the things that you don't want to imagine because you want to put all of the positive thinking into manifesting what it is you're very, all-interested in at the moment. [But] it's really healthy to be prepared for the worst-case scenario, both in just conceptually that you are all on the same page, but then literally on the same page in a formal agreement. And there're operating agreements for LLC's, or there can be other legally binding documents for such agreements in partnership.

We knew how much the land was going to cost, and we had some ideas of what the farm capitalization was going to cost. But we weren't as clear about the three-to-five-year income and expense of Pie Ranch. If we were to do it again, I think we would probably put more time into getting a sense of what the costs were going to be. We've been able to do it, and Karen's ability to also help initially in some of the farm capitalization has been critical. But there were points where we reached our limits. There was still the early stage of loss. Our income was less than the expense in the first couple of years. We didn't have forethought in figuring out how we were going to get through that period. I think there was an assumption on both of our parts that there was going to be still some income [sooner] and sufficient back reserves in order to cover that.

But we made it through that period, and I think we're on the right track for, not only having a viable, farm-based, educationally-oriented farm, but we have the ability, or at least last night at our board meeting it felt like there was clarity in the budget for '09 to see that we have some positive growth goals for this year ahead, for educational programming and—

So yes, I think maybe even prior to all of the agreements on the worst-case scenarios, [the most important thing is] getting to agreement on the best-case scenario, and really [doing] the visioning work together. What is the ideal working relationship? What is the ideal contribution of each of the partners? What do you want to be doing on a daily basis? And then the legal forms, and where exactly and how, can grow from that original visioning for what, really, you want to see happen in your life.

**Rabkin:** Great.

**Vail:** But I think it is really important to have some years under your belt. I had the farming background. Jered had some farming background. He had a lot of community organizing background. And before jumping into anything— Like the apprentices at UCSC, we always encourage them to continue to apprentice on farms for a number of years before you jump into your own farm. Even though some people like Tom Broz, he jumped in right after he did the apprenticeship, I think, into his farm. But I think before you embark on a huge project, it's best to really have some experience before going into it.

When we discovered that the adjacent slice of land, which is also somewhat shaped like a slice of pie, thirteen acres, was available, we jumped on that path. (We can get into more of the story around that in a minute.) But do you want to

be a for-profit farm? Do you want to be a non-profit? What does that mean if you're a non-profit for yourself and your own [future]? Here we are living on the land. For a while we were exploring, do we want the upper fourteen acres to be owned by the non-profit? Then, what happens to us when we want to retire? What happens to our children? There are all of those questions that you need to personally answer. Luckily, we are in this really unique situation where we are on a privately held piece of land next to what will be a piece of land owned by a non-profit, publicly held. It's this wonderful relationship of how private ownership and public ownership can help feed each other, and everybody's needs are being met. We're still exploring how that relationship will continue. Like, when we're gone, how will the upper slice and the future farmers that reside on that land—how will they relate to Pie Ranch? We're talking about that along the way.

### Why Pie?

**Rabkin:** Great. I will ask you more about that in a little bit. But meanwhile, I'd like to jump back to a question on the Pie Ranch website: Why pie?

**Vail:** Yes, well it was looking at a photograph, an aerial photograph of the land. When we were looking at it, we noticed it was in the shape of a slice of pie, or that's what we chose to see, a triangular-shaped piece of land. I can't remember which one of us, was it you that saw that?

**Lawson:** It was also our friend Annie Main from Good Humus Produce in the Capay Valley, who started the Davis Farmers' Market back in the day: she, I think, originally had talked about, "Oh, it would be great to start a pie ranch

where multiple farms would have their slice of the pie and it would all be—almost like a kibbutz or something”—a common effort that was joined by this vision of a pie, almost like co-housing for farmers. And so, that idea was in our thinking in terms of just the name. But the land being shaped like a slice of pie—And then, I remember we were looking at the Natural Resource Conservation Service maps of soils that were down at the Soil Conservation Service.

**Vail:** What kinds of crops ideally were grown in the area.

**Lawson:** Yes. And it said that soils in that kind of sloping clay loam ground were suitable for wheat. And I thought, wow, wheat. Growing wheat here. Not that much of an economically viable crop these days, especially on small acreage.

**Vail:** We had seen the neighboring farmers growing ollalieberries and strawberries and pumpkins—all ingredients that go into pies. I think, coming from the UCSC farm and managing the vegetable CSA, I had a real interest in doing something different, and growing different crops, and maybe not doing a vegetable CSA, but focusing more on fruits and dry beans and grains.

So it started to mushroom from there. All of the different ingredients that can go in pies grow well in this climate, and also you can really make a pie out of almost anything. There are white bean pies. There are vegetable pies. There are chicken pot pies. There are strawberry rhubarb pies. When we thought of it in the context of educational programming, what a wonderful lure for city kids to get to learn about how their food is grown, if they get a pie at the end of the day, and they get a hand in making that pie—from grinding the wheat into flour and cutting up the rhubarb, and cracking open the eggs, and harvesting the eggs from the chicken coop beforehand. It started to feel like a really joyous and fun project.

Also, pie is something is that you share with a community, with people. Normally you don't eat it by yourself unless you're (laughs) really hungry.

**Rabkin:** (laughs)

**Vail:** So it really started from the shape of the land and this idea of Annie's, into the other possibilities.

**Rabkin:** What building projects or physical changes did you initially have to make on the land in order to be able to run your programs there?

**Vail:** I guess it was a year that we were going up and visiting the land and even starting to do some clearing of the eucalyptus on the hillside before we actually lived there. But we knew we wanted to live there as soon as possible. We were exploring trailers, yurts. We decided a yurt was more aesthetically pleasing to live inside of instead of a trailer.

**Rabkin:** Not to mention it's the shape of a pie.

**Vail:** It's the shape of a pie. (laughs) Exactly. And at the end of 2003—it was in September, 2003—we had a big yurt-raising party. Jered and I went up to Oregon to get the yurt from Pacific Yurts and brought it down. And Karen and the two of us, [and] Karen's partner at the time, we had put the floor down. And then we did a yurt raising party. And we moved in in December of '03, without a kitchen. We were using Paul and Stef's outdoor kitchen, which was adjacent to where the yurt is. We still use their composting toilet. We were using their outdoor bath until we put in our own semi-outdoor bath. So [it was] very rustic living. And that next year, in 2004, I was still working full time at UCSC—in the fall of '04 we were able to disk and get in our cover crop.

**Lawson:** And have a child.

**Vail:** And have a baby.

**Rabkin:** Oh, my goodness. (laughs)

**Vail:** (laughs) We sowed wheat, and then we planted cane berries in the winter. And then in '05 was when there was production happening, the educational programming started to happen. Our first flock of chickens and goats came that season, so we started to build infrastructure for that.

**Lawson:** We had another work party to help with the building of a combination of a goat shed and chicken coop. And then we quickly realized that we didn't have any storage for our feed and tools. We got by with no storage for a year, and then built a shed and tractor port. So it's just been kind of bootstrap building things as we go.

And there's the conservation program. It actually just got reauthorized and expanded through the latest Farm Bill, for cost-share incentives for implementing conservation practices on the farm. It's a wonderful opportunity, especially for new farmers, because you can be starting at the beginning of something. You have to have some precedent, let's say for the irrigation practice, of not utilizing drip irrigation, for example. You're just using overhead because it's cheaper and that's what's available. But if you demonstrate that you're interested in moving more towards water conservation using a drip system, there's a seventy-five percent cost share for new farmers. So [there is] *incredible* assistance [available] in that early-stage capitalization of a farm. We were able to put in our whole irrigation system, animal fencing—

**Vail:** And road improvements, erosion control—

**Rabkin:** This means the federal government will kick in seventy-five percent of the costs of conservation-related farm developments?

**Lawson:** Exactly. And this time around, there's an increase. I think it's ninety percent for limited-resource farmers, and seventy-five percent for new farmers, and fifty percent if you've been farming for ten years or more.

**Vail:** And it also included—we put in a beneficial hedgerow that was a hundred percent paid for.

**Lawson:** The local resource conservation district was, through an ag water quality grant, able to incentivize even more of certain practices that they were interested in seeing happen on the coast. The hedgerow was one of those examples they saw, that was both water quality improvement— And we were going to prevent sediment from [eroding away]. Because we're on a slope, [we could] increase the likelihood of sediment retention on the farm and [prevent its] heading into the creek, while at the same time creating habitat for beneficial insects. So it was one of those practices that, while the main focus was water quality, was able to accomplish other resource conservation goals.

**Rabkin:** Has the availability of incentives specifically for beneficial hedgerows been at all jeopardized in the wake of *E. coli* and other food-safety scares?

**Lawson:** Good question. Resources are still available to implement them. It's really up to the farms. A lot of the larger-scale farms that have contracts with buyers are trying to follow practices that are “cleaner,” in the sense of not creating habitat where animals that might defecate closer to crops or on crops.



Yes, I think farms are maybe feeling inhibited by the recent food safety concerns, but the program is still available. Those farms that have different markets aren't reliant on that. [We] know the facts about a healthy, diversified system where certain pathogens don't end up becoming a food safety concern because of the management practices. We're actually really interested, in the wake of all that, to associate with researchers here at the Center for Agroecology [and Sustainable Food Systems], and elsewhere, who can utilize farms like ours to demonstrate [those principles].

**Vail:** And have animals in a cropping system.

**Lawson:** Yes, because we not only want to support wildlife habitat, but it's clear that we want to integrate animals into the operation. So we'll have chickens right near our strawberries, and we'll have cows right near our potatoes. So we need to be able to show that the animals that are in our system don't carry the same kinds of pathogens, or the way that we're managing them prevents that kind of pathogen passing on to fresh foods that would end up on somebody's dinner plate.

**Rabkin:** Great. Thanks. So we were talking about the ways that you built up the physical entity that is Pie Ranch, and how important these government funds have been in your ability to improve the land. As you've been talking about that, there's a little question that's been nagging in the back of my mind because of something you said earlier, and I just want to get this straight. So, Nancy, you were working full time at the Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems. You guys were basically building Pie Ranch. And you had a new baby? Is that right?

