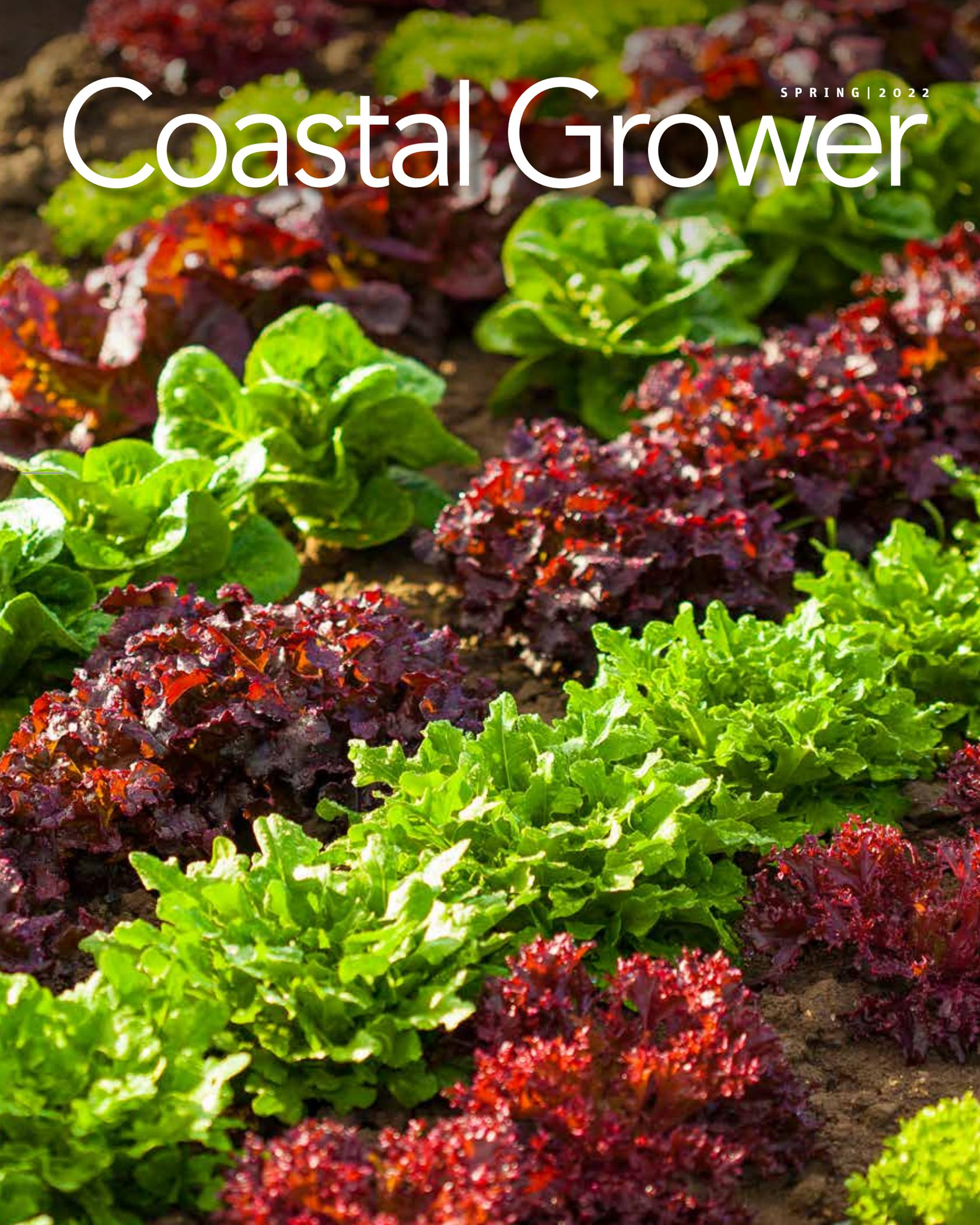


Coastal Grower

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IMPROVING OUR COMMUNITIES ONE PROJECT AT A TIME...

Ausonio Incorporated has been contracted by the Betabel Road Project to transform a former garbage dump into a vintage roadside attraction along Highway 101 in beautiful San Benito County. This project is unique in that it was inspired by Errol McDowell, a young man who passed away from a rare form of brain cancer at the age of 18. McDowell's parents purchased the property and are developing it through their charity trust, and all profits from the project will be used to fund pediatric cancer research.

This location is very special to the family because every week for 7 years they would pass by Betabel Road up Highway 101 to the Cancer treatment center in UCSF. This location was picked by their son and his dream project is now being built. Ausonio is proud to be a part of this project and encourages donations of any amount to further the research of pediatric cancer.

-WHERE TO DONATE-

The project was funded by a non-profit organization called **Canceragogo**

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<http://www.canceragogo.com/>

-MORE ON THE BETABEL ROAD PROJECT-

For more information in the project, the company and updates on the project, please go to :

<https://betabelproject.com/news/what-is-the-envisioned-betabel-project>



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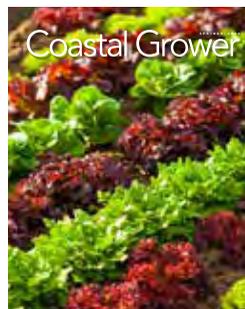
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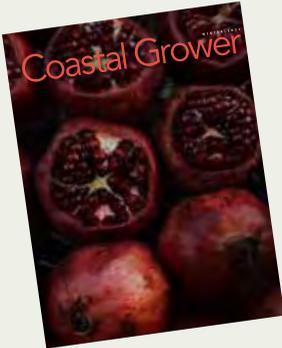


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NPD

It was my favorite meeting of the week and for someone who attended many meetings on a weekly basis—that’s saying a lot. It was our New Product Development meeting attended by various departments from sourcing, research and development, operations, sales, and marketing.

Creating new products was one of the favorite parts of my job—but considering the fact 80 percent of new products fail, it was not the easiest. So where do new products come from?

Sometimes it’s a matter of necessity (yes, it can be the mother of invention). At one time our company was cutting broccoli bunches and shipping only the dark green “florette” part of the vegetable to restaurants and grocery stores. This left the perfectly edible and delicious stem part of the broccoli plant going out the back cull shoot to feed livestock. Now, I love dairy cows just as much as anyone, but we asked ourselves how could we turn these broccoli stems into something more value added that would deliver a higher margin? After several trials and tribulations, broccoli cole slaw was born. It’s been a staple in retail markets ever since (and not to worry there was still enough plant trimmings left over to keep the cows happy).

Leveraging a trend is another way to include additional products into your line-up. At one time organic produce sales were growing in the double digits. Retail stores were opening that would exclusively sell only organic produce—so we took our most popular products and started offering them in both conventional and organic options.

Timing trends can also be key. Savvy sales and marketing departments follow consumption and diet trends closely. Low-carb, gluten free, Keto...all reasons you now see fresh vegetable options cut into shapes that mimic fresh pasta (cauliflower rice, anyone?).

Some companies have their own seed breeding programs, but we chose to partner with seed companies on introducing their newly developed varieties to consumers. One of my proudest achievements is introducing Broccolini® (a natural hybrid that crossed broccoli with gai lan, also known as Chinese Kale) to North America. We worked with the Culinary Institute of America and launched a public relations campaign to introduce an entirely new vegetable to the world. Its introduction made the pages of USA Today!

Then there’s a product we branded “Better Burger Leaf.” A beautiful round head of lettuce that combined the crunch of iceberg lettuce with the upscale, darker leafy features of green leaf. Restaurant operators fell in love with it, and we launched a retail version soon thereafter.

Yes, new to the world vegetables was one approach to new product development but making one of the world’s oldest

vegetables “new” again, is another. That’s what we did with Kohlrabi. Extremely popular in Eastern Europe we learned Kohlrabi was inexpensive to grow. A hearty vegetable with mild flavor and crisp texture, it became a popular “go to” item that was added to numerous vegetable blends (when cut into a swirl shape you’d think you were eating spaghetti).

Creating products for new meal occasions is another approach. One of our most popular products was our sugar snap pea. Consumer research showed most were eating the snap peas as a fresh, cold snack, right out of the bag. We created “Snap Pea Sensations” where we packaged the snap peas with flavored stir fry sauces. Now consumers were not only snacking on the peas during the day but cooking them for dinner at night.

While I like to think I have a pretty good batting average when it came to launching new products—given the statistics—I had a few strike outs as well.

There was our “Snacks on The Go” line...miniature tray packs of veggies with a ranch dip. Despite our best efforts we couldn’t get the products to a desirable price point at retail. Consumers simply weren’t willing to pay what we had to charge.

Kalettes®. A hybrid vegetable which is a cross between two very popular vegetables at the time: brussels sprouts and kale. Try as we might it was a bumpy road. The vegetable had an extremely long growing cycle and growers didn’t want to grow one crop in a cycle where they could usually grow two. The product was also for a very niche target of consumers—not enough volume and demand to justify the time and effort to grow, market and sell the item.

Perhaps the product launch fail that bothered me the most was our Veggie Mac ‘n Cheese line: fresh vegetable blends packed with noodles and creamy cheese sauce. The qualitative and quantitative research we did indicated the products would sell off the charts! It had a huge target audience (parents with young kids). They offered convenience, flavor and were so user-friendly even kids could prepare it themselves (mine loved it).

Yet, the product failed despite our best efforts. We did research trying to figure out why and consumers were not noticing them on the shelf or willing to pay the price.

I miss my “NPD” days and pay respect when I see new product launches that I respect and, admittedly, raise an eyebrow every once in awhile when I see new products that don’t make sense to me.

But to produce marketers everywhere...I encourage all of you to still step into that batter’s box. Sometimes you might strike out but every once in awhile you will get that base hit or, better yet, a home run. Just keep on swingin’.



Contributors



BILL HASTIE

Bill is the managing partner of Hastie Financial Group (HFG), a registered investment advisory firm. He earned a B.S. in Economics from Cal Poly, an M.B.A. in Financial Planning from Golden Gate University, and holds the Certified Investment Management Analyst® (CIMA®) and Accredited Investment Fiduciary Analyst® (AIFA®) designations



BRIAN MILNE

Brian Milne is a former journalist and sustainable ag advocate who has worked in the agtech industry since 2011.

He is currently the Vice President of Marketing and Communications for Holloway Agriculture. Founded in 1932, Holloway has expanded beyond being the trusted gypsum supplier of California's top growers, providing a host of other products and services — from soil amendments to agronomy consulting, to complete vineyard and orchard redevelopment.

To learn more about Holloway's sustainable, soil-first products and services, visit hollowayag.com.



JESS BROWN

Jess serves as executive director of the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau and the educational organization Agri-Culture. His community activities include past president of the Cultural Council of Santa Cruz County, Monterey Museum of Art, Cabrillo College Foundation and Community Foundation of Santa Cruz County. Jess served as chairman of Goodwill Industries for Santa Cruz, Monterey and San Luis Obispo counties. He served as commissioner of the Santa Cruz County Parks and Recreation Department. Currently, Jess serves on the board for Leadership Santa Cruz County, Santa Cruz Area Chamber of Commerce and chair of the Tannery Arts Center.



JENNA HANSON ABRAMSON

Jenna grew up in Salinas and returned in 2007 after receiving her B.A. in Mass Communications and Journalism from CSU, Fresno. In 2013, she founded the lifestyle website, Mavelle Style, to inspire other food loving, fashionistas and in 2016 she expanded her brand and developed Mavelle Media, a marketing communications boutique consultancy. When Jenna is not working on creative campaigns or blogging about being a stylish business owner, she can be found hiking, cooking, dabbling in photography or enjoying the Monterey County food and wine scene with her husband.



STEPHANIE BOUQUET

Stephanie is a registered dietitian and owner of SB Nutrition Consulting. She holds a B.S. in nutritional science from Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo and an M.S. in dietetics with a dietetic internship from Cal State University, Northridge. Since 1993 Stephanie has practiced in the field of nutrition with specialized board certifications in weight management, diabetes and sports nutrition. She offers individualized nutrition consultations, group style classes, athletic team presentations and wellness coaching services. As a native of Salinas, Stephanie returned to the area to raise her own family. For more information visit www.sbnutrition.net.



