



Almond Festival >> C3



Ravine On Sixteen >> C5



Full Belly Farm >> C6



Tuli Mem Park >> D1



Capay Valley Gardens >> D2



Patchwork Farm >> C8



Séka Hills >> D6



Good Humus >> D5



Taber Ranch >> D8

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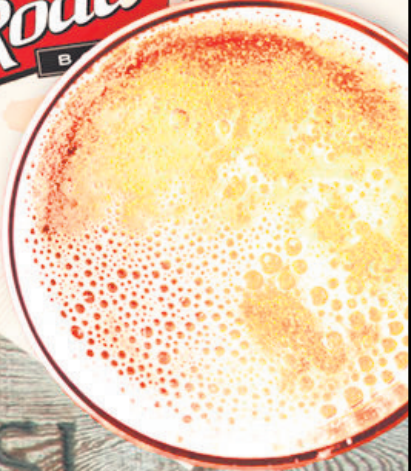
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DAILY DEMOCRAT ARCHIVES

Thousands of people visited the Capay Valley during the 100th anniversary of the Almond Festival.

Almond Festival celebrates a valuable Yolo County commodity

By Heather Kemp
hkemp@dailydemocrat.com

This year marked the 104th annual Capay Valley Almond Festival. Around 20,000 people typically make their way down scenic Highway 16 each February for this event, indulging in shopping and snacking opportunities while passing fields of almond trees in full bloom. The communities of Madison, Esparto, Capay, Brooks, Guinda and Rumsey take part in the day-long festivities — each offering their own attractions. It's not surprising that this celebration, the only of its kind in Northern California, is a longstanding tradition. The trees and the products they produce play a major role in the local economy. Almond meats were Yolo County's No. 1 commodity in 2017, accounting for over

\$115 million in gross sales, according to the most recent Crop Report. Almond hulls took the No. 17 spot at \$3.6 million. The weather is usually pleasant as tourists and residents from the region travel from town to town although mild heat or rain has occurred in the past. Everyone has their own take on whether it's better to begin the journey in Esparto and make your way up the valley or start in Rumsey and come back down, but the truth is it's fun either way. Esparto is the largest community involved and often has the most activities for attendees to enjoy. There is always a classic car show spanning a few blocks put on by the Madison Fire Department as well as live music, food, rides and craft booths to explore. In Capay, Road Trip Bar & Grill is always open and in



HEATHER KEMP — DAILY DEMOCRAT
There's always a line for the famous BBQ oysters sold by the volunteer fire department at Capay Valley Fire District Station 22 in Guinda.

Brooks, Seka Hills Olive Mill and Capay Valley Vineyards have wine tastings. Cache Creek Casino Resort is also nearby. Guinda Community Grange Hall is one of the more popular destinations, especially for those traveling with little ones.

A free petting zoo manned by members of Esparto-Capay Valley 4-H as well as pony rides are perfect places for a photo op. Vintage farm equipment is also set up outside the hall while vendors with goodies like jewelry, art and almond themed desserts are inside. Across the highway, lines form outside a Capay Valley Fire District station where the volunteer fire department sells its famous BBQ oysters. At Rumsey Town Hall, Full Belly Farm serves wood-fired pizzas made to order and kids can play on hay bales or take part in art projects. Inside the hall, there are more vendors and creations on display. New opportunities for adventure are added every year, so make sure to read The Daily Democrat for all of the most up-to-date details before your day at the Capay Valley Almond Festival.

WELCOME

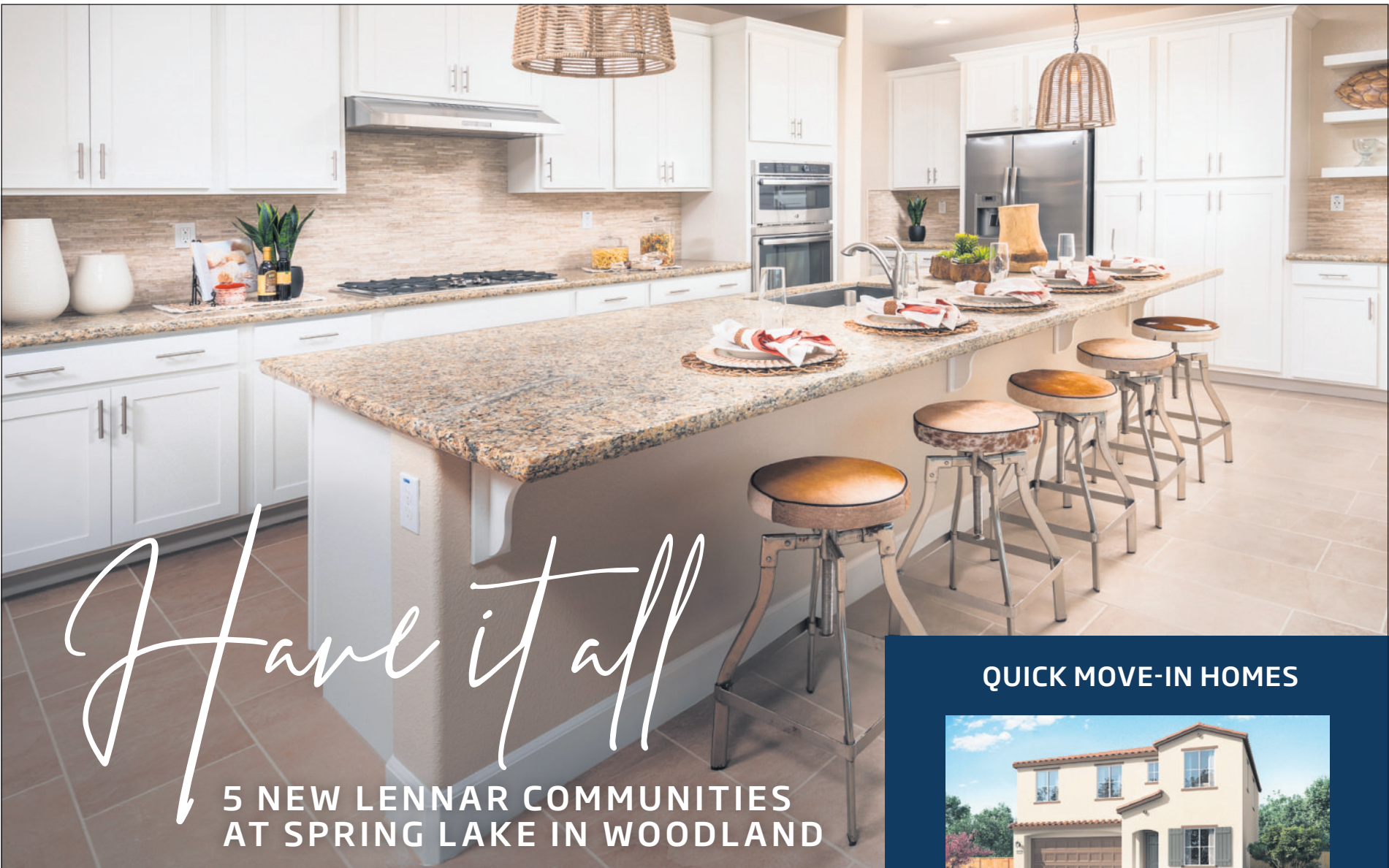
The Daily Democrat is publishing a series of “Focus” sections on neighboring cities and communities. In this fourth “Focus” section, the farms and businesses of the Capay Valley are being highlighted.