**Lawson:** (laughs)

**Vail:** Yes, so what happened was I was working full time in '04, and I had Lucas in October of '04, and went on maternity leave. And then all along was trying to figure out with the Center an arrangement where I could come back and job share with another person that had similar skills, to continue to run the field production and CSA part time. So we would each be fifty percent. And we found Julie Stultz, who had gone through the apprenticeship and had managed the farm up at Green Oaks Creek Farm (our neighbor), and she—when I came back, I think it was in December or January to go to work, she was job-sharing with me for that year, in '05. So I was working half time here. And then, because from the beginning Jered and I wanted to equally share in raising our kids, I was pumping breast milk at the farm, and then Jered was with Lucas when I was working, and then we'd switch. So Jered was really instrumental in the beginnings of getting Pie Ranch up and going, with the relationship with NRCS and getting everything figured out—from crops to educational programming.

**Lawson:** With Karen, too.

**Vail:** And with Karen. So I continued to work half time at UCSC until January of this year. Now I'm no longer there, and I've been half time at Pie Ranch, and a half-time mother. So Jered and I are sharing more of the work of Pie Ranch.

**Rabkin:** It sounds like there must have been some intensely demanding times there when you were juggling—

**Vail:** Yes. Because then we had another baby. Now we have two. (laughs)

**Lawson:** It's still intense, and it will continue, probably, for a little while, until they are both out of diapers and in school. But we're loving the opportunity to raise kids in a place like the ranch, where they really have a lot of room to explore.

**Vail:** And not only having a lot of room and living on a farm, but they get an interesting exposure to a diverse community that they normally wouldn't have living in a rural area, because of the students that come from San Francisco. And because it's repeated visits, they get to know the kids. It's really great.

### Growing Wheat

**Rabkin:** Great. I want to talk a little bit about one specific crop that you mentioned, and that's wheat, because you don't hear a lot about wheat being grown in this area. So can you tell me a little bit about the history of wheat and other grain farming in this area, and if there are barriers to easily growing wheat on the coast?

**Vail:** There was actually an article yesterday in the *San Francisco Chronicle*<sup>31</sup> about wheat growing in California now. It's an interesting story. Monica Spiller is—I don't know if she's a nutritionist by trade, but her husband was, and they were both very interested, and wrote a book called *What's With Fiber*, and were very interested in looking at the loss of whole grain in the American diet.<sup>32</sup> Whole grains in a diet definitely lends to better health overall. And she was really interested in researching old grains. She did a lot of research and learned that Sonora wheat was brought over here by the Portuguese maybe even before Christopher Columbus's time, and was grown by the Native Americans on the

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Missions of California. She obtained some of those seeds from the USDA seed bank, along with other varieties, and she started growing different wheat varieties at Full Belly Farm, with the help of the farmers there. She's not an actual farmer by trade. So from there it just started to grow. I think, really, Full Belly started selling the Sonora wheat berries at the farmers' market and milling it into flour.

**Rabkin:** Full Belly Farm in Capay Valley.

**Vail:** In Capay. And then some other farmers got interested in it. This article probably explains it better than I'll be able to do. (Did we start doing it at the UCSC Farm before we did it [at Pie Ranch]? I can't remember.) But there started to be this resurgence of interest in whole grains and whole-grain breads, and then growing wheat. We discovered this variety that works well in this climate. It's a soft white wheat that's low in gluten, low in protein, but really ideal for (luckily) pies, and good in pastry flour, although some people have made it into breads by adding some gluten.

It was really exciting to be able to grow wheat, especially for me. I'd only had experience with vegetables. And to grow something that was so Old World. You know, you see paintings of people harvesting with scythes. And it's such a staple of our diet, and something that the students are really kind of mesmerized by. They've never seen wheat growing. They didn't know flour comes from wheat. And that emphasis on whole grain, and how a whole grain can actually taste really good, and especially if it's in pie. It was really exciting to start getting into that. And now there are people all around. The UCSC Farm is growing some

wheat. Life Lab, the Homeless Garden Project. Dale Coke called, interested in growing wheat.<sup>33</sup>

**Rabkin:** Do you have to have special equipment?

**Lawson:** Yes. I'll share a little bit about that. There was the soil report saying [this would be good land for wheat]—And we knew that we wanted to grow [wheat], because it's obviously the foundation for any pie. But we had also been looking at old photographs of the Steele Ranch and noticed that they had grown wheat here on the coast. So historically there had been grain growing on this farm. It had kind of mimicked the state's overall agricultural growth—from cattle at the beginning, and then the grains, and then into fruits and vegetables. So for a while, grains were a predominant crop right in the Año Nuevo area with the Steele family, wheat being one of the primary ones. But then more recently, and for a number of years, oats have been, and continue to be, a crop that's grown in our area. So we knew that you could grow and harvest grains. And all the reasons that Nancy mentioned were motivating to us as well.

So we wanted to start. We put in a little bit, and were able to harvest it by hand. I think we put in a quarter acre our first year. And Monica Spiller had a little thresher that she brought over, because we realized it was going to really take too much time to try and thresh it all by hand. So we used her small, little thresher, still hand-placing all the wheat through this little mechanical thresher. And then we'd winnow by hand, the bucket-to-bucket method with a fan—

**Vail:** Which was great. The students were putting it all on a big tarp. A big group of students lifts up the tarp. The chaff blows away in the wind and the wheat drops.

**Rabkin:** Do you guys have photographs of that?

**Lawson:** Yes. To answer your question about other equipment, we realized we wanted to scale up a little bit, especially because there was interest in the potential of a grain and beans CSA, and growing these crops for other purposes besides our own pies.

**Vail:** And selling it to cafés, to Mission Pie.

**Lawson:** And selling it to cafés, and for bread possibly. So we looked into obtaining a combine. We looked far and wide for all the different kinds of combines. The ones that were the most affordable and seemed to be what would serve our purposes were the older, All Crop Harvesters that Allis-Chalmers built. There were something like 200,000 of them built during that period of the fifties, the late forties through the fifties. The one we had found that was in decent enough state for us who weren't so mechanically inclined—we wanted something that was in working order, that we didn't have to spend a whole lot of time in figuring out how to make it function. They are amazingly simple in some respects, but incredible engineering goes into it, and unless you are familiar with a machine like a combine—we were hoping to find something that was in better shape.

So we found one, but it was in Michigan. And I'm sure there are other ones that are closer to home, but we didn't have the time or the history— We put out the word and we asked around. And we hope to find others that are in somebody's barn that we can pull out for other farms that are wanting to do it on a small scale. But it's a 1953 All Crop Harvester that has about five and a half feet, sixty-six inches of cutter bar, that enables us to do multiple acres, if we want, of a

grain, and other crops, as evidenced by the name All Crop. We can harvest the beans on a larger scale, and other grains, and even small seeded crops, like poppy seed and things like that you could run through.

**Rabkin:** So this machine is now in your possession?

**Vail:** Yes, it was with the help of Mission Pie. They purchased it. It was really great. At the café they had a big map of the United States and they were talking to the truck driver and tracing the path of the combine all the way to Pie Ranch.

**Rabkin:** So it came from Michigan on a flatbed?

**Lawson:** On a flatbed, yes.

**Rabkin:** I'm guessing that these machines stopped being made in the fifties at some point when most wheat production in this country went to gigantic monocultures and they started using much bigger combines. Is that right?

**Lawson:** Exactly. They just went out of favor.

**Vail:** Yes, we should tell the story about Gene also. We were interested in growing more wheat, and we started to visit with Cascade first, the ranch to the north of us.

**Lawson:** And the Koseks even before Gene. Our neighbors, the Christmas tree farm, had put in wheat that next year. And before the combine arrived, and when they knew that the combine was arriving, they were excited, because they thought that would enable them to harvest the wheat. But the combine wasn't actually in working order when it arrived. Of course there was something wrong with it. So Jake Kosek, who is now a professor at Cal [Berkeley], was able and inclined to help figure out the problem with the combine, in order to harvest

their wheat as well. So we worked on that together, and got the combine going that year for both farms.

And then we needed a place to store it during the winter and we were asking around. And our friends up the road, Gene and Donna—

**Vail:** Yes, Gene and Donna Richeson. They found out about us through the farmstand. She would come to the farmstand. We started a friendship from there. They are these wonderful people who were active in an organization called Beyond War for many years. They have property just outside of Pescadero. We started going over to each other's houses for tea or dinner. She is a wonderful cook and chef. She studied nutrition. And Gene started getting really interested in the farming piece.

**Lawson:** The farmer that, through their family, had been leasing that property, their agricultural portion of the property for fifty years, just gave up that lease a couple of seasons ago. Gene was looking for a way to pass it to somebody else who could utilize it, and was asking around to us folks. We weren't necessarily ready to take it on, but we liked the idea of scaling up on the grain. And then suddenly Gene went from walking around the property saying, "I don't want to be the one to farm it but I would like to see it utilized well," went from that to really being the primary, active sower and irrigator and harvester—

**Vail:** (laughs) At sixty-seven years old.

**Lawson:** —of a ten-acre Sonora wheat crop and Federation wheat crop this year that brought in 24,000 pounds of wheat, using the combine. And he and our UPS driver, Sam, a lot of this season, were making improvements to the combine, and



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a hydraulic lift, because last year when I was using it the lift spring broke. We were able to fix that but there were still issues with the header lift— Anyway, all these little things. So yes, we got others involved in the process.

**Rabkin:** Your UPS driver?

**Vail:** Our UPS driver and this other wonderful man, Johnny Gomes, he's fourth generation—

**Lawson:** He grew up on the farm next to us and was definitely part of the farming community here for many years.

**Vail:** So anyway, now there's all this wheat so we needed a way— We have a little mill at the farmstand where people can come in and mill their own wheat.

**Lawson:** That we borrowed from Tom and Constance.

**Vail:** They can buy wheat berries from us.

**Rabkin:** And mill it on the spot.

**Vail:** Right. Yes. And we also have packaged pancake mix with our own wheat. We encourage people to use our wheat for pancakes or for pies. Normally we'd have our pie-crust recipe there. But we needed a way to mill all this wheat now, and to power this little mill. There's no way it could handle all this wheat. And we're also wanting to be able to sell our wheat to Mission Pie and to other bakers, and there's now an opportunity maybe with Rainbow Grocery, to sell to them.

**Rabkin:** Up in San Francisco.

**Vail:** Right. So Jered looked into a mill from Austria. We kind of put out the word in our email newsletter to help fund this mill, and got a number of donations. Mission Pie kicked in some money, a significant amount of money for the mill, and now it's on its way.