EMILY BASANESE

Emily is the Social Media Manager and Head of Community at Strock Real Estate in Aptos. At Strock, she loves writing the community newsletter, spotlighting local businesses on social media, and collaborating with community members. Emily has lived in San Benito County her entire life and currently lives within walking distance to downtown San Juan Bautista with her husband Josh. Outside of work, she enjoys thrifting furniture, wine tasting, and reading with her cat Archie on the window seat at home.



BEN HEINRICH

Ben is a well-known, highly regarded real estate expert on the Monterey Peninsula with 40 plus years of experience. Raised in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, he attended the University of Oklahoma where he met his wife, Carole. Ben has served as presidents of the Carmel Harrison Memorial Library Foundation and Monterey County Boys and Girls Clubs, and boardmember of the Carmel Bach Festival. Heinrich is committed to passive homes and sustainable construction practices, and is a leader in healthier homes and smart home technologies. He enjoys piano, gardening, reading, fly fishing, and golf.



MIKE HALE

Salinas native Mike Hale is a freelance writer who spent a long career in local journalism, working in various stints as both an editor and writer with the Salinas Californian, Santa Cruz Sentinel and the Monterey Herald. In 2014 he helped jumpstart KRML radio (94.7 FM) in Carmel, creating community-based programming for the “Locals Station for the Monterey Bay.” He is now semi-retired, enjoying traveling abroad and discovering new adventures along the way.



ERIN HIGHTOWER

Erin Hightower has been working in farm planning and agronomy for 13 years. At RDO Equipment Co., she works with team members and growers in the Northwest region, focused on education and training, and conducting field trials. She’s a regular contributor to CropLife.com and PrecisionAg.com, a Certified Crop Advisor (CCA), and Certified USDA NRCS Nutrient Management Planner, Certified Conservation Planner, and Comprehensive Nutrient Management Planner. Connect with her on Twitter @RDOErinH.



MAC MCDONALD

Mac McDonald was a reporter, columnist and editor of the GO! weekly entertainment and dining section for the Monterey County Herald for 22 years. He was also Managing Editor of the Carmel Pine Cone for seven years. He is currently a freelance writer and editor writing about virtually every subject under the sun, from music, art, food and sports to marketing and public relations.



PATRICK TREGENZA

Patrick operates a thriving commercial photography studio in downtown Monterey. Celebrating his 25th year in business, Patrick is proud that his list of clients and interesting projects continue to grow. Targeting the agriculture industry as being one of the most dynamic areas of local commerce, Patrick carved out a niche and is recognized as a leader in photographing food and produce. Most recently, he has expanded his repertoire to apply his lighting and compositional skills to live action video so he can accommodate the ever increasing demand for compelling web content.



SCOTT FAUST

Scott Faust is director of communications and marketing at Hartnell College. He joined Hartnell in September 2018 from Bemidji, Minn., where since 2012 he had led communications and marketing for Bemidji State University and its two-year partner, Northwest Technical College. From 2008 to 2012, Faust was executive director of strategic communications at California State University, Monterey Bay. Previously, he was executive editor of The Salinas Californian and El Sol, beginning in 2000, and also served as general manager of the newspapers and their related websites and publications in 2007-08.

Contributors



DOUG LARSON

As a Colorado State University alum and licensed California Pest Control Advisor, Doug Larson has close to forty years of experience in the Industry of Agriculture.

Through his years as a 4th generation Farmer and Rancher, Agricultural Educator, Irrigation Sales and Service Technician, as well as that of President & CEO of an international irrigation distribution company, Mr. Larson has developed a unique set of skills and experiences focusing on the use of precision irrigation systems, including drip irrigation technology, for the efficient and sustainable application of crop water.

Today, through his role as the Vice President of Sales at Ag Water Chemical (based in Fresno, CA.) Larson and team help producers better manage water quality to optimize irrigation system performance, profitability, and sustainability.



GINA COCHETTI

Gina is a licensed CPA with a master's degree in Taxation. She has worked at Hayashi Wayland for 26 years. Her background is steeped in the business of agriculture and taxes. She grew up raising animals, riding horses and worked at a flower shop before attending college to study agriculture and taxation. One of her best capabilities is decoding the mysteries of tax lingo and transactions and breaking them down into terms that anyone can understand.

She previously served as Treasurer for the Salinas Jaycees, Treasurer for Ag Against Hunger, Treasurer for the Spreckels Union Educational Foundation and is the current treasurer for the Palma School Foundation. Gina works with medium to large sized agriculture businesses, medium to large closely held businesses and high net worth individuals. She spends her time outside of work exercising, including running, biking, swimming, Crossfit, and golf.

Coastal Grower values the contributions of all our writers. Contributors wishing to be recognized are listed here. In some cases contributors prefer to remain unrecognized with a bio and photo, or prefer complete anonymity. In those instances articles are published with no recognition or attribution.



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Food For Thought

By Douglas Larson



As a lifelong Aggie, a former Ag Educator and fourth generation farmer / rancher, I realize that my passion for the agriculture industry runs deeper than most. I well know the difficulties involved in feeding a hungry nation...the long hours, the physical and mental exhaustion, the stress, the diversity of issues effecting each decision and certainly the risk. It's not an easy path, but one well worth walking. After all, the easy path is often not the most fulfilling nor rewarding path.

Truth is, although I have dedicated my entire career to this important industry, I am no longer a farmer or rancher. Fortunately, my work provides me the opportunity to walk fields of almost every imaginable crop farmed today. From time to time, I even get to help my son move cows, process calves, or perform some other on-farm duties. In fact, I revel in the prospect of working by his side and never turn down the opportunity to do so. The work is honest and fulfilling, the time with my son is irreplaceable and the memories of days gone by seem to roll through my mind like endless personal video clips.

I look back to my boyhood friends as we rode our bicycles carefree over boundless miles of dirt roads crisscrossing the coun-

tryside, playing in the surrounding tomato fields at seasons end picking over-ripened tomatoes left hanging on the vine and hurling them at one another in a messy makeshift game of adolescent tag. I remember sitting as a small boy on my grandfather's lap while he pulled a cultivator through an endless sea of corn with his Allis Chalmers tractor, count-

Through it all, the American farmer continues to assure that a bountiful and safe food supply is produced.

less hours of pinching flower buds in our hot muggy greenhouses, playing in a farm truck filled with wheat as if it were an enormous sandbox while my dad or grandad steered the combine back and forth across the golden fields of grain, riding herd in the mountains of Colorado over my summer breaks from college, the beauty of an early morning sunrise and the smell of freshly cut alfalfa in the wee hours of a summer morning. There is nothing like the feeling of saving the life of a calf whose mother wasn't quite able to accomplish the birth on her own.

I recall teaching my daughter how to pull lambs before she was even old enough to start school, as well as instructing my son on the lifelong skill of welding as a mere kindergartener. I remember teaching Ag in the classroom, all the while knowing that many of my students would likely build careers outside of our industry. Yet hoping to give them skills, opportunity, and valuable perspective of what is necessary to produce the food that sustains us all. Remaining hopeful that they would be prepared to become productive members of society, taking heart in the FFA Motto: Learning to Do, Doing to Learn, Earning to Live, Living to Serve.

Most of today's youth will not have these same types of experiences, as each generation becomes further removed from the farm. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, as of 2021, only 2.6 million people are employed in direct on-farm occupations. With close to 330 million people living in the United States, this results in an extremely small portion of today's youth having little or no real-life exposure to agriculture, let alone actually living on or visiting an active farming operation.

Today, as I drive through the gently rolling hills of California's Central Coast, north through the vine covered valleys of Napa and Sonoma, past the walnut groves and rice fields of the Sacramento Valley, down the 99 through the vast expanse of almond trees and scores of other crops grown in California's Central Valley, all the way down through the desert landscapes of the Coachella and Imperial Valleys, I think of the blood, sweat and tears that have gone into producing the food and fiber that this nation depends upon.

All the while, in the rear window of my pickup truck I display a small green sticker which reads "No Farms No Food". Do other drivers notice this sticker as I pass by? Do they ponder on the significance of that message? Perhaps they don't even give it a single thought. My hope is that this statement causes them to ponder, if only for a moment. To become cognizant of the farms and ranch-



rather than harvested due to a lack of demand. All the while, labor shortages strained producers beyond expectations.

Through it all, the American farmer continues to assure that a bountiful and safe food supply is produced. It only takes a short drive up the California Coast, through one of these productive valleys or to glance through an airplane window while flying over the mid-section of the country viewing the endless display of center pivot crop circles dotting the landscape below to understand that farming practices carry on day in and day out: that

producers remain steadfast in doing their part to assure that consumer demand is met.

I'm reminded of a sign just off the highway, not far from my home: "If you ate today, thank a farmer". Whether each of us is fed in abundance or in slight, American farmers continue to search for efficient ways to convert resources into life sustaining nourishment. Hopefully, supply chains will soon recover completely, normalizing market trends. In the meantime, the American farmer will likely continue to go on unnoticed striving to feed a hungry nation and world. ☪

es that they drive past. To think about our safe and abundant food supply and what must go into assuring its security. That the industry of Agriculture is an important part of this prosperous state and nation.

As I traveled from country to country over my career, I had the habit of entering local grocery stores to gain insight into the local food chain. With very few exceptions, I have found little that compares to the level of quality, selection and price that we experience here in the United States...a real testament to our producers, value-added manufacturers, transporters, as well as wholesale and retail outlets. We have an amazing system, and prior to 2020, something that most Americans likely never gave a second thought. A testament to its breadth and viability in and of itself.

Pre-pandemic, most grocery stores throughout the country had a continual supply of everything from fresh fruit to paper towels. Unfortunately, supply chain issues, labor shortages, fuel prices and a host of other factors have brought about interruptions to the market, especially in those early days of COVID as concerns about the possibility of limited supplies sparked consumers to purchase many necessities in bulk, causing disruption to historical supply patterns.

As schools and restaurants remained closed, there were further interruptions to traditional consumer demand. Meat products disappeared from shelves in short order, while some leafy greens had to be plowed under



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The Whole World in Your Backyard

By Emily Basanese



What if I told you that you could travel the world without buying a plane ticket? That in one day you could go to Tuscany, Nepal, and swing by the Bermuda Triangle before nightfall? Oh, and the best part — it won't cost you much. So these claims are 50 percent true — no, you won't actually be eating pasta and drinking wine in the Italian countryside. But, the cool thing about these counties? We can get real close.

In Santa Cruz County, there are several hidden gems that will have you feeling like you've left the States behind. We'll start in China...errrr, Aptos. At the Bamboo Giant Nursery, you'll feel like you're walking through a lush forest in Southeast Asia. This privately owned retail nursery has 15 acres of planted bamboo. They also assist in landscape design if you're in the market for a zen privacy hedge. Potted stalks are also available for purchase in one to 25 gallon sizes if you're looking for something smaller—or maybe you just want to walk through the rows of bamboo and pretend you're in the stunning forests of Asia.

Since we're already in China, it'll be a quick trip over to the neighboring country of Nepal. Hidden in the foothills of Soquel sits a

108 acre retreat and meditation center called the Land of the Medicine Buddha. This active Buddhist community hosts retreats, Dharma programs, and guided meditations. You can also stay overnight, book a massage, relax by the pool, or decompress in the sauna. For something more active, there are hiking trails that spider off into the 10,000 acre redwood forest that surrounds the facility.

There are several wineries that feel like they could be in the rolling hills of Italy...

I'll admit that not many people have "Bermuda Triangle" pinned to their "Travel The World!!!" Pinterest boards, but, if the opportunity is right in front of you—why not? Many people get lost in the Bermuda Triangle, but for us, it isn't too hard to find: The Mystery Spot. I'll never forget coming here as a kid and being amazed by gravity-defying displays. Wowing crowds since 1940, this spooky locale is as intrinsic to Santa Cruz culture as the Banana Slug or, dare I say, the Giant Dipper. Don't worry; there's no risk of getting

lost like the real Bermuda Triangle.