The Capay Valley includes a handful of unincorporated communities that neighbor Yolo County. Apart from the town of Capay, it includes Esparto, Rumsey, Guinda, Madison and Brooks. Each area is filled with agricultural beauty. This section delves into different farms and businesses that call Capay Valley home, including Full Belly Farm, Patchwork Farm and Good Humus. These stories introduce the people behind the products. The section also provides history on the region's flagship event — the Capay Valley Almond Festival. Each year this event draws thousands to celebrate the almond, which is one of Yolo County's top ranking crops. The festival itself celebrated 104 years this past February and based on the massive turnout, is sure to continue. This section will also touch upon the Cache Creek Casino Resort in Brooks. The resort is in the midst of an expansion, which will add 459 new rooms to the grounds. The multi-million dollar project broke ground in May 2017. In addition to the rooms, a pool, restaurant, additional meeting space and a multipurpose ballroom will be added. Located along Highway 16, across from the casino, is another endeavor taken on by the Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation — a tasting room. Séka Hills encompasses various agriculture products from the Tribe, including its signature olive oil and wine. This includes the five estate extra virgin olive oils, wines, honey, flavored nuts, beef, pickled asparagus and hummus. The tasting room hosts events and allows passers-by to try and buy their products. Please enjoy taking a trip through the Capay Valley in this section.



HEATHER KEMP — DAILY DEMOCRAT

The petting zoo outside of Guinda Community Grange Hall is one of the Almond Festival's most popular attractions.



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Cache Creek Casino Resort expansion nears completion

By Sarah Dowling
sdowling@dailydemocrat.com
@woodlanddowling on Twitter

Those who frequent Highway 16 have watched a towering structure adjacent to Cache Creek Casino Resort take shape.

Marking the next phase of development for the resort, located in Brooks, the new hotel will add 459 rooms and event space to accommodate guests who are now free to stay and play. There will be a total of 659 rooms at the resort once the expansion is complete.

“The expansion project continues to progress nicely,” explained Michael Traum, the resort’s communications manager. “The main focus now is on putting the icing on the cake in all areas of the project, so to speak, along with checking and double-checking all work and finishes to ensure it meets the high standards a project like this necessitates.

“There is still an ample amount of this type of work to complete, so we are not yet publicizing an exact timeline, though we can say the finish line is definitely coming into view,” he added. “As of the middle of June, we hope to be able to share opening plans in the coming few months.”

The \$200 million project broke ground in May 2017. In addition to the rooms, a pool, restaurant, additional meeting space and a multipurpose ballroom will be added.

“This expansion is an incredible opportunity for our entire community,” Leland Kinter, then Yocha Dehe Tribal Chairman, said at the groundbreaking ceremony. “We will finally be able to invite more of our guests to stay, saving trips on the road, and offer more rooms and amenities for our neighbors and



The Cache Creek Casino Resort hotel expansion project is nearing completion.



This artist rendering shows what the new Cache Creek Casino hotel will look like once completed.

other local visitors.”

The ceremonial “pave-ment breaking” took place on a small portion of the south parking lot, where the new building will rise. The expanded hotel will be built within the exist- ing developed footprint of the resort, on the site of the original casino and bingo hall.

“The expansion will help meet longstanding demand of many guests who want to stay over- night rather than drive home,” Traum said. “The addition of new rooms, an

event venue, and food and beverage spaces will en- hance the Cache Creek ex- perience, better serve our customers and be an at- traction for many Capay Valley visitors.”

The new hotel has cre- ated numerous new job op- portunities for the area.

“We anticipate a sig- nificant expansion in our workforce as well,” Traum explained. “As such, we continue to operate a cen- trally-located, off-site em- ployment center in Nato- mas, where prospective employees can apply for a

job immediately or find in- formation on what oppor- tunities will be available once the expansion staff- ing ramps up.”

In terms of other ex- pansion endeavors, Traum noted there are no plans for additional expansion projects in terms of square footage.

However, the interior of the existing building has undergone a substantial remodeling over the last year to match the look and feel of the coming ex- pansion area. The resort also recently completed a multi-million dollar up- grade and expansion of the spa, making it a must-see and experience space.

“Excitement continues to build by the day and we can’t wait to share the new project with the public,” Traum concluded. “It will truly be a first-class addi- tion to everything that al- ready makes Cache Creek so special in the hearts and minds of our guests.”

Contact reporter Sarah Dowling at 530-406-6234.

Popular visiting spots in the Capay Valley

By Jim Smith
jsmith@dailydemocrat.com

The Capay Valley is home to plenty of farms, wineries and other places, some of which are open to the public. Here is a list of those farms and vine- yards that would be fun places to visit.

Cache Creek Lavender Farms: 3430 Madrone St., Rumsey. The farm provides fresh lavender, soaps, lotions, essen- tial oil. Lavender thrives throughout Yolo County, but the farm has acres of the purple plants and the Mediterranean climate, so akin to its native habitat in southern Europe, makes lavender a popular low- water plant. The hours: Tuesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Call 796-2239.

Capay Valley Vineyards: 13757 Hwy. 16, Brooks. The winery produces not only wines but sparkling wines as well since 1998 and is responsible for the area having its own American Viticultural Area designation. All the wine is produced from sustainably grown grapes. Varietals include Viognier, Tempra- nillo, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Petit Verdot with the signature grape for the winery being Viog- nier, which was planted in 1998 when it was not widely known and is now the basis for “Yolo County Champagne.” All wines are estate, meaning they grow the grapes, produce the base wine, and ferment the sparkling all on-site using the Charmat method which lends itself to a crisp, clean, less yeasty product. The tasting room is open Saturday and Sun- day from noon to 5 p.m. Picnic tables are available to the public. Call 796-4110.

Full Belly Farm: 16090 County Road 43, Guinda.

The farm raises a diverse range of certified organic fruits, vegetables, fresh cut flowers, grains, sheep, laying hens, pigs, goats and cows on 450 acres. It offers comprehensive farm tours and child-focused experiences, monthly farm Dinners and free public open farm days. It also hosts private events year- round and the annual Hoes Down Harvest Festival in October. The farm stand is open each Friday from 2 to 5 p.m. Call 796-2214.