**Rabkin:** You had to go all the way to Austria to find an appropriate mill?

**Vail:** Not necessarily.

**Lawson:** It's a similar issue to that with the combines. There are few small-scale mills available. There's a longer tradition that has continued of small-scale operations in Europe. And particularly this Tyrolean mill has had a long history of providing smaller-scale milling for farms and bakeries, where artisanal operations are still viable and are getting a comeback here in the U.S. We're seeing more. When we were looking around we asked other bakers. There was one baker in Chico, [Butte County], Dave Miller. He had this particular mill. We are part of this international CSA network, and when I went to visit, as part of this meeting, a farm outside of Paris, the farmer had just bought this same mill. And then the author of a book about bread baking, and builder of wood ovens, Alan Scott—he had just purchased one of these mills. So all signs were pointing to this particular mill as a good choice for our next step. Besides, it's also a really beautiful piece of machinery, hand-crafted wood.

**Rabkin:** There's a nice photograph on your website.

**Lawson:** Yes. So you've seen that. It is a beautiful mill. So we're all about inspiration and utilization of these locally grown, heirloom varieties of foods. Having something that would inspire people, like a beautiful mill, to utilize it for

the farmstand was part of the drive to go as far as this Austrian, Tyrolean source. So we're hoping to get a map going at Mission Pie too that will chart it too. Instead of from Michigan it would be from Austria. It should be arriving, ideally before the end of the year, or right in the new year. So we'll be able to [provide] the fifty-pound sacks of flour to the pie shop. And we hadn't been able to do that, just because of the lack of quantity of wheat.

**Rabkin:** Had you been buying wheat elsewhere to generate your pies?

**Lawson:** Yes.

**Vail:** Well, on the farm, with the educational program, we would always use a hundred percent wheat grown at Pie Ranch, milled in a little mill. But Mission Pie—

**Lawson:** With 14,000 pies in their first year, they just bought from Giusto's organic flours.

**Rabkin:** How many pounds of flour do you get, roughly, from an acre of wheat?

**Vail:** Well, with hybrid varieties it's what, about two tons per acre?

**Lawson:** And with these older varieties it's about half—or anywhere from a thousand to two thousand pounds per acre.

**Vail:** I think we got just over a thousand pounds per acre with Sonora?

**Lawson:** Right.

**Rabkin:** Can you taste a difference between the hybrids that we're used to and the heirloom varieties?

**Vail:** I think so. It's also—it would be interesting to do a taste test, because something that's freshly milled definitely has a different taste and texture and quality than something that's been sitting in storage. And I think, also, how fine [finely ground] it is, is a part of it.

**Lawson:** And each wheat variety is unique, and has its own flavor. And the way that we've come to appreciate that uniqueness with other foodstuffs or beverages, like coffee, and the difference between coffee that's been ground—

**Vail:** Folgers and CAN's [Community Agroecology Network's] Nicaraguan—

**Rabkin:** Yes. Great.

**Vail:** And it would be interesting to have somebody do research on this, but Paul [Muller] from Full Belly was talking about how he wonders if the hybrid varieties of wheat have somehow— There's all this concern about people having wheat allergies, or gluten allergies. Is it because of these hybridized varieties? Like, are the heirloom varieties somehow— Because people lived on wheat for thousands of years and didn't have wheat allergies. So why all of a sudden is there this wheat allergy happening? So just wondering what was bred out or bred into these Green Revolution wheat varieties.

**Lawson:** Well, there were the genetic mutations. It wasn't even bred. That was the beginning of genetically modified foods, where they were exposed to radiation, from what I understand, cobalt. I know it was used as an example by one of the pro-GMO UC Davis researchers of, like, "Look, we did this with wheat and there's been no problems. Why can't we do this with soybeans and corn? And why are we, all of a sudden, receiving all this scrutiny?" So then all of a

sudden it occurred to me. Wait. We did it with wheat? Let's look at what happened with wheat. And one of the concerns about corn and soy is this unknown allergic potential in the human diet when you introduce these genes that aren't familiar to our bodies. So that could be true with those wheats that were handled in that way in order to get these higher-yielding varieties.

**Rabkin:** Interesting. One more wheat question. I heard something about an incipient relationship with a baker, or a baking organization in Santa Cruz? Can you tell me about that?

**Vail:** Sure. Erin Justus has Companion Bakers, and she's done bread for the farmers' market. She's done a bread CSA through Live Earth Farm. She was an apprentice at UCSC I knew at the time. Each year we've done the farmstand we usually stop in November. Mission Pie goes into high pie gear with Thanksgiving and Christmas. So it's too much [for Pie Ranch to continue producing pies during that season]— For one thing we would shut down because we no longer had fresh berries; Blue House Farm, which was doing the produce, no longer had their produce to sell. But this year we wanted to stay open and offer pie and coffee to the travelers along the coast through Thanksgiving at least. And then this year we're going to be re-opening in January and sell value-added products like jams and pancake mix. So we wanted to find somebody who could do the pies, because Mission Pie was no longer able to do it over the winter season. So we asked Erin, and she was really interested in going for it. She's done a beautiful job. I guess it was for the month of November she provided Pie Ranch with galettes and pies, pumpkin and apple pies, and then did a Thanksgiving order with us. She also sold bread through us. That was

really exciting and fun. It's closer, she's a half hour closer than San Francisco. Just supporting another small-scale baker and a woman has been really great. So we'll see. I don't know how the next year will work out. I don't know if there will be a combination of Mission Pie's pies and Erin's galettes, or how we'll do it. Something we'll be exploring.

### **Educational Programs**

**Rabkin:** Great. Thank you. Well, let's move into talking about your work with students. So tell me about your partnership with San Francisco high schools. As I understand it, Mission High School has been a kind of staple relationship for you. How did you initially establish that relationship?

**Lawson:** Well we, from [my] previous work with the Center for Eco-Literacy and deciding what schools we [at the Center] were working with, there was a process for determining [a particular school's] readiness for initiating a farmer'-market-based salad bar. We created a little matrix that helped to determine the readiness of a particular school: Is the administration interested? Are there teachers that are interested? Is there a school garden that would help reinforce the principles we're wanting to share with students—in this case on the farm, in that case it was in the cafeteria. So we generated this form and arranged for meetings with different principals at various high schools in the city, and more or less methodically went through a process to determine what school was ideal for us to begin this partnership with.

**Rabkin:** Were you looking at public and private schools?

**Lawson:** Yes. But the matrix was with public schools. There was the one independent school that I mentioned earlier, that Karen had attended as a teenager, and her daughter as well.

**Rabkin:** The Urban School [of San Francisco].

**Lawson:** The Urban School. So there was just a natural fit there, to reach out to them. And we can talk a little bit about their programming, and how the relationship with them is a bit more unique than what we established with Mission High.

We [at Pie Ranch] ended up choosing Mission High for all of the reasons that were evident in the matrix, but also, as we learned more about that particular school, its history was part of California history. It's in The Mission [District]. It's one of the oldest schools west of the Rockies. It, kind of for us, had a quality and a character that was the urban equivalent to our historic farmstead at the ranch. The community there, we felt, could be a nice partnership with that sort of urban-rural relationship building.

Beyond the school readiness, there were these broader, community-based [qualities] (nested communities, as the Center for Eco-Literacy would refer to it) that seemed significant for us. The vice principal at the time had, ten years prior, worked on school garden projects in Los Angeles. She knew that what we wanted to do would be of interest to a couple of teachers, an English teacher and an environmental science teacher that was working with special-ed students who had greater flexibility in scheduling. So what we presented to them was something that would engage students over the entire season, and maybe

multiple seasons. [We proposed] multiple trips throughout the year with the same group of students.

At a time in the educational system of emphasis on testing, state standardized tests as a measurement of scholastic success, most teachers, with limited funds, don't have the feeling of luxury to be involved in a field-based educational experience. [The emphasis is] very much more on classroom-focused rigor in order to excel on those tests. At least that's the operating culture right now. We like to think that if you actually got out of that school environment every month and got kids on a farm, doing meaningful, project-based learning, that you would actually improve test scores anyway.

**Rabkin:** And special-ed classes were not subject to the same kind of rigorous testing expectations?

**Lawson:** No, exactly. Because of their designation in special ed they are exceptions. Although they do follow the standards, and that's why we feel like in some ways we are maybe demonstrating that, and we should be looking at—that would be a good evaluation tool—to show that environmental education and experiential ed out on the farm will actually— You know, if it's improving the scholastic achievement with special-ed students it would surely assist in the overall student bodies' ability to perform on these other tests.

**Rabkin:** Is anybody, in fact, studying that question?

**Lawson:** Not yet.



**Vail:** I think there has been a lot of work done around that with Life Lab<sup>34</sup>, with K—through-sixth grade, like how to wed environmental ed or garden-based education with science standards— But not as much in high schools.

**Lawson:** Yes. There are studies that are done to show how you could apply it to core curriculum, but not whether or not those experiences actually improve overall testing. At least I'm not aware of them.

**Rabkin:** I also wondered if anybody was tracking the academic performance of the specific students that you guys work with, to see if they can measure any impact on the students.

**Lawson:** We just got a grant from the San Francisco Foundation to do that.

**Vail:** To hire somebody.

**Rabkin:** Great. So tell me a little how the arrangement works. Take me through a cycle of working with these students. What happens in their first encounter with Pie Ranch? How do they get there? Where does the money come from for transporting them back and forth, and how often do they visit you, etc.

**Vail:** Well, in the case of Mission High, the transportation costs have come from the school, and also one year we had a small grant from somebody to cover transportation. But with Mission High School, the students from Matt and Corky's classes (those are the two teachers; Corky Kern is the English teacher, and Matt Heller is the environmental science teacher), they bring their students to the farm. We meet them at 9:30. They come in a couple of vans.

**Rabkin:** How many students?

**Vail:** It's fifteen students. It's the same group of students each time. So some of them, like Andy, who has since graduated, he was one of the original students. We call them the Piesters.

**Lawson:** We were calling them the Pieoneers and they didn't like that, so they changed it to Piester.

**Vail:** He helped plant our first apple trees, and then he harvested the apples and made pie out of the apples. So to get to see that continuation over years, to have a relationship with a farm and a place—

**Rabkin:** What year was that first student group there?

**Lawson:** 2005. End of May. We sowed milpa—corn, beans and squash—the three sisters, with them on that first day.

**Vail:** Yes, that's right. So they come and they spend the whole day at the farm. And each time we walk up to this overlook of Pie Ranch, and we have a moment of silence where they can arrive and be there, and listen to the birds. And then they reflect back to us, just in their time driving up and looking out over the landscape, what do they see that has changed in the last month, since they were there last.