Monterey County has equally eclectic sites that feign international travel. We have to start in Carmel, which feels like a European community plucked from the outskirts of Paris or Amsterdam. Nearly every business is draped in European culture, but a few spots really dial it up to level 10.

The Tuck Box is a delicious brunch spot literally set in a French cottage, complete with whimsical roofline, asymmetrical door, and all of the Art Nouveau details you could want. La Bicyclette is another restaurant that captures European flavors in a romantic, moody atmosphere—at all costs, make sure you order the Cirtus Avocado Salad. Other highlights include The Little Swiss Café (obviously), the Pine Inn, for turn-of-the-century Europe, or any of the cobbled pathways that wind through town.

Now we're going to head south — way south. Down in Australia, there is a beach with beautiful monoliths jutting out of the sea called the Seven Apostles. Here on the West Coast, we also enjoy these gorgeous rock formations that are weathered by the waves. Several are littered down the western coastline of the country, and a particularly famous spire can be found in Big Sur. So, this isn't the Seven Apostles, but we could think of it as One Apostle. On Pfeiffer Beach, a massive rock rises out of the sand just off the shore. A "doorway" is famously notched into the center, carved out by years of relentless surf. During certain times of the year, you can watch the sunset through the doorway as it sinks into the Pacific.

From Down Under, we are going to jet over the South Pacific over to the Galapagos Islands. Though you may not discover any new species, you'll still get a similar thrill at the tide pools of Point Lobos. You never grow out of marveling at the thriving sea life that make these undulating puddles their homes—starfish, sea anemones, crabs, sea urchins. For a closer look, you can also snorkel or scuba dive if you can brave the cold waters.

In San Benito County, you can actually travel to Europe and time travel. The San Juan Bautista Mission will take you back to the late 1700s and will simultaneously transport you to Spain. Of the 21 California Missions, this is the 15th, constructed in 1797. It sits on the last remaining Spanish Plaza in California, right on the edge of the San Andreas Fault. The surrounding grounds have also been preserved as a state park, complete with a hotel, saloon, stables, and historic adobe buildings.

While we're over here on the Mediterranean Sea, we'll also make a stop in Tuscany. There are several wineries that feel like they could be in the rolling hills of Italy, but there's something about the terrain at Eden Rift that feels especially Italian. When

During this time it can be difficult to travel to other countries — but with some imagination (and a little wine), you can experience a taste of nearly every continent from home.

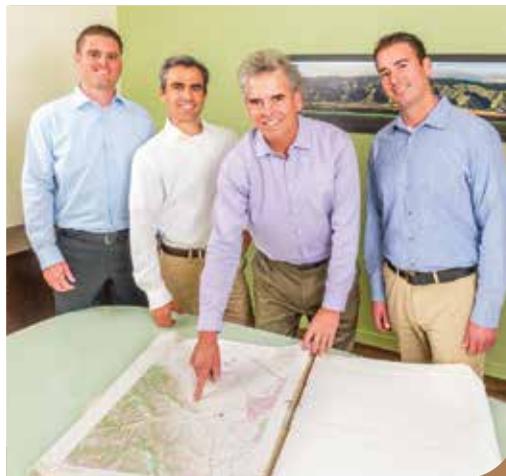
you're sitting in an adirondack chair on the lawn (wine in hand), it's the vineyards that spill over each gentle crest, the golden hills that wall in the secluded valley, and the onsite olive press that make you feel like you're in Italy. That press features an authentic granite mill that produces organic Eden Rift Olive Oil. Plus, this winery has something that most in Tuscany don't: you can attend an ATV tour through the vines, book a fireside tasting in the 1906 tasting room, or even fly in on a helicopter!



Our final stop on this escapade around the world is in the outback of Australia, two hours from the seaside city of Perth. Believe it or not, tucked into Nambung National Park sits the Pinnacles Desert. Here in California, our Pinnacles National Park is synonymous with towering pillars of rock that were formed by the San Andreas Fault and a pre-historic volcano. The Pinnacles Desert, how-

ever, is a flat spit of land with human-sized spires (some a little taller) that were formed by a receding sea thousands of years ago.

That concludes our international itinerary! During this time it can be difficult to travel to other countries — but with some imagination (and a little wine), you can experience a taste of nearly every continent from home. ☞



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Martin Vargas-Garcia

An agriculture journey inspired by creativity, fueled by dedication, driven by ambition

By Alison Hendry



When Martin Vargas-Garcia came to the U.S. at 18 years old, his first stop was the vegetable basket of the Salinas Valley, where he worked in the fields harvesting local crops and studying English as a Second Language (ESL) at night. In his limited spare time, the kid from Mexico City would wander around Old Town Salinas, where he became enchanted with photography, made friends, and started becoming entrenched in the agriculture community.

Two years later, still working in the fields and dabbling with his Minolta as a hobby, Vargas was shoulder-tapped for a seasonal opportunity in the production department of one of the largest seed companies in the country. He knew from co-workers that full-time opportunities came only after several seasons of hard work, so he set out to demonstrate his skills. “Imagine my surprise at the end of my first season when my boss, who would become my first industry mentor, came to me with an offer that would become full-time. To this day, I don’t know what he saw in me, or how we understood each other without a shared language, but that job launched my career in the

vegetable seed industry and my roots in the Central Coast,” said Vargas.

As a seed technologist, Vargas needed to understand and be able to communicate in English about seed pelleting, dry sizing, priming — all of the key processes involved in optimizing seed for planting. “I had never worked on a computer before, but order pro-

For someone with big dreams, advancing his education turned out to be an excellent choice...

cessing and dealing with technical data wasn’t the hardest part, it was English. There’s limited awareness of how hard it is to get started with another language; you’re so fearful about making an error or not being understood. To this day I credit a colleague who recognized my perseverance, and with a combination of phases, hand gestures, diagrams and checklists taught me not only how to do my job, but also to have the confidence to speak in English,” says Vargas.

While Vargas received a few promotions over the next few years, supervisory roles remained out of reach, as he received feedback that despite his strong work ethic, a university degree was required for management. So, in his 30s and with a young family at home, Vargas enrolled at California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB). He continued to work full-time while going to school, earning two double-major degrees simultaneously: Bachelor of Business Administration, Agribusiness Concentration; and Bachelor of Arts, Visual and Public Art, Museum Studies Concentration. In addition to the degrees, he was also recognized at commencement for his character, receiving the prestigious Alumni Vision Award for the graduating student who best exemplified the university’s vision of preparing leaders for a collaborative, multicultural society.

For someone with big dreams, advancing his education turned out to be an excellent choice, as another organization soon came calling with a managerial role in seed enhancement and safety coordination. Vargas would spend the next decade working with seed technologists from all over the world, channeling his learning, teaching and collaborating mantra to play a vital role in the continual improvement of conventional and organic vegetable seed quality for the U.S. market.

Seed treatments Vargas has worked on





provide millions of dollars in savings, as seed companies avoid needing to destroy thousands of pounds of seed affected by seedborne pathogens, and growers are spared major crop failure and/or the need to condemn infected fields or greenhouses, sometimes for years. With increasing availability of organic treatments for seed, the volume of fungicides used in California agriculture have been significantly reduced, helping to ensure broader access to fresh produce that's free of pesticide residue. "I'm pleased to have a small role in improving both the environment and the quality of fresh produce for people to feed their families and enjoy," says Vargas.

Seed priming, which is a proprietary process for increasing the rates of germination, seedling emergence and uniformity, especially in sub-optimal temperatures, is a particular area of interest for Vargas. He explains that coming up with the right recipe for a particular batch of seeds is an intriguing process that combines science, creativity and a dedicated team to run trials and data analysis. When this produces the desired results of faster-growing and consistently-sized plants, time-to-harvest is reduced, which can save growers a full week of nutrition, water and labor resources. "As a non-scientist, I lend my passion, curiosity and understanding of grower needs to help create tangible improvements to agriculture at a commercial level. It can be very challenging but it's also very rewarding," says Vargas.

To maintain inspiration, especially during the challenging times of COVID, Vargas is a

Clockwise from top left: 1.) Vargas featuring open field crops growing in the Salinas Valley. 2.) Vegetable seeds pre and post cleaning. 3.) Vargas's capture of workers harvesting local crops, as he once did. 4.) Mission San Antonio de Padua, part of Vargas's portfolio of images used to raise funds for reconstruction of Coastal California Missions.

great promotor of making time to enjoy personal pastimes and hobbies outside of work, which for him, is his photography. In the early days he took classes with Richard Green at Hartnell College and developed friendships with well-known masters, including Trini Contreras, Al Weber, Ken Cook and others. This led to an opportunity to work with some of them on a charitable initiative that created extensive photography portfolios of California Missions damaged by the San Simeon earthquake. Funds raised through the sale of individual photos went toward restoration efforts, helping to ensure the Missions remain part of the landscape today. "Although we all have differences, I think it's important to understand the history of our region, to learn from it, and

He continued to work full-time while going to school, earning two double-major degrees simultaneously.

to work together to make it better. It was an honor to participate in the Missions portfolio project, and I'm very proud of my contributions, especially the photos that now have a place in the Mission archives, and those that traveled to Europe and are now part of the Vatican archives," says Vargas.

Vargas's other works — including plays on light, layered images, unique long exposures and more — have been displayed at Hartnell College, the Monterey County Court House, the National Steinbeck Center, the Sunset

Center in Carmel and the Balfour/Brutzman Gallery and Student Center at CSUMB and at Sendai College in Japan. Through private collectors, his work has also been displayed in Brazil, France, Argentina and Canada.

The attraction of employment with high ambitions is part of what brought Vargas to Enza Zaden in 2019, as Seed Operations Manager, National Coordination Team member and Interim Safety Coordinator. Vargas is proud to work for the international breeding company that produces conventional and organic seed for the North American market, with head offices in Salinas. "While we're not all breeders at Enza Zaden, 'Breeding to feed the World' is the company's mission, and we truly believe in it. In everything we do we take our social and environmental responsibilities very seriously, and it's what inspires us to be the best of the best. I enjoy working with this group of highly supportive professionals, and the way we work to bring our experience, imagination and vision together in an ongoing effort to make things better," says Vargas.

His advice to industry newcomers in 2022 is to be curious and to understand that technological transformation in agriculture is happening very fast, and the human and environmental stakes are very high. There's a lot of opportunity for those willing to work hard, be collaborative and keep striving toward better solutions. While the competition is fierce, the industry is small, and everyone in it is working hard to deliver the best vegetables for humanity, and to leave our communities better than we found them. "Agriculture is a great thing to be a part of," says Vargas. ☺



Technology is Always Evolving in the Field

By Brian Milne, Holloway



“Technology is nothing. What’s important is that you have a faith in people, that they’re basically good and smart, and if you give them tools, they’ll do wonderful things with them.” -Steve Jobs

Needless to say, the agriculture industry has done some remarkable things over the years. Despite that agricultural evolution and ability to produce more food today than it ever has in our history, outsiders sometimes mislabel the ag industry as outdated and technophobic when it comes to its farming practices. But if you’ve actually worked in or followed agriculture closely the past couple decades, you’ve seen just how far technology has come on our farms.

Looking back at Holloway’s 90 years working in Central California, we see that technological evolution first-hand in our photo archives.

Back in the 1930s, 40s and 50s, Holloway spread gypsum and other soil amendments with pickup trucks that were outfitted with spreading mechanisms on the beds. By the 1960s and 70s, Holloway had switched to larger, commercial-sized spreading trucks, but the process of spreading amendments across a field or orchard really hadn’t changed that drastically. In fact, for the first 60 years, little changed with how we spread amendments here in California — other than the axle width and horsepower used. Then came GPS technology in the mid-1990s, which drastically changed the accuracy and precision we spread amendments with today, with little compaction issues or impact to the crop or soil.

In recent years, variable rate technology has allowed tech-savvy managers — equipped with field sensor data, aerial maps and other ag technologies — to apply inputs at different rates depending on soil type, soil/water/tissue analysis, and for different varieties. All of which has drastically helped improve soil and crop health while cutting down input costs, particularly in permanent crops.