Manas Ranch: 25838 County Road 21A, Esparto. The farm produces apri- cots, cherries, peaches, apples, citrus, jam and all is grown on site. The store also sells Capay Valley grown produces, honey and nuts. Hours are 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., from June to October. People can view fruit sorting and packing from June through August. Call 787-3228.

Motroni Ranch: 23727 County Road 22, Esparto. The farm produces toma- toes, sweet red onions, vegetables, Mission figs, olive oil, almonds and walnuts. The farm has been in the Motroni family since the 1930s and its farm stand has been open since 2005. The farm stand operates from 8 a.m., to 6 p.m., seven days a week between June and October.

Seka Hills: 19326 County Road 78, Brooks. Seka Hills produces wine, olive oil, Balsamic vinegar, honey and sells other lo- cally produced items as well at its center near the Cache Creek Casino. The olive mill is open for tour- ing by appointment. The tasting room is open on the weekends and during some weekdays. Call 681-7420.

Contact reporter Jim Smith at 530-406-6230.

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QUESTIONS & APPETIZERS

The Ravine On Sixteen opens in Esparto

James Kinter is no stranger to the Capay Valley. He attended school in Esparto and has served as Tribal Secretary for Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation since 2012. His mother, Paula, owns Road Trip Bar & Grill in Capay and he had a hand in opening Séka Hills Olive Mill and Tasting Room in Brooks. Kinter's latest project, comfortable eatery and bar The Ravine On Sixteen, started serving customers in Esparto on July 5. The spacious establishment offers indoor and outdoor dining options for small and large groups and a diverse menu of American dishes. He recently sat down and told us about the experience of creating The Ravine On Sixteen and what people can expect.

Q Describe your restaurant's atmosphere.

A It's a full-service family restaurant with a full-service bar that's for the community. We're trying to do something nice here for Esparto. We're serving American-fusion so different kinds of foods like Italian dishes, a couple of Asian dishes, but mainly American food and some specialty drinks.

Q What is your specialty?

A We're doing a fried chicken which nobody really does anymore when you go to restaurants so there's that and then our pizzas are going to be amazing.

Q How did you come up with the restaurant's name?



The Ravine on Sixteen's menu features signature pizzas, burgers, wings and more.



The Ravine on 16 opened July 5 and has bar, tabletop and booth seating as well as a back deck that is opening soon.

Q Do you have previous restaurant experience?

A My family has owned restaurants for a while. My Mom owns Road Trip Bar & Grill, the tribe owns several in the casino and so we came up with this concept and I felt

WHEN YOU GO
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do it here because it's right in my backyard. This is about two and a half years in the making and so we went from the slab up as far as construction, building the business and getting everything in place.

Q How many people does your restaurant seat?

A Right now it's 110 seats. There's also a patio area in the back and a beer garden that's pretty large. We'll be able to host parties out there and do different activities.

Q Why did you pick this location?

A Esparto used to have a lot of different amenities when I was growing up and over time things have kind of gone away so I wanted to do something nice for the community and give them a place they could go and call their own. A place to hang out and gather so I wanted to

people will hopefully enjoy. One of the ones I like is the coconut mojito (vodka, coconut vodka and coconut puree with mint) that we're calling Monkey Business. For our draft beers we're going to be using some local breweries and some out of Sacramento and Southern California and local wines, but obviously people like mainstream drinks as well so we'll have that also.

Q When are you busiest?

A I'm thinking the busiest times will be Thursday and Friday nights from 6 p.m. to 11 p.m. We're going to be one of the only places open that late besides the casino, but a lot of the locals really don't like to go there at night so they have a place to come walk to now.

Q What's the menu's price range?

A I think we're looking at probably \$7 average with some prices a little high and lower.

Q What else should people know about The Ravine on Sixteen?

A We did this to make sure people had a place to come to because we care about the community and wanted to give them a place to gather and reunite. We're also trying to make a fun place for people to blow off steam with some music and DJs. A lot of my friends left Esparto because there was no work so we're hoping this will bring people back into the community and it will help people to think of Esparto as a place to invest and do business.

Questions & Appetizers is a Q&A styled interview featuring local restaurants throughout Yolo County.



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Full Belly Farm owner talks happy times, hardships

By Heather Kemp
hkemp@dailydemocrat.com

A longstanding member of Capay Valley’s agricultural community, Judith Redmond is at home strolling through the orchards and fields of Full Belly Farm.

She is a founding member of the 400-acre certified organic farm which has been in business in Guinda since the 1980s.

Growing up in Santa Barbara, Redmond wasn’t the ag expert she is today. Her love of the outdoors and interest in environmental issues culminated during her time at UC Davis and launched her into a socially responsible career she still enjoys decades later.

“I’m so glad things unfolded the way they did,” she said. “I think those issues of healthy drinking water, pesticide contamination, climate change and people’s health and nutrition are really relevant to being a good farmer.”

In addition to growing and marketing more than 80 kinds of crops year-round — including almonds, corn, tomatoes, figs, and winter squash — Full Belly also grows flowers and has animals living on-site.

“It’s unusual for a row crop fruit and vegetable farm to have a big livestock program,” Redmond explained. “We have egg-laying chickens, sheep and pigs. The sheep especially play an important part in our soil-building program so we think of their presence as critical not just because we can sell their meat, but because they’re recycling a lot of waste products from the farm and turning it into really healthy soil.”

Products are primarily sold within 120-mile radius both wholesale to restaurants, distributors and stores and retail at farmer’s markets and through the Community Supported Agriculture project.

Redmond’s main focus these days is the CSA (a



Full Belly Farm and Full Belly Kitchen are located at 16090 County Road 43 in Guinda.



Judith Redmond is one of Full Belly Farm’s founding members.

service that delivers produce boxes to households in the Bay Area and Sacramento on a weekly basis) as well as handling administrative work.

Another uncommon offering that Full Belly has is its internship program where about five people are invited to spend a year familiarizing themselves with different aspects of the industry.

With a chuckle, Redmond talked about a com-

mon misconception people have about farm life:

“I think when people visit us, they have a sense that it’s a pretty idyllic and relaxed existence but it’s actually a bustling, active, busy and kind of stressful business for a lot of people.”

Heavy rains this spring caused concern at Full Belly as some strawberries got moldy and some tomato varieties, apricot and peach trees were put at risk

for disease. Luckily, diversified crop types and staggered plantings give some production protections.

“I think farmers all over the country are starting to realize that these changing climate problems are pretty serious because the weather has been more than a problem for farmers than it used to be,” Redmond said.

Another “very significant problem” that has existed for several years now

is finding laborers, according to Redmond.