Then we'll go over what their tasks for the day will be and we'll break up into groups. So some of them will go off and bake pies. Some of them go off and do farm activities—planting, or putting new shavings in the chicken coop, or sowing seeds, or mulching. There's a variety of activities they do each time. We used to work with an organization called Next Course on the farm, who would bring up some of their staff to do cooking with the students. They are also based

at Mission High School, doing nutrition education in the school. And one of the staff from Next Course, Megan, she left that organization and we wanted to keep her on at Pie Ranch. She's really great with the students. So she's been this year coming with them, contracting just on her own. So a group will go with her and prepare lunch.

After all those activities are happening, they have a half hour before lunch where they do journaling. Corky usually has some kind of prompt for their journals, what she wants them to write about. It's usually connected to what's changed in them over the past month, or what do they see in their surrounding environment. Just a time to reflect on themselves, and their place, and their feelings. Then we all circle up and we share what we did in the morning. We line up and get our food, and we all sit and wait for each other before we start to eat. Then we all have a meal together and that's ended with pie. Then we usually will just talk and hang out, and they leave at about two to head back to the city. So that happens each month.

**Rabkin:** Starting at what time of year?

**Vail:** In the fall, at the beginning of the school year. And then it ends in an overnight trip. They come and will spend the night.

**Lawson:** Theoretically, it begins in the fall. But because it's year-to-year, there might be freshmen students or sophomore students who are new, but there will be the sophomores who sowed the pumpkins or beans in the spring the school year prior, and will be seeing the end of that cycle. Even though they weren't coming throughout the summer, they'll at least be able to be harvesting something that they sowed.

**Vail:** Within the program we do a passing-the-corn-cob to the students who become the leaders, the mentors for the incoming students.

**Rabkin:** So you have students returning throughout their high school career.

**Vail:** Yes.

**Rabkin:** And they stay with these same teachers for four years.

**Vail:** They do.

**Rabkin:** Wow.

**Vail:** What's been really neat, too, with Andy, and at some point maybe we'll get you the video that features Andy, the student that was with us from the beginning. He graduated. He's going to City College preparing for culinary school, and working at Mission Pie. He also comes on the trips each month with Megan. He's an assistant chef [and] cooking educator with Megan, which has been really great to get to see how this experience at Pie Ranch can also translate into job and career.

**Rabkin:** What kinds of skills do you see the students, the Piesters, learning?

**Vail:** They come once a month and it's only for a day. So in a way, getting any real practical farming skills— They get a little taste of it, but maybe not a thorough understanding of it. It's more experience and an awareness-building activity. The cooking and the pie-baking—that's definitely something that they'll learn. Each student will learn how to make a salad or salad dressing, or learn how to make a pie crust and how to do the filling. And then they'll have to do math around things like how many measuring spoons or half cups of this and that, while they're doing that. And then there's also the skills of the interpersonal

work. Some of the students will come down to work at the farmstand. The students that work at Mission Pie—they're learning how to relate to the community, how to sell a product, how to relate to each other, how to relate to the staff. Those are real skills.

**Rabkin:** Can you think of specific examples of changes you've witnessed in any individual students?

**Lawson:** Yes: Mark, one of the students who is also coming with Andy to now be a culinary mentor with students, helping to teach and prepare their lunch—when he first arrived (I was just looking at some of his journal entries last night), he was pretty withdrawn, and he talked about it being really boring being at the farm, and just was not excited at all about it, but was willing to participate. This was just in his first day. But I think even by the end of his first day it shifted for him. He's participated for a couple of years, and it's just an incredible transformation, of coming out of his shell. And we see that often with the other students. It's a hard, kind of awkward time of personal growth. High-school students are coming into their life as independent adults. They are about to emerge into the world, and there's that post-puberty, pre-adult kind of transformation that we are part of witnessing. The farm is a really safe place for them to begin to express themselves in a family-oriented, friendship, safe place to be themselves. Mark was a pretty stark example of that. Not only [is he] more comfortable and having fun and enjoying himself and learning that he loves to cook and wants to express that more, he is becoming this great teacher, and able to share the knowledge that he's gaining with the students in ways that are kind of surpris[ing] to a lot of the adults who have been working with him.

**Vail:** Yes, it was great to watch the Rooted in Community conference happen this summer. It was based in the Bay Area. It's a national organization, a connection of youth-based environmental-ed, or more mostly, really, sustainable-ag organizations. They all came together, two hundred youth. And Mark played a leadership role at Pie Ranch. I think there were fifty people who came that day. He, along with some of the other students, led a tour of Pie Ranch and some of the other activities. It was really great for us to let go of our leadership, and let the students take it up with their peers, to see them come into a whole different way of being, and to really shine. It was great.

**Rabkin:** What kinds of opportunities have opened up for these students as a result of their work with Pie Ranch?

**Vail:** That was one. That was a huge one, that connection with Rooted in Community, meeting with people from all over the country that were doing similar things. Because they only had experience with Pie Ranch. And then to get to hang out with somebody from Philadelphia who knows a lot about cover crops, and they are side-by-side the same age and listening to each other. And here's this person who is really excited about this thing that they're doing over in another part of the country. That was a real opportunity, to be a part of that.

**Lawson:** Our hope is that we are creating inspiration for being engaged as adults in continuing the work of food system reformation.

**Vail:** Some of them in the high school have direct opportunity with that. There was the food leadership group that came up last year, at Mission High School, that met a week during advisory. They were learning more about the food system, and learning about their food system at the school, and thinking about

inserting a more sustainable carrot into the salad bar. This year there's a gardening class that's happening at the school, that Karen has started, and they're getting a hand in that.

**Lawson:** And then after high school, our hope is that job-related career decisions are directly related to their experiences at the ranch. There are some opportunities that have emerged through the Mission-based enterprise, Mission Pie. A number of the students from Mission High are in employment positions there. And other students who are from other schools have come as interns, summer interns, to work on the farm as more full-time apprentices. We had a young woman, Sarah, this last summer who was in school on the East Coast and wanted to work with us.

**Vail:** She was originally from the Urban School, a student from the Urban School who had come to Pie Ranch and wanted to come back as an intern.

**Rabkin:** So she had graduated from Urban and gone to college on the East Coast—

**Vail:** Her first year of college and then came back in the summer and worked at Pie Ranch.

**Rabkin:** And lived on Pie Ranch?

**Vail:** In a tent.

**Lawson:** So there's that. We imagine more of that happening, but we're still in the recent-graduate stage. So we don't have the kind of longitudinal study to be able to track what kinds of decisions the youth are making who have had experiences on the farm. We only hope that their experience, combined with all

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the larger national attention given to the topic now— We hope a lot more opportunities and new kinds of effort for green jobs will translate into support to give people opportunities related to what we're doing.

**Rabkin:** What's the socioeconomic and ethnic demographic that these students come from?

**Lawson:** It's quite diverse—from Mission, to Urban, to Pescadero High we're beginning to work with and other—

**Rabkin:** How about Mission High?

**Vail:** Mission High is a mix of Latino, African American, Asian American students. Some European American, not as many. And income levels—it seems to be on the lower side of things.

**Lawson:** The school itself has—over fifty percent that qualify for a free and reduced—

**Vail:** Lunch. And then with the Urban School, there are more privileged students.

**Rabkin:** And what's your relationship with Urban School?

**Vail:** Well, through Karen's connection with Urban. That's how that relationship began. They have a class called Cal Studies. It's this wonderful class, I feel like every high school should have it. They have a rotating thing, where through Cal Studies they will look at agriculture for a couple of years, and then look at water and—

**Lawson:** Forestry. Food.



**Vail:** For two years, maybe it was three years in a row they were looking at agriculture. So a group of students, the only class they take their last semester of high school is Cal Studies. They were based at Pie Ranch for a couple of days. Then from there they would go out into different parts of California to look at agriculture and the whole food system. Then they would come back and share their experiences and bake pies together. So they came back, I think it was three or four times that they came back to Pie Ranch after these experiences in California. And then at the end they do this amazing presentation about their whole semester and what they learned.

**Rabkin:** Were they camping on Pie Ranch?

**Vail:** Yes, they were camping. And we were just talking now with a teacher at Urban about having other students come out for community work days. We hosted a leadership retreat of Urban students. Originally we thought: oh, the Urban School. Wouldn't it be great to be the rural campus for Urban and have Pie Ranch be their school farm. But it's not as established of a program and relationship as it is with Mission High. We're keeping the connection alive. It's just in a different format. So Mission High has the monthly visits. Urban has this unique Cal Studies class. Oceana in Pacifica—we do an intersession with them where they're at Pie Ranch for a week. Other schools that we've had relationships with will come for a couple of days. So there's kind of different rhythms, depending on how it can be structured in each school. We're about to go to a meeting with Pescadero High School next week to look at getting students out to the farm, and figuring out how that could happen in a regular kind of a way.

**Rabkin:** And as far as the Pie Ranch staff people who are involved in working with the students and their teachers, it's the two of you and Karen. Do you have any other help?

**Vail:** This year we have two and a half apprentices. And the half apprentice was also half campaign manager. We haven't really talked yet about, I guess, the capital campaign for the lower slice. She was helping with that. She had a lot of experience with Farm Aid<sup>35</sup> and another farm, Drumlin Farm in Massachusetts.

**Lawson:** Doing development work.

**Vail:** And now she's going to stay on. She really wants to learn more about hands-on farming, so she's going to stay on as a full-time apprentice. We have two other full-time apprentices. They help with the student groups when they come. They'll take turns helping lead pie baking, or leading farm activities, or milking the goat. We're a team with the apprentices, working with the students when they come.

**Lawson:** Part of their knowledge coming into the apprenticeship is that they're gaining, not just the practical skills in food production, but also in this kind of farm-based education.

**Rabkin:** And do your children have any exposure to these high school students?

**Vail:** Definitely. Yes, it's great.

**Lawson:** Yes. Prior to pre-school, for Lucas, he was engaged from when students arrived to when they left. And that's the way it is for Rosa now, until she starts pre-school in the fall. But at least now, when he comes back from pre-school, he still connects with the students before they leave, or during lunch. I think Andy

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even just talked about it the other night. Students who've been coming for a few years have gotten to experience Lucas and Rosa in a way that they may not have gotten to in an institutional education.