Here’s a look back at how spreader technology has changed over the decades:



Holloway spreading gypsum over cotton by truck in the 1960s, when field crops were a dominant crop in Central California.



By the 1970s, Holloway was using larger, commercial trucks to spread gypsum in

specialty crop types such as almonds, fruit tree orchards and vineyards.

Today, spreader trailers are able to deliver amendments right along the tree row and irrigation lines.



Today’s tractors are also outfitted with precision GPS to ensure operators are efficient and delivering amendments exactly where they need to be for crop uptake.



You can read more about California ag history as part of Holloway’s 90-year anniversary celebration at hmhollowayag.com/90

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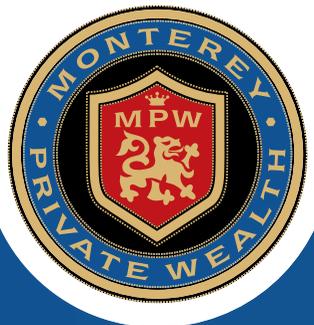
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Smart Homes

By Ben Heinrich



On January 9, 2007, the world changed — for homeowners, consumers . . . and businesspeople. Steve Jobs stood on the stage at Moscone Center in San Francisco and announced these famous words: “Today Apple is going to reinvent the phone.”

But it did much more. The iPhone not only revolutionized the way we communicate, but also the way we live, work, and play here on our beautiful central coast. And, it has spurred new technology, changing at an exponential rate, creating a virtual tsunami of innovation that is washing over our lives and families, at work and at home. This rapid development is both empowering and dizzying. It wasn’t always this way.

From the beginning of recorded history, human discovery and invention had proceeded at a very leisurely manner. The first industrial revolution upped the rate of innovation, but at a serene and steady pace that humans were able to handle.

For telecommunication, it was dramatic — but simple by today’s standards:

- On May 24, 1844, Sam Morse sent the first telegraph message from Washington D.C. to Baltimore: “What hath God wrought.”
- Thirty-two years later, Alexander Graham Bell summoned his assistant with the first intelligible voice transmission over wires, “Mr. Watson, come here, I want to see you.”

Up to the 1970s, technological progress was essentially linear and at speeds that we could comprehend and understand. As humans, we evolved over thousands of years in a linear setting, estimating straight lines between our location, food, and safety. We are not very good at comprehending radical change and when it goes exponential, we become anxious and disoriented.

Then Apple helped usher in the high-tech age! Barely a decade and a half later, we are living in a world of smart phones, smart homes . . . and very smart grandchildren! We now realize our cars are essentially computers

on wheels, and reluctantly our homes are becoming computers on a foundation. Most of us —homeowners and consumers — struggle to keep up, doing what we can to make sense of change so rapid it seems that the ground shifts under us every other week.

To thrive in an exponential world, we need context and grounding, anchors that enable us to see the world in a meaningful and reasoned manner and provide an architecture within which we can make relevant choices.

So, what happened to the sensible and even-handed journalism that we’ve always relied on to clarify and guide our thinking? Today, most technology information available to consumers is little more than manufacturer press releases touting their latest gadgets. We live in a product-centric world of journalism that focuses on features, technical details, and hype. There is no context, few anchors and little guidance

Home automation systems have become increasingly more sophisticated and are quickly adding to the range of technologies available for the homeowner.

available for thoughtful decisions — no consumer-centric perspective that focuses on individual differences in needs or lifestyles, or takes into account the physical parameters of our homes. If it’s new, you need it!

But there is a better way and together we will explore a holistic approach that puts the consumer at the center of decision-making.

The Smart Home Landscape has been changing at an almost exponential pace since the introduction of the smart phone in 2007. Home automation systems have become increasingly more sophisticated and are quickly adding to the range of technologies

available for the homeowner.

This marketplace continues to offer new gadgets and systems in a relentless manner — far outpacing consumers' ability to evaluate and make sense of what is in the best interests of their family and lifestyle. These new technologies are now being woven into the fabric of home ownership. Yet the information available to guide consumers is little more than marketing hype.

For the homeowner, the goal must be a process of thinking about their own specific needs...

What's missing is a practical framework within which informed evaluations and sound choices can be made. More and more consumers are looking for context, guidance and advice.

But how are we supposed to navigate in this new environment? All too often, we are introduced to smart home concepts through the lens of the latest gadget, perhaps a smart lock, or doorbell, or thermostat. I call this the “product-centric approach,” where the focus is on a specific gadget. Under this approach, homeowners are on the receiving end of the latest marketing campaign, and the body of information available tends to be no more than a collection of press releases and advertising.

There is a better way: a “consumer-centric approach,” a process of thinking about Smart Home products relative to how families really live, play and age. The gadgets are not the end result — contented consumers are!

Smart Home products will always be there, available as needed. For the homeowner, the goal must be a process of thinking about their own specific needs, grounded in a protocol that creates a sense of priorities, a roadmap for them to assess how they live, entertain and plan for the future — and how specific Smart Home features can support their unique family circumstances and lifestyles.

Heinrich Team's Smart Home Primer

To help families and homeowners navigate the



Smart Home landscape, we have developed The Smart Home Primer. Using research developed by Nobel Prize-winner Richard Thaler and discussed in his recent best-selling book, “Nudge,” we have developed a construct that creates the architecture for decision-making.

One of the daunting features of the Smart Home landscape is its sheer size and unorganized presentation. The Smart Home Primer provides homeowners with solid ground, a place to begin a process leading to smart decisions for their families.

But first, a few principles, definitions and highlights from The Primer.

What exactly is a Smart Home? — “A Smart Home is one in which the owner has explored the available technologies, chosen systems which make sense for their home and lifestyle and adapted those Smart Systems to their family's specific needs and preferences.”

Consumer-Centric Thinking — A process of thinking about Smart Home products relative to how families really live, play and age. For the homeowner, the goal is a mindful method of thinking about their own specific needs; creating a roadmap to assess how

they live, entertain and plan for the future; and how specific Smart Home features can support those goals.

The Primer allows you to organize your thinking from your point of view. It helps you set priorities and brings your lifestyles and circumstances into focus around the Four Pillars of a Smart Home.

- Entertainment and Automation
- Smart Energy Management
- Health, Safety and Well-Being
- Home Security

In summary, use the Primer to help you set your individual family priorities. Take charge of your own Smart Home landscape and enjoy the ride. Be smart, be safe, be well. 

Heal Together Initiative

A vow to reach every segment of a grieving community

By Mike Hale



Grief is a natural, human eventuality. It enters our lives, in some shape or form, more than we would like. But an ongoing, worldwide pandemic has created such a perfect storm of stressors around loss to have caused what can only be called bereavement overload.

It didn't take long for mental health professionals in Monterey County to recognize the impact of the trauma.

Currently, families of 656 individuals have faced the death of a loved one to COVID-19, and some estimates predict that number may be nearly 60 percent higher. Along with the news of those deaths, levels of depression and anxiety also skyrocketed, particularly among vulnerable children and teens, older adults, and low-income groups.

What's more, healthcare providers and frontline responders have been hugely impacted by the persistent stress of caring for

patients and observing traumatic deaths of those unable to have family members present.

To address these profound needs, Hospice Giving Foundation of Monterey County awarded a \$1.1 million grant, entitled Heal Together, to Coastal Kids Home Care, a local nonprofit that will help expand grief and bereavement care.

Following the grant in late 2021, Coastal Kids Home Care greatly expanded its programs to reach every segment of a grieving community. It created a wide-ranging, bilingual project which combines experienced mental health professionals and trusted community agencies to address an extraordinary need for healing and hope.

"Though some of us may have been spared tragic, profound loss, we all have shared experiences ranging from lost routines, isolation, or missing loved ones and friends," said Siobhan Greene, President and CEO of Hospice Giving (HG) Foundation. "Grief from this pandemic is palpable. This initiative is completely aligned with our mission."

With more than 15 years of experience caring for children with serious illness and those facing end-of-life, Coastal Kids Home Care (CKHC) has long prioritized bereavement care to help parents and siblings heal after loss.

CKHC recognized a community-wide need and greatly expanded its mental health counseling program. Licensed bilingual counselors served families and children without interruption via telehealth or with social distancing. In early 2021, the nonprofit incorporated Papillon Center for Loss and Transition adult bereavement groups into its programs.

Heal Together offers an opportunity to turn the tide of loss toward a future of renewal.

"HG Foundation conducted a survey to find out what is really needed with bereavement counseling, and they found limited support in our community," said Ruth Shapiro,

Coastal Kids Director of Palliative Care and Bereavement. "Their vision is 100 percent aligned with ours, and we knew it was time to beef up our own program. We realized that through this grant we could create a network

Heal Together offers an opportunity to turn the tide of loss toward a future of renewal.

that could reach so many more people."

The Heal Together includes:

- The Heal Together Hub, a central source of information on community resources to respond to grief, loss and anxiety. Services include bereavement groups with trained facilitators (available for all ages and in English and Spanish); counseling with a licensed professional; and expressive therapies for children, with more services to come, including grief yoga, meditation and journaling workshops. The schedule of services, including locations, are updated weekly at www.heal-together.org.
- Broad community-wide outreach to ensure individuals of all backgrounds have access to quality information on grief.
- Opportunities for licensed professionals and community volunteers to undergo training in grief and bereavement.
- Specific services tailored to high-need populations including communities in South County, overburdened healthcare workers and more.

"HG really understood our program, and we were one of the few that had a bilingual staff," Shapiro said. "Right away we were flooded with referrals from other agencies. It was a huge honor to receive this grant. All of our hard work has come to fruition."

Yet Shapiro realizes that more work lies ahead.



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Dog Friendly

Throughout the pandemic, we've all been forced to change our rituals and routines. Social distancing guidelines made it especially difficult to safely come together to mourn the loss of a loved one, bringing drastic changes to the process of grieving.

While working through grief is already a difficult process, research from Curtin University in Australia found that people grieving a loved one who died of COVID-19 are experiencing heightened psychological symptoms when compared to those grieving individuals who died before the pandemic or from natural causes. The symptoms include separation distress, dysfunctional grief and post-traumatic stress.

The study collected data from adults in the U.S. in November of 2020 and published online in the Journal of Pain and Symptom Management.

The researchers discovered a profound need for timely support and care to help people grieving during the pandemic. Shapiro and her colleagues witnessed the same thing at a local level.

"There was a real tipping point in the beginning in 2020. People were dying alone without families," she said. "Losing loved ones without seeing them at the end of life, that is different, that is a crisis. Also, our first responders started having so many deaths in their world. Nurses, doctors, EMTs and others saw exponentially more death in their jobs and found little or no support where they worked."

Frontline workers began to get sick, too, which led to a crisis level of care. "When you don't have enough staff for appropriate care, it creates minimal care for patients," Shapiro said. "If you're a doctor or a nurse that doesn't feel good. It's hugely demoralizing."

Through the two-year grant, Heal Together will hold free workshops for first responders, and provide specialty training for local therapists who feel they may not have the competence required for bereavement care.

"Part of this movement is education and tools, to set up training for therapists and others, school counselors, nurses, firefighters, anyone who may face someone who is grieving."

Trained therapists would then take referrals to help grieving patients, even

those with no insurance, and be reimbursed through Heal Together.

Bereavement, said Shapiro, is not a mental health condition. "We need to remove the stigma," she said. "It's a normal human experience, but it can make it hard to function in our lives."

The ultimate goal is to provide access to professional assistance to everyone, especially among the underserved.

"There are many barriers, including access to transportation and technology," Shapiro said.

Culture can often stand in the way, as well. For example, Shapiro said, tears and expression of sadness can be different in the Latino community. "Culturally we need to reach out to them and encourage them to

Hospice Giving Foundation of Monterey County awarded a \$1.1 million grant, entitled Heal Together, to Coastal Kids Home Care, a local nonprofit that will help expand grief and bereavement care.

open up to bereavement services," she said.