With a year-round crew of about 65 people, more workers are needed depending on the season.

“We’d love it if between May and October we could add another 60 people, but because of the shortage of labor, it’s really hard so we’re always shorthanded in the summertime.”

She chalks up the nationwide issue to current immigration policies and Mexico’s

“I think when people visit us, they have a sense that it’s a pretty idyllic and relaxed existence but it’s actually a bustling, active, busy and kind of stressful business for a lot of people.”

— Judith Redmond

improving economy. Redmond pointed out that paying staff is also getting more expensive in California.

“In agriculture when you’re growing fresh fruits and vegetables, labor is like 60% of your budget,” she said. “It’s a much higher ratio than many other industries.”

Events held at the farm give visitors the chance to check out what’s going on.

Upcoming Pizza Nights scheduled for Aug. 16 and Sept. 27 are an opportunity to take in the Capay Valley’s scenic beauty while sampling Full Belly Kitchen’s famous wood-fired pizza.

“Pizza Nights are super fun and we do tours,” Redmond explained. “There’s no price for entry or reservation needed. People oftentimes bring a blanket or their own picnic and just hang out. There’s usually live music too.”

The 31st Annual Hoes Down Harvest Festival, a day dedicated to honoring and promoting ag arts and sustainable rural living through education, is happening on Oct. 5. Thousands show up each year to take part in workshops, listen to live music or take their kids to the children’s play area. Proceeds are donated to statewide and local organizations and are used to fund scholarships at Esparto High.



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California farmers see organic veggies go ‘more mainstream’

Capay Organic is no longer an ‘organic niche’

By Kevin Hecteman
Ag Alert

When Thaddeus Barsotti's parents launched Capay Organic in Yolo County in 1976, they were mainly looking for a place to raise a family away from the city. What they started was a family farm that is now in its second generation and 43rd year, with Barsotti and his brothers Freeman and Noah at the helm.

"When it started, it was a movement," Barsotti said of organic farming. "It was really a more holistic approach to producing food and participating in a food system."

Now, "organic is not a niche any longer," he said. "It's really becoming more mainstream."

While the number of organic growers in the state is relatively constant, farm-gate value has more than doubled, said Jane Sooby, senior outreach and policy specialist for California Certified Organic Farmers.

The recently released 2017 Census of Agriculture shows 3,335 California farms producing organic crops and commodities, up from 3,008 in 2012. In that same half-decade, sales jumped from \$1.36 billion in 2012 to \$2.8 billion in 2017.

Sooby noted that carrots and garlic have seen large increases in production. Carrots jumped from 9,274 acres in 2017 to 21,223 acres last year, according to CCOF figures, while garlic rose from 1,638 to 4,893 acres during the same timespan.

In total, CCOF data from September 2018 shows nearly 2.6 million acres of certified organic acreage in California, of which 227,748 are planted to vegetables. Nearly half of that — 109,997 — comes among "assorted vegetables," including beans, lettuces, onions, peas and potatoes.

Yolo County has been part of that organic trend. Although the revenue had fallen in 2017, there is still a lot of money coming in, according to the 2017 Crop Report. That report showed in 2017, organic production generated \$49.989 million, compared to \$58.863 million in 2016 and \$51.173 million in 2015.



Thaddeus Barsotti runs Capay Organic in Capay with his brothers. Thad's parents started the farm in 1976. The taller crops are cover crops in a field planted to tomatoes in 2018; the young plants are this year's heirloom tomatoes.

Countywide, organic commodities ranked No. 4 among the top 20 commodities, coming in behind wine grapes at No. 3, processing tomatoes at No. 2 and almonds at No. 1. Almonds brought in \$115.020 million in 2017.

Barsotti planted this year's crop of heirloom tomatoes in late March. He'll soon start preparing ground for fall vegetables, using most of the summer months to "solarize" the fields.

This is a process of organic weed control that begins with soaking the soil and covering the field with a thin sheet of plastic. He'll leave the plastic in place for June, July and early August.

"That plastic, with the hot sun and the moisture in the soil, will heat up (to) 150 degrees, sometimes higher," Barsotti said, adding that the temperatures "are high enough to kill weed seeds" in the top couple inches of soil.

"You take the plastic off right before you plant, and then you're planting into a clean bed," Barsotti said.

Fall-vegetable planting should take place in August and September, he noted.

Barsotti grows many crops in small quantities for Farm Fresh to You, Capay's community-supported agriculture operation, which sends boxes to people's homes. Farm Fresh to You customers like to buy locally and in season, he said.

"In the wholesale world, we have a vegetable lineup that's year-round of kales, chards, radish, bok choy, a

whole mix," Barsotti said. "So that's a big line for us. That market's been tough the last few years, but it's been good the last few months."

Farmers thinking of switching over some or all of their land to organic encounter a years-long process.

"The first thing you do is pick which field you wanted to be organic," Barsotti said. "Then you would find an organic certifier."

CCOF, based in Santa Cruz, was launched in 1973 and was the country's first such organic certifier. Barsotti serves on the board of directors.

Sooby said helping new organic producers negotiate the process is one of CCOF's specialties.

"In general, your certifier will help you, tell you what you can and cannot use in your fields," Barsotti said. "You get a list of all the permitted materials, and there are organic fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides, fungicides."

The field then must be farmed for three years using only these materials before it can be certified, he said; in the meantime, crops grown in this field must be sold as conventional.

"The easiest way to do it is to bring the certifier in when you start that process," Barsotti said. "They come out and look at it every year."

Organic and conventional growers face many of the same issues in relation to employment, water and the regulatory environment — what Sooby calls "cross-

cutting issues." She said she has spent a lot of time and energy on irrigated-lands issues lately.

"The one-size-fits-all water regulations that we're seeing are not a good match for organic producers who use inputs that tend to not have the same environmental impact as conventional production," Sooby said. "We're seeing our growers having to fill out the same paperwork, even though they're not using the inputs that are of concern."

"Conventional and organic farming is 80% the same," Barsotti said. "I'm arguably more regulated than a conventional farmer."

As with many other farmers, Barsotti said he's worried about having enough people on hand to do the work needed at the farm (see story).

"Typically, organic products require more hand labor," he said. "If you want to have a good labor force, you have to keep them year-round. Otherwise, they leave."

Barsotti said he partners with a labor company that plans for a year's worth of work. The employees focus on Capay when needed and take on other jobs when Capay is not busy, he noted.

One commodity conventional and organic farmers should focus on more, Barsotti said, is storytelling.

"I think California farmers, organic and nonorganic, need to do a better job talking to the public about what a good job we're doing," he said.



PHOTOS BY JIM SMITH — DAILY DEMOCRAT
Sherri Wood in her recently renovated barn at Patchwork Farm in Capay.