**Vail:** They saw my big belly when I was pregnant with Rosa. And they saw her when she was just little, and they've watched her grow up.

**Lawson:** When Nancy was teaching at CASFS and I was responsible for feeding Lucas, bottle feeding—some of the students would help with that. So they've watched him as an infant all the way through to his toddler days here.

**Vail:** I don't know if this is true, but I think that having our kids there and being part of it, that it helps the students feel more comfortable, because they can have fun with a little three or four-year-old, and be silly, and it makes it enjoyable for them.

**Rabkin:** Interesting. Have you seen the education that you provide at Pie Ranch extending beyond the students themselves, and into their families or home communities?

**Vail:** Well, if we get to show you a couple of these small documentaries, some of the students will talk about how they are trying to get their parents to buy more healthy food and organic food. One student was talking about milk. This food leadership class that was at the high school—we went into Rainbow Grocery and we looked at all of the different eggs, and how are different chickens raised, and how can you buy eggs that are not only healthy for you but for your environment. So then they go and tell their parents to buy those eggs. We'll hear them saying that. Whether it's true, I'm not sure. But hopefully that's happening.

Hopefully they're talking about it with their parents. I think there's that opportunity more, because of the repeat visits, to have more of an impact, because they start to fall in love with the place, to look forward to it, and notice how they feel after having a meal that's really yummy. And so they're, I think, more likely to change their habits and maybe influence their parents and family.

**Lawson:** I mean, it does raise this really huge question about—

**Vail:** Access.

**Lawson:** Yes, access, and also the larger cultural/societal changes that would be necessary to support the kind of healthful preparation of food, eating of food, with limited-resource families that don't necessarily have somebody with the time to prepare meals. Some of it is perceived inability, and some of it's actual structural impediments to adoption of healthier lifestyles. Our cities are bombarded with so many other limiting factors that make it hard to adopt the kinds of things that we're promoting. We know that it's going to be a whole larger, longer effort to have that kind of meaningful social change that I think you're hinting at, that we'd like to see as the result of our work. But it's scratching the surface now.

**Vail:** The corner stores that just have gum, candy, and chips. It's neat because Megan, who does the nutrition education, she's so wonderful. She does a lesson where she'll bring in junk foods, and then she'll bring in healthy foods that kind of match. Like, she'll bring in a bag of Doritos. And then, what's the kind of healthy equivalent of Doritos that might taste good to a high school student, but are actually better for you because of the oils in it, or it's a whole grain, or whatever it is. And she'll do a nutrition education comparing those two

products, and where you can find it. But yes, there's a ton of work to be done on many, many levels to start to see the change.

**Rabkin:** When you think about your interactions with the Piesters over the years, are there any memories that stand out with particular vividness or fondness for you?

**Vail:** One that's really kind of recent. A student who I thought of when you asked earlier about how we had seen the students change—this student, Saul, he was very withdrawn and very shy, and I think struggles with language. He has started to open up, I see, more and more. We had a recent visit when we did a rooster slaughter. We had too many roosters. We needed to slaughter some of them. We decided it would be a rite of passage to go through that act with the high school students. We luckily had another teacher come, whose nickname was Chicken, who helped to lead it. He studied chickens in college and was involved in chickens in various ways. So we went through this whole very thorough and sensitive introduction to why we were going to be doing this. We had alternatives for students who didn't want to take part in it, but it turned out everybody wanted to do it. They took part in this rooster slaughter, and observed roosters being killed. Then some of them actually did it themselves. Then we had rooster stew for lunch. And after all of this happened, after we sat down to a meal together, in our closing circle before they left, Saul said something that was really profound. He said, "These roosters will always be a part of our bodies, or will always be with us." It was really profound and amazing for me that he said this, because he was somebody who was always

really quiet, and to say something that was so real and thoughtful, really stuck out for me.

**Rabkin:** You have a lovely account of that also on your website.

**Vail:** You got to read that article. Great.

**Rabkin:** Jered, any particular memories stand out for you?

**Lawson:** I don't know if there's a particular, specific moment. Maybe what stands out for me, in a way, is what we've done these mid-session, or mid-year, or end-of-the-year kind of check-ins for the students—like what's working for them, what's not working for them. I remember being surprised, because I think our goals were more skill acquisition, kitchen, and awareness of the farming practices. [We were thinking in terms of] re-skilling in the kitchen, and re-acquaintance with sustainable farming. [But the students talked mostly] about their sense of self, increased confidence and sense of relations, or friendships that they've built. The personal and social consequences of their experiences were what they were wanting to talk about.

To me, that was a surprise. It wasn't necessarily our starting point as a goal, but it has become a wonderful, unintended consequence of hosting groups on the farm. We recognize that it takes those healthy relations with oneself and each other in order to manifest those other desired outcomes of increased attention to preparing good foods, and being a part of that social change work that will inevitably ripple out, we hope.

**Rabkin:** So we've been talking about your work with students, and I just wanted to ask a couple of wrap-up questions about that. I was wondering if there are any

especially challenging or difficult aspects to that work you've been doing with the Piesters.

**Vail:** My experience with teaching in a farming environment is with the apprenticeship program, where you have students that are there who have some knowledge, and some buy-in, and desire to be a part of a more sustainable food system. So I guess my challenge is working with the age group. High-school students, like Jered was saying, are in their transformation into adulthood, and there's a certain amount of—they are just not there, and there's not the awareness yet, or the education yet. They haven't had access to— And so, in a way, it's both an opportunity and a challenge, of just how to tap into getting them excited about planting strawberries, or whatever it is in the task that we are doing, how to hold their attention when we are talking about cover crops and what's importance of a cover crop. Like, who cares about the nitrogen, and the rhizome bacteria in the roots—how to get them even think that's important.

**Rabkin:** How *do* you get them to think that's important?

**Vail:** I think a big part of it is making it, one, a comfortable environment and fun. And keeping things pretty basic, not talking too much, and asking a lot of questions. And then just getting their hands dirty doing something. So maybe they might not be understanding what they're doing when they're scattering these seeds that are a cover crop that's going to feed next year's crops, maybe they don't quite grasp it all, but just the act of going like this, and sowing seeds and walking across a field, maybe that—

**Lawson:** And then maybe when they come back and see the cover crop growing, when you describe what's happening on the roots of that cover crop, they're more apt to listen because they had that hand in the sowing.

**Vail:** Yes. And the nice thing about having their teacher there, the science teacher, [is that] where there are the standards where they're learning about certain aspects of energy cycling, then they get to start making those connections, like, oh! That's where practical, experiential education is so key, because they really see it. It's not in a textbook. They sowed the seed; they've come back; it's grown. We mow it down in the spring. So it's more of an immediate—

**Lawson:** [We'll t]alk about the difference between that system, versus a system where you're purchasing an input. And what went into the production of that input? Matt Heller, the environmental science teacher, will help interpret some of what we're doing in relation to what they've been studying in their science class.

**Rabkin:** Do the teachers make deliberate connections between the experiential education on the ranch and what they do in the classroom back in San Francisco?

**Lawson:** Yes, very much so.

**Vail:** Yes, which is great. And it's nice having science and English side-by-side, too. It's really beautiful how it comes together with Corky. The different books that they are reading. They read this one book called *The Circuit*. I haven't read it all, but I think it's about migrant farm worker experience.<sup>36</sup> And then just doing farm work, and reflecting about that and how it feels. The connections are really key. So it's both: challenge and opportunity. What's the challenge for you, Jered, would you say?



**Lawson:** I think the hardest part for me is hearing about and feeling the challenges that they go through as young people in these very intense urban environments. It's the hardest— If you're sensitive at all to people's suffering, it's like, oh, my God. Neighbors, or friends of theirs, or cousins have been shot from gang-related activity. Or even within the home, abusive family situations. That's been the hardest part for me, is trying to understand and work with youth that come from much more painful experiences in their lives, are coming from that place, or having to hold that in their navigation of the world.

### **Mission Pie**

**Rabkin:** Thanks. There's, of course, a whole other component to this set of relationships that we've been alluding to, but not really talked about directly, and that's Mission Pie. So let's talk about that a bit. When and why did you and Karen establish Mission Pie?

**Vail:** Well, the idea of it initially came from Andy, who is this student we keep talking about, Andy Guterrez. He was coming out to the farm and we were talking about opening up the farmstand on Highway One, and wouldn't it be great if you students could come and work in the farmstand. And Andy raised the question: well, how would we get down there, because we don't have cars? How could we have a job down there? And wouldn't it be great if you had a place in the city that we could connect with. So a light bulb went off for Karen. Really, it's not our project. It's Karen's. She partnered with a baker from Destination Bakery, the owner of that bakery, to start Mission Pie. She located this wonderful building on 25<sup>th</sup> and Mission, and sold her home in the Glen Park, Noe Valley area, and obtained this building. She lives on the top floor, rents out

the middle floors, and then the pie shop is on the bottom floor, and was in partnership with this other person on that. That person got out of it and now she and, from my understanding, she and Kristen, who is the baker, are partners in the project.

**Lawson:** And she also initiated a kind of process of involving other people who are interested in it, to help conceive of the idea, figure out how to get a pie shop up off the ground. So yes, it's definitely a complementary partnership, Karen being a common denominator between the two. In our budget processes these days, we've been ID-ing the kinds of products that are sold at the farmstand have the title "Value-Added Collaborations." Because there's now Companion Bakers, and there could be others where raw products, produce from the farm is then sold to this other effort that transforms it into something that comes back to the farm and sold at retail at the farmstand. So having this model, too, [is a] demonstration for other farms to increase economic viability, to transform—[we provide] this demonstration of that value-added benefit, where it's possible. And we clearly have a nice easy one, in a way, to put out on the coastal highway to draw people in with pie.

**Rabkin:** So Karen capitalized the acquisition of the building and the beginning of the store by actually selling her home, and buying this building.

**Lawson:** Exactly. So it was the sort of the same thing that happened with the farm, with other assets in order to manifest the next phase for her in her life. I think there was this enlightened realtor, or two, I think, was involved in that, and had come across the site. I don't know if it was just serendipitous timing. I think she had said to him, "I'm looking for something that might combine these

interests.” And the old Victorian at 25<sup>th</sup> and Mission that is her home and the site for the pie shop hosted a floral shop (it’s a corner building) for at least a hundred years. So again, it’s that same California historical property and enterprise that ties into what we’re wanting to demonstrate and show the transformation of.