Traditional talk therapy is not for everyone, of course. Shapiro points out that the Heal Together initiative offers a wide range of alternative programs to help during the grieving process. In some cases, just reducing isolation can work wonders. Current classes provide those grieving with an opportunity to appropriately mourn a loss and then heal:

Grief Yoga

Grief yoga does not require any previous yoga experience. Many of the recommended poses can be done at home. The classes will start with brief sharing and journaling followed by gentle yoga poses to assist in relaxing and releasing. Participants should bring a yoga mat and a pen and journal.

Breathing through Grief

Research on pranayama (breathwork) techniques — including slow, conscious breathing, as well as alternate-nostril breathing — sug-

gest effectiveness for decreasing heart rate and blood pressure, reducing stress and anxiety, and regulating emotions. Participants should bring a yoga mat and be prepared to start with gentle yoga stretches, followed by breath work, and a short healing meditation.

Journaling/Healing Meditation

Journaling has been proven to assist in processing grief and creating internal peace. Some benefits of using journal prompts for inner or emotional healing include becoming aware of thoughts and feelings, recognizing and releasing negative thoughts and feelings, increasing positivity and mood, and encouraging inner peace and a feeling of well-being.

Moving Through Grief

This class is designed to help release the stagnant energies of grief stored in the body through movement, breath, and affirmations. Participants should be prepared for gentle stretches followed by a combination of ancient Persian dance movements and Qigong to move through the grief and fill the body, mind, and spirit with healing energy.

Class schedules

- Saturdays 9-11 a.m.
- Classes are each one hour long and are facilitated by a licensed counselor. There will be additional time at the end for any questions. Classes are offered to ages 12 and older (an adult must accompany minors).
- For bookings: Contact Virginia at 831-320-0947. For more information on Heal Together, visit heal-together.org or @heal-together831.

For more information about Coastal Kids Home Care, visit www.coastalkidshomecare.org or call (800) 214-5439. ☎



Growing



California Solution for Federal State and Local Tax (SALT) Deduction Limitation

By Gina Cochetti, Partner at Hayashi Wayland



Following the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA), passed in December of 2017, high tax states such as New York, New Jersey and California have been working on legislation that would reduce the impact of the newly enacted state and local tax (“SALT”) deduction limitation. Prior to the TCJA, individual taxpayers were able to personally deduct 100 percent of the state and local taxes they paid as an itemized deduction on their personal tax returns. The TCJA limited this deduction to \$10,000 total. For example, let’s say your annual property taxes were \$12,000 and your income taxes were \$10,000. Prior to the TCJA you could deduct the combined total of \$22,000. Since the passing of the TCJA you can only deduct \$10,000, effectively losing a deduction \$12,000.

In July of 2021, Governor Newsom signed California Assembly Bill 150 into law, which is California’s solution to the SALT limitation. Along with other provisions, AB 150 allows certain owners of pass-through entities a way to deduct more than the current SALT deduction limitation of \$10,000 by paying the tax directly through their pass-through entities.

What is AB 150?

California Assembly Bill 150 establishes the Small Business Relief Act which allows qualified pass-through entities to elect to pay and deduct a pass-through entity tax of 9.3 percent on qualified net income. This elective tax is an entity level tax that is deductible by the entity for Federal tax purposes. By deducting the tax at the entity level, the benefit of the tax is passed on to the individual partner and reduces their overall tax. The new law is effective for years beginning on or after January 1, 2021 and ending before January 1, 2026. This elective tax will be repealed automatically on December 1, 2026 unless Federal law changes prior to that date upon which the law is automatically repealed.

Who benefits from AB 150?

Qualified entities, which include Partnerships, S corporations and LLC’s filing as partnerships, can make an election on an annual basis to utilize to pay a 9.3 percent tax on their qualified income. Qualified entities do not include publicly traded partnerships, entities required to be in a combined

reporting group, and any entity that has a partnership as an owner. Qualified entities first make an annual election and then each individual owner can choose if they want the entity to pay the tax on their share of the entity’s income. S Corporation owners may be limited in their ability to choose to pay the tax if the entity elects to pay the tax.

How does it work for the pass-through entity?

The election is irrevocable and must be made annually on a timely filed return for the year of election. For tax years beginning in 2021, the tax is due on or before the entity’s return due date, without regard to extensions. For tax years beginning in 2022 through 2023, the elective tax is due in two installments: the greater of \$1,000 or 50 percent of the tax paid in the prior year is due by June 15th of the taxable year of the election and the remaining amount is due on or before the due date of the original return (without regard to extension). How does it work for the partner, member, or shareholders?

As you can see, AB 150 has the potential for significant tax savings.

Consenting pass-through entity owners claim a nonrefundable credit on their personal income tax return equal to the elective tax paid on their behalf (9.3 percent of their qualified net income). Unused credits can be carried forward for up to five years. Nonresidents and part-year residents are able to use the entire credit, whereas full year California residents must prorate their income between pass-through and other income to determine the amount that can be used each year.

EXAMPLE:

Fun and Games Partnership (“Fun and Games”) has two partners who each own 50 percent has



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**- Charlie Sammut
Monterey Zoo**

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\$800,000 of income.

Without AB 150, the partners of Fun and Games each pay tax on \$400,000 at the California tax rate of 9 percent for a total of \$36,000 of tax each. This tax is not deductible for Federal tax purposes (assuming they already deduct up to \$10,000 each of property taxes), so they also pay \$120,000 OF FEDERAL TAX EACH (\$400,000 AT 30 PERCENT). The combined tax per partner is \$156,000.

With AB 150, Fun and Games Partnership directly pays tax to California of 9.3 percent each, for \$37,200 each. This tax is deductible for Federal tax purposes, so they now only pay Federal tax on income of \$108,840 each (\$400,000 - \$37,200 = 362,800 x 30 percent). The combined tax per partner is now \$146,040 for a tax savings of \$9,960 per partner.

How do I know if this applies to me?

Every California partnership, LLC taxed as a partnership and S Corporation will need to determine if they qualify to make the election to be taxed at the partnership level. If the partnership qualifies, an analysis should be done to determine if the election will result in tax savings to any of the partners. Finally, each individual partner will need to determine whether they consent to the election or want to pay tax at the individual level.

While AB 150 could result in big benefits to taxpayers, there are some limitations. As the law is currently written, individual taxpayers cannot use the credit to offset the California tentative minimum tax, making it difficult for some individuals to benefit from the tax and the credit. This restriction was unintended according to the legislature and may change. As part of his proposed budget, Governor Newsom is advocating for expanding the passthrough entity elective tax credit by eliminating the tentative minimum tax limitation.

As you can see, AB 150 has the potential for significant tax savings. Specialized analysis is necessary to determine how the benefit applies to a specific situation. Taxpayers that may benefit should closely follow California legislation for any updates. As with any new tax law, individuals should contact a tax professional to evaluate the application of AB 150 to your individual tax situation. ☞

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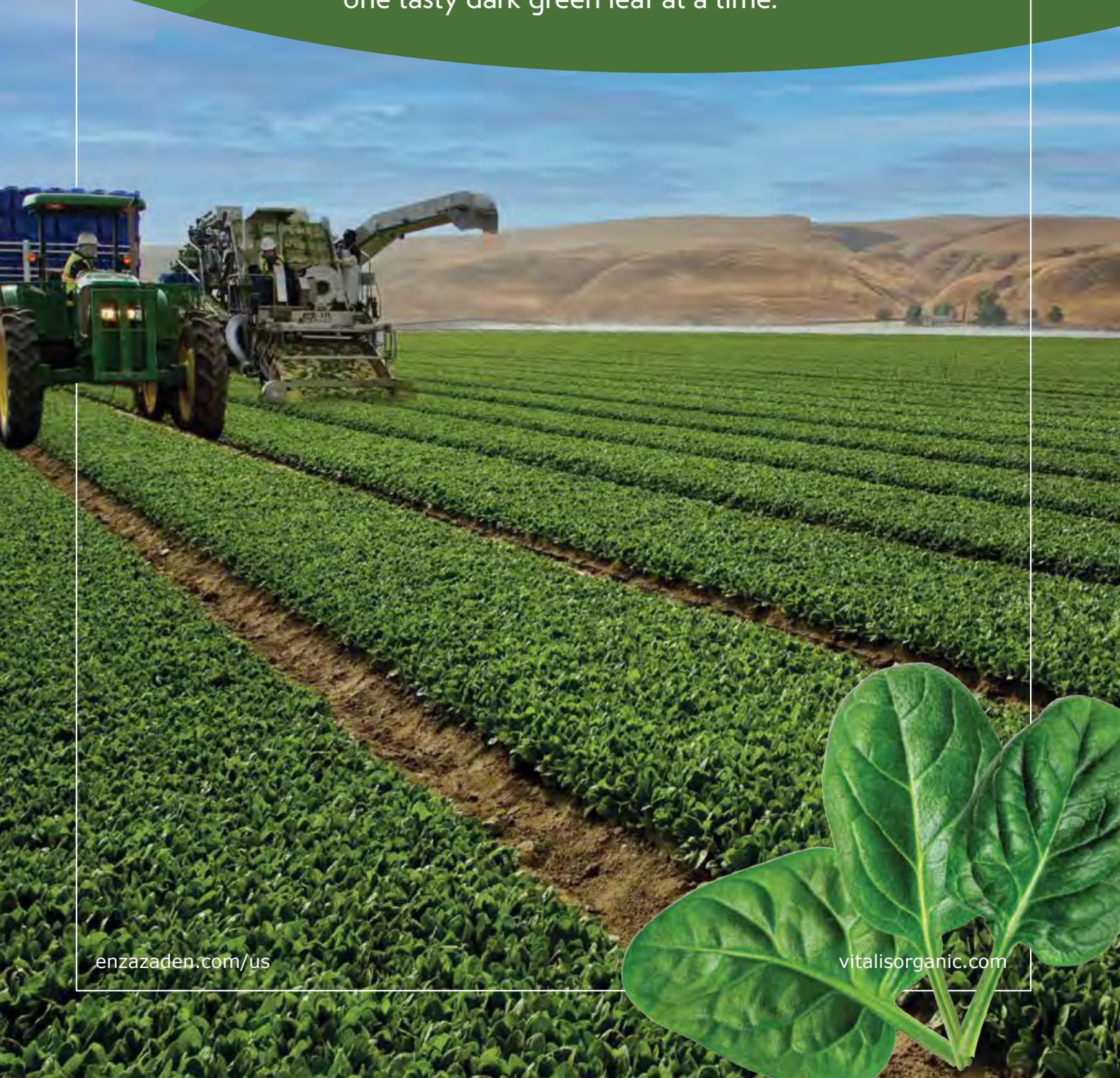
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Playing Chess, Not Checkers

Three Moves to a Data-Driven Resource Management Strategy

By Erin Hightower



The business of farming is a lot like the game of chess. Strategy. Skill. Staying a step ahead of the opponent – although, unlike chess, growers have multiple opponents including weather, pests, and other factors out of their control.

Different resources like equipment and people are like different game pieces, each with their own functional abilities and rightful place in the field (on the board). Just as a grandmaster does not move a bishop or knight without a thoughtful reason, growers must use a strategic plan, factoring in all resources, and based on more than gut instincts and experience. And every decision made is ultimately for one, big-picture goal: protect the king. Of course, on the farm, the crop is king.

Precision ag data is a useful tool to make good, informed decisions in playing the strategic game that is farming. Without good data, it is like only seeing half of the opponent's pieces. It is important to see every piece of the board, not just the pawns and the rooks.

I think we can all agree one of the biggest challenges of implementing a data-driven precision farming strategy is overcoming feelings of overwhelm. In my years of working with growers, one of the ways I have learned to address this challenge is to focus on smaller, more manageable areas. I have identified three key resources growers need to manage on a daily basis: people, equipment, and inputs.

Here are a few examples to show how good precision data can be helpful in these three areas and used to play chess, not checkers – that is, make strategic management decisions.

People Resources

A company's most valuable assets are its people. Each team member brings a unique blend of knowledge, skill, and personality. Like all assets, proper management of people is important to getting best results.