Patchwork Farm owner experimenting with culinary lavender plants

By Heather Kemp
hkemp@dailydemocrat.com

Sherri Wood has been living her dream for two years as a "FarmHer."

She left city life in San Francisco and a job in non-profit management behind to start a lavender farm in Capay after visiting the valley for its annual Almond Festival and falling in love.

Patchwork Farm is a 28-acre property located at 20472 County Road 79. While six acres of lavender fields are flourishing now, Wood had to rid her land of diseased 30-year-old almond trees before using it for her intended purpose.

Wood started off by growing aromatic lavender but has expanded her project to include 3,000 culinary lavender plants in the last year.

"Culinary lavender matures earlier than the aromatic and are smaller plants," Wood explained. "They're two-thirds of my plants and it's going well."

She's begun to use her lavender to make baking mixes and manufacture an herb blend. Woodland's Zest Fresh Pastry West has started using her product on its focaccia bread.

As of September, Patchwork is also a certified organic grower, which Wood considers a "big achievement."

The FarmHer recently renovated a 1930s redwood barn which is being used as a workspace and will be filled with thousands of lavender bundles as they are assembled.

She also adopted her first dog, a Welsh terrier named Capay, to help keep the go-phers away and installed a barn owl box.

Wood leases parcels of her land to fellow agriculture enthusiasts so they can live their dreams as well.

"Laura Reynolds decided not to renew her lease, so now I have 17 acres leased to Matt Shiffra and he's growing garbanzo beans," Wood said. "Every day I watch these rows of green get taller."

Shiffra has a three-year lease and the market on organic garbanzo beans cornered as there aren't many people who offer that around the Capay Valley.

For selling her own goods, Wood said she wanted to make sure she could successfully grow plants first as she had no background in farming. She's starting to focus more on selling now that she has "proof of concept."

Future plans include maintaining her lavender plants, which have 10 to 12-year lifespans and bringing awareness to culinary lavender.



There are approximately six acres of lavender fields at the site.



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JIM SMITH — DAILY DEMOCRAT

Children from Esparto were some of the first to swim in the new Tuli Mem pool in Esparto that was completed earlier this year, just in time for summer.

Capay Valley keeping cool at Tuli Mem Park

By Heather Kemp
hkemp@dailydemocrat.com

Capay Valley residents are splashing the summer heat away at Tuli Mem Park.

The 8.7-acre aquatic and recreation center opened at 17257 Yolo Ave. in Esparto with a ribbon-cutting ceremony in May.

“Tuli mem” roughly translates to “swim park” in Patwin, a language spoken by members of Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation, one of the many groups involved in the 19-year effort to complete the project. Others included the county, Western Yolo Recreation Center Association, the California Department of Parks and Recreation, Esparto Unified School District and YoloArts.

A youth baseball/softball field, a soccer/football field, a full outdoor basketball court, a walking trail, a central gathering area with picnic tables, leisure pool, eight-lane swimming pool, an aquatics building with restrooms and changing rooms, indoor and outdoor showers and a meeting room are among the facility’s amenities.

Trini Campbell, a member of the Western Yolo Recreation Center Association



PHOTOS BY HEATHER KEMP — DAILY DEMOCRAT

A blue heron graces the outside of the Tuli Mem Park and swimming pool in Esparto.

who worked tirelessly to make the park happen for almost two decades, was the first to hop in the pool when it became available to the public for the first time on Memorial Day weekend.

“This space has become a place for children to learn how to swim, a place for water aerobics, playing fields for youth sports games and practices, a gathering place for picnics and family celebrations and open space for

outdoor recreation and exercise,” Campbell said previously. “For our region, this beautiful park is the accomplishment of a lifetime that we will share as a community.”

Woodland YMCA oversees regularly scheduled recreational swim, adult lap swim and water exercise sessions at the center.

Featured throughout the grounds are pieces of art commissioned for the project. The Tuli Mem Gate,

composed of two circular arches made from stainless-steel pipe connected by sheets of Cor-Ten steel, sits in front of the main building. A blue heron sculpture sits near a pedestrian walkway on the side of the building.

Although it took such a long time to get the ball rolling, a groundbreaking was held at the site just over a year before it opened.

The project stayed in its \$8 million budget including



A basketball court as well as soccer field are among several ways children and adults can spend time outdoors at the Tuli Mem Park.



Hundreds of people attended a grand opening ceremony for the Tuli Mem Swimming Pool in Esparto.

the \$6.7 million construction contract, according to the county’s public information officer. A total cost

likely won’t be known until August when all bills are in and final accounting is complete.

Progress continues on Esparto Community Health Connection Center

By Heather Kemp
hkemp@dailydemocrat.com

Several major steps toward opening RISE, Incorporated’s Community Health Connection Center have taken place in the last year.

The center will be located across the street from Tuli Mem Park in Esparto on a 1.64-acre par-

cel on the corner of State Route 16 (Yolo Avenue) and County Road 21A recently purchased by Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation. The building will have a medical, dental and vision clinic and serve as RISE’s headquarters.

A project 15 years in the making, new developments include the tribe approving a construction proposal

and Winters Healthcare coming on as the healthcare provider.

“The RISE Community Health Connection Center was designed to be a community connection center where residents can access quality health care, social services, youth development programs and more. It will transform our region for genera-

tions,” said Tico Zendejas, executive director of RISE. “RISE looks forward to its new partnership with Winters Healthcare and the services that together we will provide for our community. RISE and Winters Healthcare both focus on building relationships with the individuals we serve and are jointly committed to mak-

ing the new facility a shining model of service delivery for our rural communities.”

Yocha Dehe Tribal Chairman Anthony Roberts commented on the partnership.

“We are so glad RISE came to us because this is exactly the type of impactful project Yocha Dehe had in mind when it

created Doyuti T’uhkama to ensure the benefits of gaming boost our community,” Roberts said. “We are incredibly proud to be able to do this. Because of our three decades of successful partnership with RISE, and Cathie and Tico, we have no doubt it will be an incredible success and become a powerful local resource.”



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Capay Valley hides blissful gardens in plain sight

By Jim Smith
jsmith@dailydemocrat.com

Those seeking a relaxing getaway can find it in the garden spots of the Capay Valley.

Every year a number of gardens are highlighted with proceeds benefiting the gardens as well as projects in Esparto and the Capay Valley overall.

Projects such as the Will Baker Native Plant Garden, enhancement of the Guinda Grange and Rumsey halls, and other events all benefit from visitors.

This year, seven gardens across the Capay Valley were featured and although we couldn't get them all, we found those we did visit to be delightful, soothing and full of fragrances.

Here are the gardens we visited. (Oh, and if you're anxious to see them for yourself make sure you call ahead.)