**Rabkin:** You’ve mentioned along the way several capital projects that Mission Pie helped Pie Ranch with. Does that mean that Mission Pie is now turning a profit?

**Lawson:** It has, I think, from early on. Karen began the pie shop really small, and was able to lease the full corner space to an arts group that was needing a temporary space while their building that they were in for years was being earthquake retrofitted. But I think the combination of really good-tasting pies and other products, with the educational programming, and link to a specific ranch, came into being at a real ripe time where there’s a heightened national awareness of the value of such localization of food enterprise. And with Michael Pollan’s book *Omnivore’s Dilemma* and Barbara Kingsolver’s book *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*—these were being read by many, many citizens across the U.S.

**Vail:** And Jessica Prentice’s Locavores movement in the City.<sup>37</sup>

**Lawson:** Yes. A real heightened awareness of the value of such efforts. So Mission Pie was very well received from early on, and has had a steady, committed, and growing group of customers. I don’t know the actual economics of it. I think they also see it as a way of investing in that story that is compelling to people.

**Rabkin:** The story of localizing.

**Lawson:** Of the relationship, of saying we are supporting in some way— It's just like getting equipment for their bakery. They know that equipment for a farm that's starting up is harder to capitalize than an urban enterprise. If that urban enterprise commits to that rural enterprise, in a way, it's beneficial to both. Whether it's putting that out there to the world, they see that relationship. It's affirming to them. They want to support that business as a result. So it's an investment in good relations to the public.

**Rabkin:** And what proportion of the labor at Mission Pie is provided by students from the high school?

**Vail:** I think overall there are twenty people working there, and eight of them are from the high school. So a pretty good number. Some of them are students who are still at high school, and some of them have graduated high school.

**Rabkin:** Do any of those students maintain their relationships in one way or another with Pie Ranch after they graduate?

**Vail:** Yes, some of them come down to the farmstand to help with the farmstand on the weekends, and then stay for the community work day and barn dance.

### **Building Community on the North Coast**

**Rabkin:** Let's move back down the coast, then, to the local community. You've both mentioned at various times helpful relationships that you've had in one way or other with neighbors or businesses from the community. I wanted to turn back to that, and ask you whether you've worked concertedly in any way to integrate Pie Ranch with local community organizations, or people.

**Lawson:** We both had [relevant] experience, and I had some experience with the start-up of a food policy council in Berkeley, and then efforts to do something similar in the Central Coast, in Santa Cruz and Monterey County. So we had thought, oh, it would be great to do something like that in San Mateo County at some point, and help be the catalyst for that. There was a group that had already been doing county-based organizing throughout the state, Ag Innovations. And it was just wonderful serendipity. They had chosen San Mateo County as the next place to do their work of convening a group of stakeholders in the food system to look at food and farming. Historically, they had organized more principally around agriculture, and this was the first time that their effort was broadening to be more food-system oriented. And so, [they] had invited everybody from Farm Bureau, to the head of the health department, to emergency food providers, educators, restaurateurs, other food business folks, and gathered everybody together with the intention of building foremost [a] kind of a trusting dialog about the food system: what is working and what's not working, and what collectively they might be able to do as a group differently than if they were continuing to work independently from each other on those efforts.

It's been about a year and a half, almost two years since we've been meeting. And there's a sense that once the group moves from the dialogue into the action, that some pretty incredible things are going to happen. But those haven't yet materialized. But there are three working groups now that are focused on more— On the farm level, there are issues of access to water—particularly the development of off-stream water storage has been a primary challenge for

farmers in the area. So there's kind of a stewardship collaboration and an interest in supporting that. There're farm-to-school developments. Garden-based education is being another working group focus area. And then farm-to-institution is the other collaborative effort, as well as local marketing [to further] the work of local labeling highlighting San Mateo County-grown products. And other efforts that would, by having the alliance, improve the climate for maintaining working landscapes in the county. So other policy initiatives that come forward would be able to utilize the alliance to strengthen the positioning of the collective interest. So that's been wonderful. We've been involved in that, utilized our site to host meetings, and just be a voice at the table.

**Vail:** Besides that, there's also, with Gene and Donna, who got inspired about the wheat—they have this wonderful huge barn and they've hosted gatherings at their place of the local farmers in the area. And there's an interest in having maybe a monthly, or some kind of a regular scheduled salon or opportunity for people to come together and talk about issues. Blue House Farm, started by past apprentices from UCSC, is a small farm just ten minutes north of us. And there's a new farm that started on Gene and Donna's land. They're also leasing their land to Fifth Crow Farm, also three graduates from the apprenticeship. There's a couple of other— Ulli, who is a graduate from the Farm and Garden apprenticeship program, has been involved in the school garden at La Honda Elementary. There's our farm and Green Oaks Creek Farm. There's a number of small farms with an interest in local agriculture, and they're really interested in it too, and convening and exploring supporting each other. And Dee Harley.<sup>38</sup>

**Lawson:** We're exploring more of that potential for incubating new farmers in the area, in collaboration with other organizations like the Peninsula Open Space Trust, which we can talk more about in relation to the capital campaign. But seeing the land-trust community and other existing private property owners like Gene and Donna in supporting that, the major step in new farm development is the access to the land. So creating that pool of affordable farmland for these new farmers is another aspiration of Pie Ranch and our work.

**Rabkin:** Tell me about your monthly work parties, barn dances, and potlucks.

**Vail:** Sure. Well, from the beginning we wanted to open up the farm to the public, [for them] to be able to come and have a tour, and take part in activities on the farm. We thought at first we'd do that every single week, but (sighs) that seemed like a lot. So we decided on this monthly rhythm of having a community work day that starts at 2 p.m., so people can still have their Saturday and then arrive anytime between two and five, or two and six, when the daylight hours or longer— whether it's harvesting wheat, or cutting firewood—just having people be able to come and take part in the activity on the farm. So we'll have people come from San Francisco, who've heard about us from Mission Pie, or Pescadero, or Santa Cruz. People will come. That ends with a potluck in the barn, followed by the barn dance.

There are kind of a lot of different threads that went into having a barn dance. That building was built in the thirties as a Brussels sprouts packing shed, and held dances. There's a photograph that we have (I think it might be on the website) of the barn with all of these wonderful cars from the forties, and there

was a dance there, Italian immigrant farmers gathered for a barbecue and a dance.

**Rabkin:** Now as you mentioned, the slice of land that Pie Ranch is on didn't have any buildings on it. So this barn—

**Vail:** The lower slice that the Peninsula Open Space Trust purchased—and we're launching this campaign to have it held by the nonprofit—this building is on that piece, right on the highway. It's a wonderful place for the farmstand, which exists now. When Jered and I got together at the Eco-Farm conference in 2001, Andy Wilson was calling the contra dance, and there was this moment when he said, "Dance like you mean it," and we had our hands together, and we're looking at each other (laughs). That's when, you know, we got together and fell in love, our romantic beginnings. Andy Wilson just happened to move in next door, down the road. He's a professional caller, does it for a living, is amazing. He's an incredible caller.

**Lawson:** Great skill.

**Vail:** Great skill in bringing people together to dance. So he comes. And I always played music here at the CASFS Farm with the Rolling Cultivators, and had an interest in continuing that. There are a number of other musicians involved in the nature awareness Riekes Center, wilderness awareness work. So we formed a little band called the County Line Pickers. It's a really great community event, and it's been extremely successful without a whole lot of advertising. We just put out our monthly newsletter now that announces it. But anywhere between a hundred and two hundred people show up every single time.



**Rabkin:** Has the nature of the event changed in any way since you initiated it?

**Vail:** Not really. We ask for money for it. We don't charge at the door or anything, but in the middle of the dance we'll pass around a hat and talk about it. But what has changed in that, is we've gotten better at contextualizing what it is that we're doing, kind of in the spirit of community supported agriculture. We'll share with them what we want to pay the musicians, and what we want to pay the caller, and what it takes to run this dance, just like a farmer would say what it takes to run their farm. Then the community responds with giving them money to do that. The last two times we've been successful in getting what we asked for. It takes \$1100 to pull off that dance once a month, and we got that the last two times.

**Rabkin:** That's to pay the musicians, pay the caller—

**Vail:** Pay the house.

**Lawson:** For the overhead, and the clean-up and set-up.

**Vail:** And so that's changed, just getting better at asking for what we want. And then, we've also developed this thing we call the soap box or apple box (laughs), where anybody in the community can stand up on the apple box and make an announcement, or share a concern, or talk about the Farm Bill, or whatever it is that is somewhat connected to— We encourage people to keep it connected to sustainable ag.

**Lawson:** I think I would just add that [just as there are] unintended consequences of the educational program, having to do with the personal and social benefits of farm-based education, doing this community barn dance is this other kind of

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unintended cultural benefit that we weren't— I mean, maybe it was intended, but we didn't really know the extent to which it was desired or wanted, and it's been amazing to get the kind of positive feedback from the community, to have a place to come together and dance together. You see a barn chock full of people, from young kids running around, up to seniors, with such grins on their faces from ear to ear, laughing hysterically, having this wonderful time. There are few places for that to express itself in that way. You go to Santa Cruz or San Francisco, and there really isn't a place to do that in this way, that's led with live music and with somebody like Andy who is helping to orchestrate it. So it's, to me, an example of what we'd like to have people have more in their lives.

**Vail:** Yes, and I think of how we want to have a connection to agriculture. In the human race there's this traditional connection to agriculture. There's also the connection to celebration, and celebrating the harvest. That's a huge piece of it. It's in our blood to want to be joyful and celebrate something that's real, like growing food, and coming together around food and eating it together. Winona La Duke wrote something about that, and also Wendell Berry. I remember reading that we went from a culture that danced together, going from hand to hand, looking at everybody in the eye, to a culture that danced in pairs, to a culture that danced by yourself. Not like there's anything wrong—because I like dancing by myself too. (laughs) But what was lost in our culture when we stopped dancing all together?

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## Community Work Days

**Rabkin:** In addition to teaching community members about farming, or giving them a little bit of experience of what it's like to get their hands dirty on a farm, do your community work days actually provide some useful labor for you?