Operator Jane's data may show she runs her sprayer at a speed two miles-per-hour faster than operator John, while operator

Bruce's data demonstrates he has a quicker adoption period with new precision technology than operator Betty. By having good data on every operator, growers can align the right operator to the right task, the right machine, even the right field position to best bring out their strengths.

Data can also be revealing about operators themselves, enabling adjustments to either behavior or the equipment. I recently worked with a grower who upgraded his older, slower sprayer to a faster ExactApply model. Upon reviewing initial operating data, it showed he was operating it at a faster speed than his previous sprayer and the nozzle size he thought he needed was no longer correct. Had he not collected and reviewed that data, he would not have

Just as a grandmaster does not move a bishop or knight without a thoughtful reason, growers must use a strategic plan, factoring in all resources, and based on more than gut instincts and experience.

changed his nozzles and may have continued to operate with the incorrect size, which was creating unstable droplets and not putting on enough chemistry.

That brings us to the next key resource: equipment. There are more ways that data can help make the most out of equipment resources.

Machinery Resources

While a farm's most valuable assets are people, the most expensive ones are equipment. There are so many ways that good data can optimize a farm's equipment management strategy.

Regular preventative maintenance is the difference between a machine that operates without worry for hundreds of hours and one that is prone to breakdowns, often at the most inconvenient times. Technology offers a great way to track machine hours and maintenance intervals, removing any chance of human error using handwritten maintenance logs. Technology can also provide insight into a machine's utilization that may be assumed otherwise.

One of my growers recently commented that he was excited about two new windrowers he added to the operation. His operators shared his enthusiasm for these new machines – maybe too much. He quickly realized these two new machines were being used at a rate nearly double what he anticipated. Why? Because operators were choosing the new machines every time and rarely using the perfectly good, yet older models. He expected all the machines to be used at an even rate and created a maintenance plan to reflect equal hours. Realizing the two new machines were logging more hours, he was able to adjust the maintenance plan to be sure the higher-utilized machines were getting appropriate TLC.

Another way to use data for machine optimization comes when pairing tractors with implements. Different implements demand different RPMs out of the tractor. Consider a piece of equipment that needs a higher RPM, like tillage, and one that needs less RPM, like a seeder. It is important to pair the tillage equipment with a tractor that has the horsepower to meet its needs, whereas a smaller tractor can be used to run the seeder.

That is obvious, right? But this data is more valuable than one might initially think. I recently worked with a hay grower who realized he was oversizing RPMs significantly. Once he had the data to show just how wasteful this was, he updated his fleet to less expensive, smaller tractors that still met his power needs.

Data can help take the optimization practice a step further. For example, consider the ability to track fuel and diesel exhaust fluid consumption. It is one thing to determine the least amount of horsepower

an implement requires, then right-size the tractor in the most optimal way. Further optimize machine pairings by finding that sweet spot where the tractor meets the horsepower needs while using the lowest amount of fluid.

That leads to the third resource to track and optimize: input resources.

Input Resources

Here is a question: which areas of your farm deliver the best return on investment. I will ask the question again, this time the answer cannot simply be, “The one with the highest yield.”

If you are always thinking several steps ahead, doing your best to anticipate an opponent's next move, and drawing on more than gut instincts to make the right decisions, you are more likely to avoid being caught in checkmate.

A field may deliver the highest yield, but what if that field also requires more than one pass to get rid of the palmer amaranth? What if it requires more fertilizer than another because of its unique terrain and characteristics? Essentially, that top producing field may also be the top consumer of costly time and inputs. Data can be the secret to exposing truths about some fields and unlocking hidden potential in others.

One way I have seen growers adapt to unique field needs is using variable rate practices. Whether seeding, nutrients or other inputs, a variable rate strategy is one of the best ways to control input costs and eliminate waste. It is also great advice for those who are struggling with how to produce more in the same amount of space. After all, it is easier to variable rate than it is to find new ground to farm.

One way I help growers understand variable rate strategy is looking at it through the lens of a livestock farmer. When manag-

ing a herd, a farmer is constantly evaluating the cows throughout the year, paying attention to which cows get sick, which ones lose weight, which seem to have an easier time gaining weight and so on. They address this by giving some more feed or medicine or, conversely, less.

This is not a magical strategy; it is simple common sense. You would not feed all cows the same amount of food if some were gaining weight and others were not. You would not give them medicine if they did not get sick or withhold from the ones that did. You do not treat them exactly the same because they are not the same; each is unique and all have individual needs.

The same is true of fields; every field has unique characteristics and needs, yet it always surprises me that it is not common practice to treat them differently. This is where a variable rate strategy comes into play and doing it well is dependent on good data.

Especially when it comes to in-field practices, I think it is common to do certain things or do them a certain way because that is the way it has been done. Data can help and encourage looking at situations more critically and determine what is necessary, what is right, and what can help get the best production with the lowest inputs.

Protecting the King

If you play chess using the same strategy, the same set of moves every time because, “That is how I have always done it,” I can almost guarantee you are not going to win. The opponent – weather, pests and all those factors out of your control – is not the same every time. They are going to throw out new moves, change it up, and, at times, be totally unpredictable.

Strive to be the grower who is playing chess, not checkers. If you are always thinking several steps ahead, doing your best to anticipate an opponent's next move, and drawing on more than gut instincts to make the right decisions, you are more likely to avoid being caught in checkmate. ☞

Pitfalls of Benchmarking to the S&P 500

By Bill Hastie



Investors today are inundated with information about the investment markets from a variety of sources, namely about how the various stock market indexes performed that day. So, it's not surprising that investors, when assessing (benchmarking) their personal investments, tend to compare their portfolio's performance with that of an index. While these indexes

Investors today are inundated with information about the investment markets from a variety of sources, namely about how the various stock market indexes performed that day.

provide useful information about how the broader markets are performing, they are much less useful for measuring how

individual portfolios are performing. There are several reasons why an individual's portfolio performance can vary significantly from the returns of a particular stock market index. First and foremost, in order to accurately measure portfolio performance, there must be an "apples-to-apples" comparison between the assets in the portfolio and that of the benchmark it is being measured against. The more dissimilar a portfolio's assets are from those of a particular stock market index, the less reliable the comparison.

In 1952 Harry Markowitz pioneered Modern Portfolio Theory (MPT), the primary concept being that through diversification, the investor can either maximize return at a given risk level or minimize risk at a given level of return. Although there have been several variations of, even rebuttals to, MPT over the last several decades, it remains the fundamental framework for most portfolio construction. In designing most well-

diversified portfolios, the investor will first consider the stocks to add to their portfolio — typically large, mid and small-size stocks, and foreign developed and emerging market stocks. Next, the investor will typically include an allocation of bonds to the portfolio as possibly the best portfolio "diversifier" as bonds and stocks tend to move in opposite directions — the amount of bonds will be based on the investor's level of risk aversion. Based on Morningstar's style box analysis, there are nine U.S. stock "asset classes" and nine U.S. bond "asset classes". The more a portfolio is diversified, the more asset classes

It is important to remember that benchmarking a portfolio for performance is not necessarily intended for seeing how to beat the index, rather to see if portfolio performance is consistent with that of matching indexes.

it will hold in order to create a "teeter-totter" effect — some portfolio holdings go up when others go down (known as negative correlation).

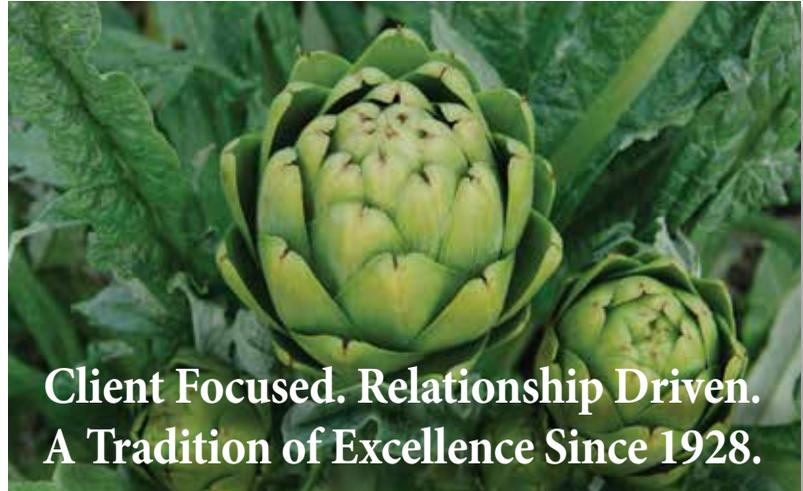
The stock market index most commonly used by individual investors to benchmark their portfolio's performance is the S&P 500 index, which is made up of most, but not all, of the 500 largest companies in the U.S. The S&P 500 is classified as a "large cap blend," just one of the nine Morningstar asset classes. Currently, the nine most heavily weighted stocks in the S&P 500 make up just under 28 percent of its total weight which accounts for much of the index's higher highs and lower lows through various market cycles.

Investors will typically try to "diversify away" some of the volatility of the S&P 500 until they reach their desired risk level. For

the reasons of the inherent mismatch in both portfolio composition (make up) and volatility, benchmarking any given portfolio's performance against the S&P 500 is likely to provide an inaccurate comparison. This then begs the question — how do you best benchmark a diversified portfolio for performance?

The solution most often used is the development of a blended benchmark, intended to resemble the composition of the portfolio. This begins with breaking down the portfolio into its various asset classes and determining which of the many available market benchmarks best fit each. For example, while the S&P 500 only includes large size stocks, the investor might consider using the Russell 3000 index for their U.S. stock asset classes which includes 1000 large and 2000 mid and small-size stocks. For U.S. bonds, the Bloomberg Barclay's Capital Aggregate Bond index has for decades been the standard for measuring bond performance. For foreign stocks, there are two indexes that are commonly used. First, the EAFE index (standing for Europe, Australasia, and the Far East) which includes stocks from Europe, Australia, New Zealand and East Asian countries. Second, MSCI ACWI ex U.S. (standing for All Country World Index except the U.S.) which has broader developed foreign and emerging foreign market stocks. The percentage allocations to each index should match that of the portfolio being benchmarked for performance.

It is important to remember that benchmarking a portfolio for performance is not necessarily intended for seeing how to beat the index, rather to see if portfolio performance is consistent with that of matching indexes. Benchmarking a portfolio may be most valuable at the end of each year or following a major market move. This will help the investor make any needed changes to the portfolio and keep it more in balance to achieve the desired results. ☞



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Hartnell to Offer Plant Science Pathway at Castroville Center

By Scott Faust



Hartnell College will soon enroll the first group of students for an Agricultural Plant Science pathway program set to launch this fall at its new Castroville Education Center, on Merritt Street just east of Highway 1. Following what’s known in higher education as a “cohort” model, those 15 or 20 students will take classes together and be ready in two years to transfer and complete a

The newly opened Castroville center, complete with science labs, a tutoring center and state-of-the-art classrooms, allows Hartnell to structure the plant science curriculum as a non-stop pipeline from college to university to career.

bachelor’s degree in plant science at a California State University. That includes Cal State Monterey Bay, which started its

plant science program in fall of 2020.

Students in Hartnell’s program in Castroville will have opportunities for job shadowing and internships with north Monterey County companies. A class in agricultural and industrial equipment will take them off campus for other hands-on experiences.

Overall, their learning will have a berries-and-artichokes emphasis, while still being fully applicable to leafy greens, vegetables and specialty crops throughout the Central Coast.

“The program is designed around agriculture based in north Monterey County, but we’re getting a lot of interest from students around the region, including in King City,” said Clint Cowden, Hartnell’s dean of career technical education and workforce development, who also directs the Castroville Education Center.

The newly opened Castroville center, complete with science labs, a tutoring center and state-of-the-art classrooms, allows Hartnell to structure the plant science curriculum as a nonstop pipeline from

college to university to career. The center first welcomed students on January 24, in time for the Spring 2022 semester.

Input from agricultural leaders during Hartnell’s community listening sessions for Castroville revealed strong support for an accelerated program that dovetails with plant science degrees at CSUMB, Fresno State, Chico State, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo or Cal Poly Pomona.