Cadena Farm and Garden

17570 County Road 86, Esparto. Ramon and Lucy Cadena purchased in the land in 1971, but it's said to be over 100 years old. Sitting on a beautiful 26-acre parcel, at the cusp of the Capay Valley, Cadena Farm grows fruits, vegetables, nuts, flowers and herbs. Now in its 48th year of operation, Cadena Farm is still tended by the Cadena Family.

The flower beds and rose bushes were hand planted by Lucy Cadena. Ample photo opportunities await, so bring a picnic and enjoy the almond orchard or the shade of our giant mulberry tree. Sale items include; adult beverages, dried goods, fresh fruit and fresh vegetables.

Polestar Farm

25491 County Road 21A, Esparto. Polestar Farm is a 12-acre property nestled at the mouth of the Capay Valley. Acquired in January of 2018, it is a family owned and run operation, tending to over 750 Royal Blenheim



PHOTOS BY JIM SMITH — DAILY DEMOCRAT

A miniature pomegranate tree in bloom at Hayes' Garden near Esparto.

apricot, 500 Elegant Lady peaches and various fruit and citrus trees. The owners invite the community to meander their bountiful property and enjoy newly planted gardens.

Hayes' Garden

16586 County Road 87, Esparto. A roomy 150-by-160-foot parcel, adjacent to an almond orchard. Join in a stroll through the spacious garden, filled with a rose and lavender border, perennial beds in both sun and shade, xeric plantings filled with grasses and native perennials, grape arbor and fruit trees. Sometimes



People walk among apricot and peach trees at Polestar Farm in Esparto.



Children play among fruit trees at Cadena Farm and Garden near Esparto.



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Roses line walkways at Hayes' Garden outside Esparto.



Flowers bloom in an old bathtub at Cadena Farm.



An antique iron forge now houses succulents at Cadena Farm outside Esparto.



Ground cover provides cooling shade for birds and other wildlife at Hayes Garden, which is adjacent to an almond orchard near Esparto.

Gardens

FROM PAGE 2

there is also a selection of potted plants for sale ranging from grasses, perennials and California natives.

Garden at Good Humus Produce

12255 County Road 84A, Capay. Established in the Hungry Hollow area in 1984 by owners Jeff and Annie Main, this 20-acre organic farm grows flowers, herbs, fruits. Flowering trees and shrubs, native hedgerows and Australian Beefwood create borders, leaving central areas for vegetables, flowers and the stone fruit orchards.

Bring a picnic and walk the paths to find the perfect spot for lunch. Sale items include plants, fresh flower bouquets, jams, jellies and dried fruit. Park along the road.

Patchwork Farm

20472 County Road 79, Capay. Patchwork Farm is the realization of Sherri Wood's lifelong dream, planted during childhood, nurtured across the years, and, finally, brought to life in 2017.

At present there are over 8,000 lavender plants in two varieties; so come and relax, refresh your spirit, and refine your knowledge of all things lavender. The owners invite people to roam through fragrant fields, enjoy a picnic with a fresh lavender beverage, and play a round of bocce. Then, browse our selection of dried bundles, sachets, essential oils, and refreshing hydrosol sprays.

Winter Creek Ranch

18080 County Road 70, Brooks. The owners invite people to the gardens created by a botanist, plant lover, and teacher of Culinary and Medicinal Herbs.

Favorites of the owner include the California na-

tive perennial shrubs, bulbs (Narcissus, Daffodils, Sparaxis, Allium), roses (mostly own-root old fashioned fragrant ones), and herbs (parsley, sage, rosemary, thyme, bay, tarragon, mints, Echinacea, etc.) The property changed from a thoroughbred cattle stud service (1950s) to a walnut orchard (1980s) and now is transitioning to an olive grove.

Pharm Schaer

7840 County Road 49, Guinda. A startup farm of specialty, culinary and medicinal plants, the garden around the house is also in renovation of hardscape and softscape.

One new feature is a hedgerow of California Natives that goes around most of the farm. Watch out for the farm animals, there are kittens, dogs and chickens. The homeowners often have handmade goat milk soap and sponge loafas for sale.

Contact reporter Jim Smith at 530-406-6230.

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COURTESY

Around 800 Yolo County students have swapped their classroom desks for fields in the Capay Valley as a part of a program called “Go Visit A Farm!”

‘Go Visit A Farm!’ program lets kids be farmers for a day

By Stacy Grow
Special to The Democrat

Around 800 Yolo County students have been swapping the classroom for a new setting: a local organic farm.

Students from Woodland, Esparto, Davis, and West Sacramento have been visiting farms in the Capay Valley, thanks to a grant program called “Go Visit A Farm!” run by local non-profit Yolo Farm to Fork and sponsored by Raley’s.

Students visit either Full Belly Farm in Guinda, a 400-acre diversified organic farm; or Fiery Ginger Farm, a one-acre organic urban farm in West Sacramento.

The two farms may differ in size, but each field trip combines similar elements. Students take part in farm exploration, interactive discussion, and hands-on farm activities that incorporate school curriculum topics and make farm-to-table connections.

Every student participates in a harvest activity and are encouraged to sample the produce they harvest. Other activities might focus on identifying parts of a flower, growing vegetables at home, pruning and car-

ing for a fruit tree, keeping livestock, vermicomposting with worms, or recognizing beneficial insects and birds.

Hope Sippola of Fiery Ginger Farm says her goal is to show visiting students “what it is like to be a farmer for a day.” This includes planting, harvesting, and packing vegetables, tasting greens, and learning about the on-site egg-laying chickens.

At Full Belly Farm, Director of Outreach and Education Haley Friel says two highlights of their farm visits are when students tend the newborn piglets and gather freshly laid chicken eggs.

“Some students bravely reach under the chickens to grab the eggs,” she says. “Others have even seen eggs being laid right before their eyes.”

Friel says by visiting a working farm, the students learn “where their food really comes from and all the effort and energy that goes into bringing it to them.”

According to Friel, young people are often surprisingly detached from our food system.

“Even students that live in more rural areas are often disconnected from the real-

ities of our food system and have no context or connection to it,” states Friel.

She credits the farm visits for providing “engaging, exciting experiences” that help students connect to the food they eat and spark “curiosity and interest in the agriculture they depend on.”

Fostering this connection is a prime reason Yolo Farm to Fork created the “Go Visit A Farm!” program six years ago.

President Suzanne Falzone explains, “We’ve been doing farm visits from our very beginnings in 2012. We want kids to experience where food originates and how it grows. We also want to acquaint them with our county’s rich ag heritage.”

With about 800 students participating each year, the program has made close to 5,000 farm visits possible since its inception.

Funding for the farm visit grants comes from Raley’s. Some of the farm visits conclude with a trip to a nearby Raley’s grocery store. There, students see how food harvested at nearby farms can be purchased and taken home by customers, completing the farm-to-fork cycle.