**Vail:** Yes, they do.

**Lawson:** Very much so. I mean, sometimes it's—like we could have brought the combine through the wheat, so in that sense it's maybe not the same kind of utility that I think you're referring to.

**Vail:** Well, like when we had to braid all the popcorn to hang it, that is a really labor-intensive thing. It takes a long time. So having a big group of people sitting around braiding the popcorn that we needed—

**Lawson:** That's a good example. We wouldn't necessarily do it, if we didn't have the community.

**Rabkin:** So it enables you to expand your efforts in certain directions that you wouldn't be able to without a group of willing workers.

**Lawson:** Exactly, yes. And then there are some things like firewood— Yes, it's an incredible help to have many hands doing something that we would have to do ourselves, and make for longer days. I think people enjoy that opportunity to work outside. They may not have a woodlot in their backyard in the city. (laughs) And sometimes it's just a giving on their part, and oftentimes they'll get something in return, but it's non-monetized, in the form of compensation.

### Green Oaks Ranch: Reaching for a Second Slice

**Rabkin:** Tell me about Green Oaks Ranch and your efforts to acquire and restore and make use of it.

**Lawson:** We wanted to be able to reach out to the passersby on Highway One. The original idea was a pie stand on Highway One. So we inquired with the person who was managing the ranch if we could lease the barn by the road to do the farmstand, pie stand. We'd always driven by the whole thirteen acres, because you have to drive—the road is just south of the property. It's a long property, long and narrow, and the road goes along the south side of that. We'd look over and see these historic buildings. It was under absentee ownership for many years, and [we] thought, oh, someday it would be wonderful to be in a position to be involved in the restoration of that property, but we really weren't thinking of it anytime soon, or, if it would be even possible. But we knew at least we'd like to see if we could lease the barn by the road for the farmstand. We found out that we couldn't do that because they were about to show the property to a couple of interested buyers. The landowner was looking at dispossessing the property. We, of course, got concerned that, not only would we not be able to do the farmstand, but any long-range vision of being involved in that property would be lost.

At the time we didn't know that the intention of the previous owners was to open it up as a public park. It had been gifted to the county of San Mateo by the Steele family. It was Catherine Steele, who was a schoolteacher, and her husband, Will Steele, who was the grandson of Isaac Steele, who was the one who initially made the ten-year lease with the option to purchase the 10,000 acres that were a part of the old Rancho Año Nuevo—18,000 acres that started the

dairy back in the 1860s. So the heart of that 10,000 acre dairy operation was this Green Oaks Ranch farmstead. And then other Steele family members came and were a part of the development of the dairy on different parcels. That thirteen acres was what remained of the heart of the ranch, and Catherine had given it to the county as a way of keeping that heart open to the public.

**Vail:** And her husband, Will's, dying wish in the house, was that the house and the surrounding lands be preserved for the public to come and breathe the air of the Pioneer West. That was his dying wish. So she gifted it to the county.

**Lawson:** And then the county was unable to maintain it and restore it to the level at which Catherine had expressed—which they had agreed to do. And so, it was decided by Catherine just to get it back and be able to sell it. At least if it wasn't going to be realized, that vision, then she would at least be able to have the resources that were available. And her son, as well, Warden, was interested in the monetary benefits of the sale over just seeing it just get underutilized, and in her eyes, unappreciated by the county.

So when we learned that, it was just like, oh, my God, here's this affirmation of the vision that we'd like to introduce to the site, and mount the effort to restore the buildings and utilize it as the center for Pie Ranch's educational programming, and fulfill the wishes of the Steele family. Since then, we've learned more about the history of the property, and all these amazing archival documents. Catherine collected and maintained this collection of wonderful Steele family documents and photographs that are in the Special Collections at Stanford [University]. And we've gone a few times to look through, and a couple of times to actually make copies of photographs and documents to be able to

integrate into the campaign to preserve it. But we had only three months to come up with the purchase price of 1.25 million dollars.

**Rabkin:** (laughs)

**Lawson:** And didn't have that amount of money. And the miracle— It was going to take longer than three months, and so we invited and encouraged POST to step in as a partner, an interim partner.

**Rabkin:** This is the Peninsula Open Space Trust.

**Lawson:** Yes. They are a long-term partner as far as conservation easements are concerned, but an interim partner as owner, in order to make that acquisition possible. So we assigned the right for them to purchase, with them assigning the right for us to purchase it back in the form of a purchase option over a three-year period. We've just met with them recently to negotiate an extension of that while we continue to mount the campaign. We're in the throes. The property, in a way, and its urgency for acquisition, catalyzed our organizational development as well. We knew we were going to have to form a board of directors for our own non-profit, but we certainly needed it for the effort to mount this campaign. We just had a board meeting last night, and we have weekly campaign cabinet meetings, and a bi-monthly larger capital campaign cabinet, in an effort to pull in both human and capital resources for the acquisition, restoration, and stewardship of that historic property.

**Rabkin:** Anything you want to add, Nancy?

**Vail:** It's such an incredible opportunity. When we got Pie Ranch we didn't know this was going to be an opportunity. And every day driving by and

looking at it was becoming more and more interesting. When Pie Ranch originated, we didn't know Mission Pie was going to happen; we didn't know the Green Oaks Ranch would come into being. Having studied history and loving history—I love the history of the Steele family. I love the history of the Ohlone people that lived on the coast. One of the largest populations was in that area, because of the rich resources there. It enriches the educational programming when the students come, because it's not just about farming. It's about history. It's about the cultural and natural history of the area. And being across from the Año Nuevo State Reserve where there's these elephant seals. There're mountain lions that walk through the property, bobcats. And yet, we're close to these urban areas. It's such a vital place.

**Rabkin:** And are the two of you involved in trying to raise capital for this purchase, or is that mostly the Peninsula Open Space Trust's work?

**Vail:** The way we divide things up is Jered is focusing on the campaign, and I focus on more of the educational programming, and then we both are focused on the farm. Jered and others, Karen—

**Lawson:** And then our board president is the chair of the campaign, and our co-chair—we're looking for another person to work with her in that leadership role. So I personally am involved in all of the meetings and efforts to generate interest. We're right at that point where we've come close to finalizing all of the collateral necessary for the campaign, all of the materials that we'll need to share with prospective donors and foundations that would make the acquisition, restoration, and stewardship possible. And we've begun asking—internally of ourselves, we feel like the whole team, the board and the cabinet, and us, staff—

have to demonstrate a contribution to the campaign. So that's underway, and once we've all fully made our pledges, then we feel like we'll be in a better place to engage the other prospective donors in making contributions.

And we have hired, as well, somebody who is much more adept in managing capital campaigns, and has experience with running them. Mary Schmidt from Firehorse Development is our capital campaign director, and her partner Sira is involved as well.

And then Sky DeMuro came to us, another one of those kind of interesting serendipitous encounters that's probably worth including in the oral history. She was visiting farms this last winter, and we were right at the point where we knew we needed more people involved in the campaign. We had just talked about, it would be good to get somebody who can work part time as an assistant to Mary, who is doing more of the campaign management from the farm base—everything from database, to managing the responses, thank you's—all the kind of things that are necessary for the campaign to function on that kind of an office level. And Sky walked onto the farm on a Friday for a farm tour, was intending to leave to go back East to work at Drumlin Farm. It's a long-standing educational farm associated with Massachusetts Audubon. She was about to leave on the Monday, and we learned that she had managed the capital campaign, a 3.2-million-dollar capital campaign, for Mass. Audubon's restoration of a lot of old buildings, and new interpretive materials and signs, and stuff like that. And then we learned that before that she had spent three years in development with Farm Aid, managing the website and events with Farm Aid, a big concert and— And before that had done development work at Harvard. We



thought oh, my God—and she wants to be a new farmer. It was like, “Oh, my God, you can’t leave!”

**Rabkin:** (laughs)

**Lawson:** (laughs) We got some goat cheese and some wine and sat out in the pasture and talked about, what would it take to get her to stay. And she didn’t leave. Two months later she ended up going back just to get more belongings, but she’s the only one living, right now, in the old house that needs a lot of work and attention. So it’s kind of appropriate that she’s interested in helping to fundraise for it. But she’s going to be spending actually a bit more time— She’s still helping with the campaign, but she’s really inspired about the farming side of it. So that will continue to grow for her as well, and we’ll be pulling in more help. She’s been a tremendous, early-on asset in the beginnings of campaign organizing.

### Reflections

**Rabkin:** Great story. Well, looking back on your experiences to date with Pie Ranch, what do you feel most proud of?

**Vail:** (pause) That’s a hard one, to pick just one thing. I really feel proud of the whole effort. It’s so wonderful to be able to sit here and tell this story. So thank you for that opportunity. Just everybody involved in it, and the passion and the belief in it, and the risk-taking to go for something that’s bigger than ourselves. I feel proud that we all believe in it enough to be doing it. I’m going to have to think about that a little bit more.

**Lawson:** I get pretty excited about—like just before arriving today, there was an intern, Jessica, who is going to potentially stay on to do some research around soils, soil fertility. That’s the thing that comes to mind. I get excited about the cropping system that we’ve developed at the ranch, with the integration of the animals, that has promise as far as a model for diversified, small-scale production that—

**Vail:** —can keep more of the resources on the farm. The animals providing fertility.

**Lawson:** Yes. It’s not a new concept at all. In fact, it’s very much an old—the tried-and-true methods of fertility management on farms. But it’s something that in the organic farming movement and our specialization of cropping systems that are more “efficient” to be able to farm in these ways for market-driven production methods. Since we’re more of an educational farm, we’ve had the kind of luxury, in a way, to be able to looking at developing systems that are still on a market scale, in that we have products that we are vending at the farmstand and through the pie shop, but [at the same time] taking a little bit more of a risk, because we didn’t have to rely completely on the markets as a way to cover the lease fee, or the mortgage on the property, and our salaries aren’t, the income that we’ve begun to generate isn’t solely based on the sale of produce. We have the income from the educational programming. We have had the freedom to develop this production system that I believe has promise to scale up, so that those who want to just be farming and not necessarily combining educational programming—it could end up being an economically viable model for a new form of organic farms, or a new-old form, because we are trying to apply new

methods of rotation and movable animal systems that haven't necessarily been a part of the old, traditional systems of animal incorporation and integration into the cropping system. And not coming from a farm background, I guess that's where I get excited about it, because it's, for me, a meaningful part of my day now too. I get to celebrate that.