Instead of leaving the area as freshmen to begin at a four-year university – and possibly never coming back after they graduate – students in Hartnell’s program will start college in the context of Salinas Valley agriculture and be able to build early connections with local companies.

Hartnell’s cohort program in plant science, the first of its kind in California, will offer other advantages as well, Cowden said.

Much like Hartnell’s highly successful CSin3 computer science program, in which participants earn a computer science bachelor’s degree in just three years, the plant science students in Castroville will know exactly what to expect each semester. In addition, because they will be in class with the same students over the two years, they





can establish greater camaraderie with one another and their instructors.

“For a lot of students, that structure is something that they’re really used to from high school,” Cowden said. “By continuing that same type of structure, we see their confidence level and their success rates go up.

Their courses, such as chemistry, soil science and plant science, will build on each other and give students a more integrated understanding of the subject matter,” he said. “It also creates almost like an athletic-team kind of bonding, and they tend to get involved in more project-based learning by



Clockwise top left: 1.) Hartnell plant science graduate Jonathan Blas, now at Cal Poly-SLO, is pictured in a field near Chualar where he worked during a spring 2020 soil science internship. 2.) Castroville Education Center. 3.) Hartnell biology graduate Jasmine Rodriguez, now at Humboldt State University, conducts research during a summer 2019 internship in entomology at the University of California Cooperative Extension. 4.) Clint Cowden.

A concentrated focus on plant science, as opposed to the wider scope of a major in agriculture production, will prepare students to understand not only the “how” of crop cultivation, but also the “why.”

being able to work in teams,” Cowden said. A concentrated focus on plant science, as opposed to the wider scope of a major in agriculture production, will prepare students to understand not only the “how” of crop cultivation, but also the “why,” he said.

“As our students grow in their careers, they’re going to continue to learn about ag production,” Cowden said. “But that emphasis on truly understanding plant science is important, because as the industry changes, if they understand the botany and those types of concepts, they’ll be able to adapt – be it fertilizers or climate change or other agronomic factors that are going to change over time.”

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| HOME SHOWCASE

# The Braga Barn

*By Jenna Hanson Abramson, Photography by Patrick Tregenza*







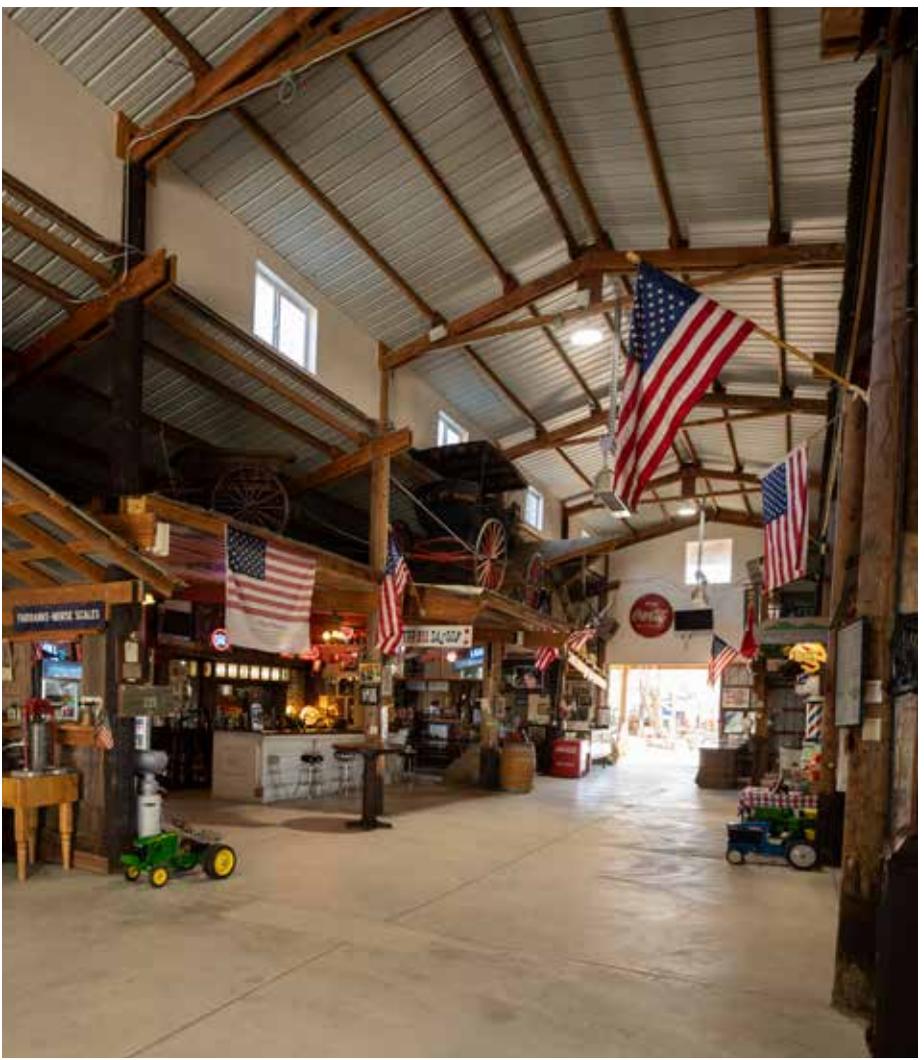
Chris and Rodney Braga (l to r),



In 1937, roughly 10 years after arriving in Monterey County, Sebastian and Josie Braga purchased 600-acres, 25 miles south of Salinas in Soledad, CA. It is on this land that they built a homestead, raised dairy cows, grew sugar beets and kickstarted what we know today as Braga Fresh, an industry leader and an established grower and shipper of fresh vegetables worldwide.

In the 1960's Sebastian and Josie's three sons joined the family business. Their middle son, Norman, decided to raise his family on the Home Ranch as well, just up the road from where he grew up. It is on this site, next to the home where his sons Rodney and Chris Braga grew up, that the Braga Barn was constructed, not just for the family but also for the community to enjoy.

The Barn was originally intended to be a place for Norman to display his collection of over 100 tractors, and instead, it turned into a museum of sorts of Monterey County history with an emphasis on the Salinas Valley and traces of the Braga family's farming heritage. Braga Barn visitors can get a glimpse at what farming was like on the home ranch 80 plus years ago with the display of wooden dairy cow sanctions, milk containers and strap-on milking stools (relics of bygone years), and farming equipment, large and small, paying homage to where it all began.



For over 40 years Norman collected items all throughout the Salinas Valley and well beyond. If a popular business was closing or there was going to be a big auction, he was there to salvage the history and further his collection. Chris Braga recalls several Saturday morning phone calls from his father enthusiastically requesting that he come over and help unload new findings. Chris fondly remembers the time he helped his father unload, his personal favorites, a couple of merchandise displays. Norman had searched 25 years for a merchandise display and then, coincidentally, found two very similar displays just two weeks part.

Among the collector pieces Norman gathered over the years, are items that had personal meaning to him. There is the cash register and artwork from the former Italian Villa Restaurant once located on South Main in Salinas, where he and his friends had often met up; there is a replica of his mother Josie's kitchen; there is a 1963 split window

Corvette that he had sold when his son Rodney was born (making it time for a family car) but then found again in the 80's; and then there is the realistic reproduction of Al's Barbershop in Soledad (barber pole included)

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**The Barn was originally intended to be a place for Norman to display his collection of over 100 tractors, and instead, it turned into a museum of sorts of Monterey County history with an emphasis on the Salinas Valley and traces of the Braga family's farming heritage.**

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where Norman would get his hair trimmed and Rodney and Chris both had their very first haircuts.

One part of the Braga Barn that stands

out and is favored by many who visit is the "The 911 Saloon" in reference to September 11, 2001. Not only does the saloon have a stocked bar at the ready for family, work and community functions, it is also the well-known and original Doc Rickett's Bar from Cannery Row, a fun piece of Monterey County history. Braga Barn guests today can say they have enjoyed a beverage at the same bar that John Steinbeck, Doc Ricketts and others of that era were known to frequent in the past.

On one of the saloon walls is a mirror, showcasing cattle brandings, that originally hung at Pozzi's Stampede in King City; and on the ceiling of the saloon you will find a patriotic tribute honoring the heroes of 9/11, crafted by local students. Following the tragedies of that day, Norman distributed plywood sheets to all the Soledad Elementary classes inviting the students to create pieces of art honoring the heroes who emerged from the catastrophe. You may recall







seeing the hand painted wooden signs along Highway 101 in the weeks following September 11. Thereafter, when the signs came down, Norman held on to his favorites and incorporated them into his collection.

There's one more characteristic of the saloon that cannot go unmentioned... when you are sitting at the bar enjoying your drink and company... it rains! As Rod Braga puts it, "farmer's always need rain and there is nothing we love more than the sound of rain." So, what did Norman do? He brought the rain inside the Barn to his bar. Even better, he found a way to recreate the soothing sound of rain on an old tin roof. In this way, he and all his farming buddies could enjoy a drink to the pleasing sound of rain whenever they so desired... even if it was hot, sunny and dry outside, it was idealistic weather conditions inside the Barn.

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**Every which way you look there is a unique story to be told, a piece of Salinas Valley history or a portrait of the Braga family through the years.**

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Let's go back to the original collector's items and the reason for the barn being constructed in the first place... Norman's tractor collection. There are over 100 tractors on the property, and the majority of them still run. There are a couple of fun surprises when it comes to the way the tractors are displayed throughout the property. One tractor was strategically lowered into the wine cellar during construction. Another was creatively placed for privacy in the bathroom. But the ultimate tractor exhibit on the property is known as "Caterpillar Hill." This is where several of Norman's Caterpillar tractors are excitingly displayed on a rock knoll that Chris completed for his father. The Bragas have every model of Caterpillar tractor that has ever been manufactured, an impressive collection, including Rodney's favorite piece, a Best 60 (known today as the Caterpillar 60). This tractor is a rare find for its yellow color and most significantly because it is branded Best, versus Caterpillar, indicating it comes from before the 1925

Holt/Best merger that ultimately formed Caterpillar Tractor Co.

Another one of their extraordinary tractors with its own story is the Silver King on display in the tractor barn just down the path from the main Braga Barn. The Braga brothers recall this being one of their father's favorites. During World War II trucks were not easy to come by but were needed to move produce from the fields to the packing houses. The Silver King could drive up to 35 miles per hour allowing farmers to pull lettuce trailers to Salinas packing houses, playing a big role in agriculture history during the war effort.

Every which way you look there is a unique story to be told, a piece of Salinas Valley history or a portrait of the Braga family through the years. Norman always intended for the Braga Barn and his remarkable collections to be shared with his community as a way of keeping the heritage of the Salinas Valley present. His sons, Rodney and Chris, although not self-proclaimed collectors themselves, have continued to add to the collection and share with others what their father created. I am delighted to be a part of sharing Norman Braga's impressive collections and providing a small glimpse into all the stories they hold with you. ☺





# Supermarket Psychology 101

By Stephanie Bouquet, MS, RD, CSSD, CDCES, SB Nutrition Consulting



**G**rocery shopping is a task we all must endure. The desire to whisk in and out for a “few” needed items inadvertently leads to the purchase of more (or a lot more) not so necessary ones. According to a recent study on the spending habits of consumers, grocery stores employ psychological tactics similar to larger retail companies to entice consumers to remain in the store longer and increase spending.

Think about the following psychological tactics used (and have a plan to counter them) before your next grocery store trip:

## **Tactic #1: Sensory Overload:**

Key food items and products with bright colors are placed close to the entrance of the store to stimulate senses. The smell of freshly baked cookies (bakery) or the vision of a bright spring floral bouquet (floral department), creates a calming effect which can lead to overspending.

### **Plan: Don't Shop Hungry**

True hunger causes the body's blood sugar

level to drop. In response to this dip, the body will exhibit physical symptoms such as headaches or a growling stomach to remind the brain it is time to eat. If we ignore or delay these signals, the brain will desire food sources that quickly bring the blood sugar back into equilibrium. Refined carbohydrates (such as cakes, candies, and juices) provide fast energy and will be the foods that your grocery cart will navigate towards.