Capay Open Space Park still a work in progress

By Jim Smith
jsmith@dailydemocrat.com

It’s been a long time coming, but a project first proposed back in 1996 could become reality by late 2019.

The work is part of an overall upgrade of Capay Open Space Park. Yolo County and its partners the Yolo County Resource Conservation District and Cache Creek Conservancy received a grant from the California Nature Resources Agency for improvements to the Capay Open Space Park in mid-2017 for the work.

The park is located at 15063 County Road 85 outside of Esparto.

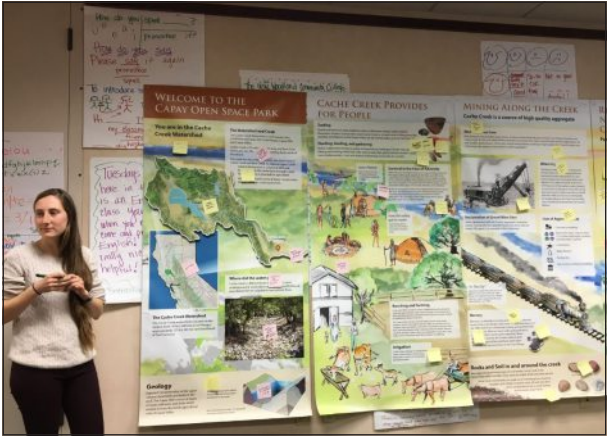
This grant allows the partners to initiate creek and grassland habitat restoration, and install new park signs and interpretive panels highlighting the history and natural landscape of the area, according to Gina Martin, office manager of the Cache Creek Conservancy.

Restoration work includes planting native grasses, flowers, trees, and shrubs in the park to make it more enjoyable for people and provide better habitat for wildlife.

The grant also includes funds for interpretative signs, which underwent a final review several months back and are in their final stages of being completed. With luck, they could be unveiled as soon as the end of July or early August.

Funds are from the California River Parkways Program, a state program for the acquisition, restoration, protection, and development of river parkways. Yolo RCD and the Cache Creek Conservancy began work on this grant in winter 2017 and will continue through spring of 2020.

Grassland habitat enhancement will include pollinator planting on a



COURTESY

Interpretative panels are one element of changes planned for the Capay Open Space Park near Esparto. After a public meeting earlier this year, work on the panels could be completed within weeks.

Restoration work includes planting native grasses, flowers, trees, and shrubs in the park to make it more enjoyable for people and provide better habitat for wildlife.

half acre and management techniques such as burning to promote native species, encourage nutrient cycling, and improve soil health. Yolo RCD also will spearhead almost five acres of riparian habitat restoration and enhancement and four acres of oak savanna restoration.

The Conservancy will assist with the restoration and enhancement by organizing community planting days. The Conservancy also is leading the effort to create and install new park signs, a trailhead map, and the kiosk panels near the parking lot.

“Currently, the kiosk

panels are empty, and we want to provide park visitors information about Capay Open Space Park and the area,” says Nancy Ullrey of the Cache Creek Nature Conservancy.

The general topic areas for the kiosk panels include the regional and geographic context, natural and human history, information about ecological function and restoration of the area, and the role of gravel resources. There are plans for the Conservancy to offer some of its outdoor education programs at the park in addition to the community planting days.

Capay Open Space Park opened in 2008. The 41-acre park site was donated to the County in 2004 by Granite Construction, which operates a nearby gravel quarry.

This site is considered the northern gateway to the proposed Cache Creek Parkway, part of the County’s Cache Creek Area Plan under the Cache Creek Resources Management Plan.

These plans originally were written in 1996 and are still being updated.

Contact reporter Jim Smith at 530-406-6230.

Cache Creek Conservancy

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Good times at Good Humus

By Sarah Dowling
sdowling@dailydemocrat.com
@woodlanddowling on Twitter

For husband-and-wife Jeff and Annie Main, their interest in farming stems from their days as UC Davis students.

However, neither studied agriculture. Instead, they were introduced to the concept through communal living with other students.

Annie recalled having a big garden out back to learn from and the students bought produce for the community in bulk, giving her a taste of the business.

“It was a huge part of our college education so to speak,” Annie recalled. Both she and Jeff also have roots in agriculture with prior generations going into the profession.

Fast forward to 2019, Annie and Jeff are now considered pros, growing their Capay Valley farm Good Humus, for more than 40 years.

The 20-acre operation grows more than 60 crops, including stone fruits, vegetables and flowers. They also make wreaths for different holidays and produce their own line of jams and jellies.

“We do a lot of different things but not a lot of any one thing,” Annie explained previously.

While Good Humus has been a Capay Valley staple for years, the farm’s roots trace back to Davis.

As students, Jeff and Annie helped found what are now the Davis Food Co-op and the Davis Farmers Market — the couple remain fixtures at the market to this day, putting their products on display.

While the farm has been doing well as a whole, it has not been without its challenges.

Like many California farmers, the drought put stress on businesses and the environment.

“Yes drought was a huge concern, we depend on wa-



Annie Main of Good Humus wraps flowers for a customer at the Davis Farmers Market.



A look at some Good Humus row crops. The farm has been providing organic produce to the region for decades.

ter for our entire farming operation, and we depend on our well for all of that water,” Annie explained recently. “The level was definitely going down during the drought.”

However, this year’s wet winter brought with it other issues.

“The wet winter/spring meant that we could not get our normal late winter planting in the ground

in Jan/February so we did not have crops to sell during the late spring,” Annie explained.

The wet spring also meant that they could not get onto the ground to turn

over and prepare beds for spring planting.

“We could not transplant our summer veggies that were in the greenhouse until very late, which meant that we will not have pep-

pers, tomatoes or eggplant until mid to late summer,” Annie added. “The heavy rains actually did damage to our citrus crop-our late oranges rotted on the trees.”

This had a “huge impact” on Good Humus during the spring which “is notorious to be a tough time anyway,” according to Annie.

Specifically, the business took a financial hit in terms of lost product and delayed planting.

Weather is just one issue. Annie explained that the decline in the economy has been a huge challenge. People have started to grow their own gardens, which should be a good thing, but it also takes away from local farms.

Likewise, as the minimum wage continues to rise, small farms might not be able to keep up.

“Labor is difficult,” Annie explained. “You really want to take care of the people that are taking care of you.”

Thinking back, Annie noted that the Capay Valley has had a surge in organic farms over the years.

“A lot more are people doing what we are doing,” she said. “You can feel pretty alone out here, but to know there are others doing what you are doing it is great. That you have people to fall back on or talk to about the issues.”

Organic farming has become more mainstream, Annie added.

“I feel like the education of people and what we are doing and the value of what we are doing in the last 10 years, people have come to recognize the value of it,” she concluded. “It is fabulous.”