**Vail:** I just want to add that I think what I'm also proud of, or maybe most proud of, along with that, is the apprentices that we had this last year, they're staying for a second year. Two of them are staying. And one of their best friends is coming. The two best friends are interested in farming together, maybe starting a dairy. We developed this wonderful way of meeting once a week, sharing honey and millet, meaning sharing appreciation and concerns, having the opportunity to keep communication really clear and open, and making the work life sustainable at Pie Ranch. I feel like that was successful enough so that these people want to stay at the farm. That was really good, to have that mirrored back. It's definitely full, and a lot, and there's a lot of fine tuning we could be doing, but I feel like we're running pretty well, and there are good feelings between the people working together.

**Rabkin:** Jered, I wanted to follow up on something you mentioned about bringing in income through the educational element. How do you garner income through the educational programs?

**Lawson:** It's a combination of fee for service, and grants, and donations. So for those schools like the Urban School of San Francisco, independent schools that have funding already available through their school to do this kind of project-based learning, farm-based education, we charge. We charge what we would

also present to a foundation of what it costs to provide that kind of educational experience. So foundations have begun to support the work. And then, we just are in the process right now—in fact we have to pick up our envelopes at Community Printers today. We are sending out an end-of-the-year letter describing the fact that we'd like to double the amount of youth that come to the farm this next year, and that contributions from the community will help us do that. Fifty dollars, a hundred dollars.

**Rabkin:** So you guys are actually doing that fundraising work, too, both for writing foundation grant proposals and reaching out to the community for donations.

**Lawson:** Yes, Karen has done a lot of the grant writing in these last couple of years. We have new help in that arena. As another consequence of the capital campaign, we have a team that we are able to engage in program fundraising. But we're all involved in that writing and editing, and the board as well. So yes, it's one of the hats that we still share. It might get to the point where we can fully let go of some of these various responsibilities, but in the start-up we basically had to be the wearer of many hats. It's both fun, and challenging, and rewarding to be able to do all these various tasks necessary to get it up off the ground, but I think we're all looking forward to having the capacity to farm out the various—to begin to delegate and have a team, a broader team of people working with us.

**Rabkin:** Take off a few of those hats.

**Lawson:** Yes. And engage more people in jobs that are viable for them.

**Rabkin:** Great. If you were starting this whole project now, is there anything that you would do differently?

(long pause)

**Vail:** I'm not sure. Like, in the partnership agreement, some of the language—maybe we could have been more thorough with some of that in the beginning. I don't really have much to say.

**Lawson:** Yes, even that— Nothing has come up that has said that it should have been different.

**Vail:** Well, we're doing a little bit of catch-up, just on a personal level, a little bit of catch-up, like in the meeting yesterday with Karen, around feelings that came up along the way. Everything has been going really quickly, really fast. So maybe I could say taking care of our communication along the way could have been a little better. But we are spending the time now doing that catch-up. And maybe if we had talked too much along the way, we wouldn't have—certain things wouldn't have happened. Like, there's a certain amount of—"well, let's just jump in and go for it in order to get it going." You take that risk in maybe things not being quite as clean as they could have been, but— So I don't really have any regrets or— It still also feels kind of new and young, too. So maybe in ten years—

**Rabkin:** We'll ask you that question again. (laughs)

**Lawson:** "If we were to do it all over . . ." [mimics ancient voice]

**Rabkin:** (laughs)

**Vail:** (laughs) Maybe we wouldn't have done it. Maybe we would have gone to open a bed and breakfast in Costa Rica.

**Rabkin:** (laughs) It doesn't sound that way. At least not now. Are there any aspects of your current hopes, dreams, or visions for the future of Pie Ranch that you haven't talked about yet, that you'd like to share?

**Vail:** We're looking into a conservation easement on the upper slice, and building a home so that we're not living in a yurt forever. Even though we love the yurt, the kids will need their own space, I'm sure, or we will. I'm interested in, also, [preparing for] the long term, eventually when we can't do this work anymore, and we can sit back on the porch in a rocking chair—like, what's going to be going on? Taking our personalities out of Pie Ranch, and seeing it continue to grow—how will that relationship be between the upper slice and the lower slice, and the people involved in the rural and the urban relationships? Hopefully we'll have something in place that will be smooth for people to come into and take it over.

**Rabkin:** Anything you want to add, Jered?

**Lawson:** I want to focus on the old house and the redevelopment of the farmstead, and that vision of it hosting this, not just educational programming for Pie Ranch, but a real, genuine center for the kinds of both production methods that we're demonstrating, and cultural celebrations, and coastal organizational efforts to re-ruralize through good farming. All of those [are part of] the bigger vision for this site helping be another place for people to connect to food and farming and the social change we would like to see. I'd like to see, in the same vein as the Center for Agroecology [and Sustainable Food Systems] here, or Occidental Arts and Ecology Center, or other places where people and youth organizations can gain the inspiration and the skills to be a part of making

our part of the world a little better in its organizing how food gets from the farm to the table.

**Rabkin:** Great. Thank you. Is there anything that we haven't touched on that you'd like to address before we close?

**Vail:** I'm hopeful, with Obama coming into the presidency, [about] this work that we've been doing, which is very much about local communities, local food-system health, and now feeling the faith in a leader, Barack Obama. This work can ripple out, hopefully, and needs to—especially, as Michael Pollan so eloquently articulates, in how it connects the dots between health and environment, and foreign policy. Pie Ranch, hopefully, will be a place where some of that change work happens at the local level, but then it can also filter out into California, and the United States, and globally, seeing how food is the common denominator between all of these areas, and all people everywhere. I feel so fortunate that there's this sense of hope on a larger level, as we're doing this very local work, even though there's this huge economic crisis happening at the same time.

**Rabkin:** Well, thank you both very much, and thanks also to Karen. I'm sorry she couldn't be here, but I feel like her contributions and her spirit have been nicely represented by the two of you.

**Vail:** Good.

**Lawson:** Thank you, Sarah.

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Chadwick moved to Covelo, California, in 1972 at Stephen Decater's invitation to start a garden project.

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- <sup>2</sup> See the oral history with Paul Lee that is part of *The Early History of the UCSC Farm and Garden: Oral Histories with Paul Lee, Phyllis Norris, Orin Martin, and Dennis Tamura* (Interviewed by Maya Hegege, Edited by Randall Jarrell, Regional History Project, UCSC Library, 2003) <http://library.ucsc.edu/reg-hist/farmgarden.html>. See also the oral histories with Darrie Ganzhorn and Paul Glowaski of the Homeless Garden Project, both part of this series.
- <sup>3</sup> See the oral history with Maria Inés Catalan in this series.
- <sup>4</sup> See the oral history with Paul Glowaski in this series.
- <sup>5</sup> See the oral history in this series with JP Perez of JP Organics for an example of this kind of CSA.
- <sup>6</sup> See the oral history with Jim Cochran of Swanton Berry Farm in this series.
- <sup>7</sup> See Julie Guthman, *Agrarian Dreams: The Paradox of Organic Farming in California* (University of California Press, 2004).
- <sup>8</sup> For more about ALBA, see the oral histories with Maria Inés Catalan, Jose Montenegro, JP Perez, Maria Luz Reyes and Florentino Collazo, and Rebecca Thistlethwaite in this series.
- <sup>9</sup> See the oral history with Reggie Knox in this series.
- <sup>10</sup> See "Leaving Behind the Trucker Hat," *New York Times*, March 16, 2008.
- <sup>11</sup> "Just Food is a non-profit organization that works to develop a just and sustainable food system in the New York City region. We do this by fostering new marketing and food-growing opportunities that address the needs of regional, rural family farms, NYC community gardeners, and NYC communities." See <http://www.justfood.org/jf/>
- <sup>12</sup> Associations pour le Maintien d'une Agriculture Paysanne (AMAP).
- <sup>13</sup> See the oral history with Jim Leap in this series.
- <sup>14</sup> See the oral history with Orin Martin in this series.
- <sup>15</sup> See the oral history with Amy Courtney in this series.
- <sup>16</sup> See the oral history with Guillermo Payet, founder of LocalHarvest, in this series.
- <sup>17</sup> Slow Food Nation conference took place Labor Day weekend of 2008 at Fort Mason in San Francisco.
- <sup>18</sup> *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (Penguin Press, 2006).
- <sup>19</sup> *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life* (Harper Collins 2007).
- <sup>20</sup> *The Real Dirt on Farmer John* (2005)
- <sup>21</sup> From 1932 to 1968, Chisso Corporation, a company located in Kumamoto, Japan, dumped an estimated 27 tons of mercury compounds into Minamata Bay, causing mercury poisoning. —Editor.
- <sup>22</sup> Barbara Damrosch, *The Garden Primer* (Workman Publishing Company, 1988).
- <sup>23</sup> See the oral history with Orin Martin in this series.
- <sup>24</sup> See the oral history with Maria Inés Catalan in this series.
- <sup>25</sup> See the oral history with Jim Leap in this series.
- <sup>26</sup> Elizabeth Henderson and Robyn Van En, *Sharing the Harvest: A Citizen's Guide to Community Supported Agriculture, Revised and Expanded* (Chelsea Green, 2007).
- <sup>27</sup> See the oral history with Tim Garlarneau in this series.
- <sup>28</sup> See the oral history with Patricia Allen in this series.
- <sup>29</sup> <http://repositories.cdlib.org/casfs/tofg/>
- <sup>30</sup> See the oral history with Steve Gliessman in this series.
- <sup>31</sup> See Tara Duggan, "Bay Area Wheat Makes a Comeback," *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 10, 2008.
- <sup>32</sup> Gene and Monica Spiller, *What's With Fiber: Enjoy Better Health With A High-fiber, Plant-based Diet* (Basic Health Publications, 2005).
- <sup>33</sup> See the oral history with Dale Coke in this series.
- <sup>34</sup> See the oral histories with Amy Katzenstein-Escobar, Robbie Jaffe, Erika Perloff, and Gail Harlamoff of Life Lab, all in this series.
- <sup>35</sup> See <http://www.farmaid.org>
- <sup>36</sup> Francisco Jimenez, *The Circuit: Stories from the Life of a Migrant Child* (Houghton Mifflin, 1999).
- <sup>37</sup> See <http://www.locavores.com/>
- <sup>38</sup> See the oral history with Dee Harley in this series.