Asked to give her advice to aspiring farmers, Annie emphasized flexibility, a strong work ethic and a supportive community.

For more information, visit goodhumus.com.

Contact reporter Sarah Dowling at 530-406-6234.



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Land Trust protecting Esparto walnut orchard

Democrat staff

Another Yolo County farm with significant agricultural value has been permanently set aside for agriculture.

“Thanks to the efforts of the owners, Jim and Claire Haag, and the Yolo Land Trust, the Haag Walnut Orchard has been placed into an agricultural conservation easement that will keep the farm permanently in agriculture,” Lynnel Pollock, president of the Trust, reported.

“Claire and I are delighted to have completed this project with the Yolo Land Trust,” said Jim. “Our 70-acre farm is just north of Esparto. By placing a conservation easement on our walnut orchard, we are able to attain our goals of ensuring that it stays forever in agriculture and also provides a refuge for wildlife and plant diversity.”

For the Haags, protecting the agricultural productive capacity of their orchard forever is a dream fulfilled, according to Pollock.

“We have to conserve it now for those who come after us, generation after generation,” said Haag.

Funding for the conservation easement project was provided by a grant from the State of California Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program.

SALC is the California Strategic Growth Council program administered by the Department of Conservation.

“We are proud to support a program that reduces harmful greenhouse gas emissions while also supporting local farms and

farmers around the state,” said Louise Bedsworth, executive director of the Strategic Growth Council.

Additional grant funding was provided by Yolo County, the John and Eunice Davidson Fund, and PG&E.

The Haags also made a significant contribution to the Yolo Land Trust to complete the transaction, according to Pollock.

“Permanently conserving prime farmland is one of the most important things we can do as a community,” said Pollock. “We are delighted and honored to have worked with Jim and Claire Haag and the funders to conserve this farm. Besides growing walnuts, the orchard provides habitat for a variety of wildlife that will continue to thrive.”

The Haag’s have been employing innovative agricultural land conservation strategies on their farm for 40 years, according to Pollock.

“Their farming practices have attracted thousands of loyal customers who buy delicious fresh walnuts from the farm via the internet,” she added. “Besides selling off-site to the local Yolo community, the Haags developed an online customer base located throughout the United States and Canada, with customers in Japan and the United Kingdom as well. They also ship their ultra-pure walnuts to parents of allergic children who participate in a doctor-supervised ‘Introduction to Nuts’ treatment program.

Over 30 species of birds have been identified among the native grasses,



COURTESY

Another Yolo County farm with significant agricultural value has been permanently set aside for agriculture thanks to owners Jim and Claire Haag and the Yolo Land Trust.

hedgerows and shrubs the Haags have cultivated on their farm.

The Haag Walnut Orchard will remain privately owned and on the County tax rolls. No further public investment will be required to keep the land in agriculture or for the annual monitoring by the Yolo Land Trust.

The Land Trust was founded 30 years ago and remains dedicated to conserving Yolo County’s land resources.

Thus far in its history, the Land Trust has helped landowners place conservation easements on 65 farms throughout Yolo County.

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Taber Ranch offers a place to get away from it all

By Jim Smith
jsmith@dailydemocrat.com

One of the most striking things about Taber Ranch is the peace and quiet.

Located at the end of a somewhat bumpy, dusty road in the Capay Valley, the ranch has been remodeled and the setting could be out of Architectural Digest.

Yet, despite its modern appearance, the work done by owner Martin Armstrong is meant to let people get away for the day, have some wine, play a few games, enjoy some music or simply hang out.

The tasting room at the Taber Ranch Vineyard and Event Center has been remodeled by Armstrong and wife Lane into a lush setting where people can talk or just sit and think.

Taber Ranch, located on County Road 81, just off Hwy. 16 just outside of the town of Capay has been undergoing a transformation for the past 20 years, but it has been an evolving process that Armstrong says is still coming together and is nothing more than a continuation of history.

And while growth and change continue, the Ranch is nearly there, serving as a wedding venue and get-away for those who want a day or merely an afternoon of relaxation; or the opportunity to sip wine.

“The new tasting room broke ground in early 2017 and after two long years we are finally ready to share this remarkable space,” states Armstrong.

The tasting room is about the size of a wide-open, single-family home. It’s dominated by a long bar, surrounded by warm, darkly colored barnwood and beneath a ceiling of corrugated metal lined by plush chairs.

The tasting room, in turn, opens out to a slightly enclosed patio where people can taste still more wine or set up shop for specialty goods.

And the enclosed patio leads out to an open pa-



The wine bar at Taber Ranch offers locally produced wines in a relaxed setting.



Taber Ranch Vineyard & Event Center Tasting Room held a grand reopening earlier this year.

tio and wide grassy areas suitable for playing corn-hole or listening to bands. An area for weddings and other gatherings is farther up the hill, which at this time of year is bright green in color.

While the event center is the point around which people gather, the true stars of Taber Ranch are the grapevines.

Armstrong, who is originally from Fort Bragg, started putting the Event Center in place two decades past he says, by planting Syrah, Merlot and Tempranillo grapes.

Today there are 14 acres of vines including Sauvignon Blanc, Petit Verdot and Chardonnay “which we currently have bottled and Petite Sirah, Sangiovese and Zinfandel in their

infancy to eventually become a part of our book of wines.”

All the grapes are estate grown and hand harvested. Most are processed by Chris and Luciana of Turkovich Family Wines, which shares in the bounty.

Armstrong noted the opening of the tasting room “is truly the icing on the cake for us and we look forward to what is to come.”

The Ranch was established in 1867 by the Taber family who arrived in the Capay Valley by wagon train, migrating from the eastern part of the United States.

For over a century, the ranch has produced almonds and maintained livestock growing to a 500-acre property from its original purchase of 343 acres,



DAILY DEMOCRAT ARCHIVES

The new Taber Ranch Event Center in the Capay Valley offers a pleasant setting for parties, weddings or simply relaxing.

according to its history.

It has remained in the Taber family ever since, although it gentrified in a way as buildings aged and the land was put to other uses.

It was until the year 2000, the old sheep barn and mule shed began their transformation from dirt-covered animal shelters into the tasting room and other structures.

Over the next ten years, ponds and reservoirs were built, hilltops were leveled and the slopes terraced for grapes, two acres of Arbequina olives were planted, gardens and plant life matured and the barn is now used for dances and events.

The first wedding party had the barn surrounded by gravel with a couple of fancy outhouses in the back. Today, it has changed

into a versatile center, where people can come and tour or merely relax.

Armstrong reports that even nearby Cache Creek Casino is starting to see the significance of a quiet getaway, so guests there can step away and enjoy the scenery and sample the wine in quiet reflection.

Contact reporter Jim Smith at 530-406-6230.



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