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## **It does take a little work and effort to navigate the grocery store efficiently.**

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## **Tactic #2: Directional Store Layout:**

During the COVID 19 pandemic, many grocery stores have eliminated multiple store entrances. Most often, the entrance that remains open directs the consumer to travel in a counterclockwise direction around the

store. If you think this is just coincidental, think again! Traveling in a counterclockwise direction is less efficient (more stopping and backtracking) than a clockwise direction leading the consumer to remain in the store longer while ultimately spending more money.

### **Plan: Shop with a Grocery List**

Take a few minutes before shopping to think about what meals to prepare during the week and build a grocery list from that. If you frequent the same store each week, list needed food items to correspond with the clockwise layout of the store. Sticking to the food items listed will help prevent impulse grabbing of “extras” just because they are on sale or look good.

## **Tactic #3: Placement of Staple Food Items:**

Essential food items such as fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, or low-fat dairy products tend to line the outside walls of the store. Consumers will have to travel through the store to get these items and can fall prey to “not so healthy” foods they encounter on the way. Running into the store for “a gallon of milk” can lead to a cart full of other unplanned items before returning to the store front.

### **Plan: Shop the Perimeter of the Store**

Avoid the interior aisles and “end caps” (end of interior aisles) of the store as much as possible. This is where the majority of packaged, processed and convenience-based foods reside.

## **Tactic #4: Eye Level Placement of Expensive Food Items:**

Large food companies pay premium dollar to have their brands placed in pristine advertising spots on the shelves. For example, sugary, processed cereals are strategically placed at eye level (and kid eye level as they sit in the cart) to enhance buying tendency.

**Plan: Be Ready to Exercise**

Healthier food items are often housed in harder to reach spots, typically the top or lowest shelves. You may need to stretch upwards or lunge down to grab them.

**Tactic #5: Sales and Limited Time Offers:**

Who doesn't like a good sale? Nothing draws in potential customers more than the psychological feeling of "missing out" if not purchased immediately. Chances are these items are reduced in price because of overstock and aren't necessarily always a healthy option.

**Implementing these small tweaks to your grocery store trips may pay large dividends not only to your checkbook, but your health as well!**

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It does take a little work and effort to navigate the grocery store efficiently. Implementing these small tweaks to your grocery store trips may pay large dividends not only to your checkbook, but your health as well! ☺

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# Ranching, Firefighting, and a Love of Cooking

*Interview with Greg Estrada, Cattle Rancher/Timber Producer*

By Jess Brown



ranch and not in town; however, as I began working, I wasn't sure if I'd have to move away for career purposes. Fortunately, I never had to.

JESS: Are you surprised that your son Zach has become so involved in the ranch by raising cattle?

GREG: Not really. He and my father, Frank, developed a deep bond at a very early age. He was a sponge and wanted to know everything about the ranch, cattle, timber and the challenges it faced. He purchased his first cows when he was 11 years old and has expanded his herd each year since. He now has cattle in Santa Cruz and Santa Clara Counties. My mom, Loretta, spent many hours with him on the ranch and in her yard showing him how to work hard. He loves the ranch as much as my parents do.

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**I feel that we owe it to the generations that came before us to preserve what they left us.**

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JESS: Your wife Janet did not grow up in a farming/ranching family. How did she adapt to ranch life?

GREG: We dated for several years prior to marriage so she saw what ranch life was all about. Once we married, she adapted much better than one would think, and I'm quite certain you couldn't get her to live in town now.

JESS: On a national level, crime is surging, especially in urban areas. What is happening in the remote, rural areas of our region?

GREG: We have definitely seen a rise in crime like most rural communities have. It's a challenge for us because we have a public road that runs through the ranch and another that is our border to the west. In the last year and

a half, we have been broken into, had locks cut off gates, trash dumped regularly on the ranch and random gunfire at all hours of the day and night. This has resulted in us having to reinforce gates, install security cameras and develop a closer relationship with the Sheriff's Department.

JESS: I know that you are a board member of the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau. Have they been helping you with the crime situation?

GREG: Definitely. The Farm Bureau was instrumental in bringing myself and three other farmers together to hold coordinated meetings with the Sherriff of Santa Cruz

JESS: How many generations has the Estrada family been in the Pajaro Valley?

GREG: Six generations.

JESS: Where did the family originally come from?

GREG: My dad's family came from Spain, and my mom's family came from Germany.

JESS: Describe the location of your ranch?

GREG: We are located east of Watsonville, and to the south and east, we border Santa Clara County.

JESS: You are currently producing cattle and timber. Are these the two commodities that all generations of the Estrada's produced on that property?

GREG: The family has always raised cattle, but timber harvesting didn't begin until the 1970's.

JESS: As you were growing up, did you feel you would always live on the ranch?

GREG: I always wanted to live/stay on the



County. If it wasn't for the Farm Bureau's ability to bring us together, our voices and concerns may not have been heard or possibly ignored.

JESS: Besides being involved in the family ranch, you had a long career as a firefighter. You retired from the position of Cal Fire Battalion Chief. What were some of your career highlights?

GREG: There are too many to list, but here are some highlights:

The Pebble Beach Fire in 1987. This was my first fire in which I saw significant loss of homes. The Summit Fire in Santa Cruz and Santa Clara Counties in 2008. This fire was in the hills I grew up in and threatened our ranch. The Trabling Fire that occurred just north of the airport in Watsonville. The fire started in five different locations over the distance of a mile, along Highway 1. The fire quickly resulted in a mile long fire front on a day when it was 105 degrees. The 5 alarm Wall Street Inn fire and the 4 alarm Apple Growers Cold Storage facility in Watsonville.

JESS: Last Fall, you worked with Cal Fire to have a prescribed burn on the family ranch. How much time and effort went in to planning for the burn?

GREG: It was a two-year process to obtain the necessary permits to burn.

JESS: Can you explain how the fire got out of control?

GREG: It wasn't due to a lack of resources, overly aggressive fire fighters or poor

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**We feel it is important to give back to the community that has given us so much. At a very early age, both of my parents taught me the importance of being involved...**

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*Clockwise from top left: 1.) Greg Branding at Estrada Ranch. 2.) Three Generations of Estradas. 3.) Greg Estrada fighting fires. 4.) Greg Estrada as a little boy on the ranch.*



planning. The first part of the prescribed burn was textbook. When the second part was lit, it began very normal, but suddenly the wind shifted causing the fire to throw embers 300 yards away where myself, Zach, and other fire personnel were located. We attempted to suppress the spot fires, but they quickly spread beyond our control. Even with all of the planning and preventative measures Cal Fire and ourselves had taken, the brush was so volatile due to decades without fire, extreme drought plus being a hot day, that it became a problem.

JESS: How did you suppress the fire?

GREG: It was a combination of efforts between aircraft, bulldozers and fire engines. Fortunately, we have good ranch roads that played a very important role in containing it.

JESS: Do you still believe in prescribed burns as a method to manage range and timberland?

GREG: Definitely. We can choose to take a more aggressive role in managing rangelands on our terms or do nothing and deal with the mega fires we have been experiencing in California and the West. It's very unfortunate that the fire escaped control, but the burn scar has begun to heal, and in some places, we now have cattle grazing on ground they haven't been able to graze for 60-70 years. In addition to reducing the fire hazard where we had 10-foot-tall brush four months ago, we now have lush green grass and new growth.

JESS: What is the biggest challenge in ranching today?

GREG: I would say encroachment. As more people move into the rural settings, farmers and ranchers face challenges. In our case, harvesting timber and raising beef cattle requires us to educate and defend what we do on a regular basis.

JESS: How important is the preservation of ranch land?



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*Greg, Janet and Zach Estrada.*

GREG: It's the most important thing we can do. I feel that we owe it to the generations that came before us to preserve what they left us.

JESS: The Estrada family has always been involved in the community. Why is this important?

GREG: We feel it is important to give back to the community that has given us so much. At a very early age, both of my parents taught me the importance of being involved, and as parents, Janet and I have done the same with Zach.

JESS: Where do you see the Estrada Ranch in 20 years?

GREG: God willing just the way it has been since 1848.

JESS: Who has been the most influential person in your life?

GREG: I'm going to have to say it's a tie between my parents. My dad taught me to be humble, patient and respectful. My mom taught me how to work hard, to stay busy and to stay involved.

JESS: What is something about Greg Estrada that most people don't know?

GREG: I enjoy cooking. ☺

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## *Recipe*

### MELON SALAD WITH MINT & FETA

1 piel de sapo or honeydew melon  
1 avocado  
1 lime  
2 cucumbers  
3 tbsp olive oil  
1/4 c crumbled feta cheese  
fresh mint leaves

1. Cut melon and avocado into cubes. Sprinkle 1 tsp lime juice on the avocado to prevent browning.
2. Slice cucumber and combine with melon and avocado in a salad bowl. Toss gently.
3. Whisk olive oil with 1 tbsp lime juice and season with salt and pepper.
4. Drizzle dressing on top of salad and top with crumbled feta and mint leaves. Enjoy!

  @lovemysalad\_usa



# Caraccioli Cellars

By Mac McDonald



Scott Caraccioli's father and two uncles may have set an incredibly high bar for the quality of Caraccioli Cellars wines, but it was the late champagne maestro Michel Salgues who helped the family achieve their lofty goals.

Salgues, who spent 20 years as winemaker at the acclaimed Roederer Estate, one of the giants of sparkling wine in the U.S., retired in 2004, but joined Caraccioli in 2006. He wanted to work with a small, estate-centric winery where he could oversee the entire life of a sparkling wine: from planting and growing to ushering it through the tirage (or secondary fermentation process, which can take several years) and final bottling.

He found that in the fledgling Caraccioli Cellars in the Santa Lucia Highlands, which was founded by brothers Gary and Phil Caraccioli with their uncle Jim Caraccioli.

The brothers grew up working on the family farm in the Salinas Valley. Much of that time was spent watching their Swiss-Italian grandfather nurture his homemade wines and serving it for family dinners.

Gary grew up believing that wine wasn't just a beverage, but an experience to be savored.

So, Gary encouraged his family to expand their agricultural roots into growing grapes and making wine with the idea that they would make unique and original wines not being produced elsewhere in the area. The ultimate goal was to produce sophisticated and complex sparkling wine specific to the Santa Lucia Highlands and the family's own small vineyard.

That set the stage for Salgues, who was born and raised in France and had a doctorate in biochemistry and master's in food sci-

ence in addition to his illustrious career as a winemaker. He found Caraccioli the perfect match for him.

"My father and uncles set the standard and the mindset not to cut corners and

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**The ultimate goal was to produce sophisticated and complex sparkling wine specific to the Santa Lucia Highlands and the family's own small vineyard.**

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to make something different and distinctive. Michel was the conduit to allow that motor to run." says Scott Caraccioli, Gary's son who started out selling and marketing the family wines and is now the General Manager overseeing all aspects of produc-

tion, distribution and marketing.

With the backing of the family, a commitment to the long-term, and a clear mission on how to achieve their goals of a one-estate focused winery with stringent, transparent winemaking and rigorous, sustainable viticulture practices, Caraccioli Cellars was able to set itself apart from other wine producers in the Santa Lucia Highlands. The area is well-known in the wine world for its award-winning Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, but not so much for its sparkling wines — until Caraccioli, that is.

The year 2015 was a banner year for Caraccioli and one that cemented its reputation as one of the best producers of sparkling wines not just in California, but the world. For one, it was the first year all wines were 100 percent estate grown. Second, it won a whole host of awards at the prestigious Champagne and Sparkling Wine World Championships, the only international sparkling wine competition judged by sparkling wine specialists and founded by the world's foremost authority on champagne and sparkling wine, Tom Stevenson.

Caraccioli won Best U.S. Sparkling Wine in 2015 for its 2007 Brut Cuvée and also took home hardware for the 2007 Brut Rosé and 2009 Brut Rosé. That's in addition



to three more Gold and three Silver awards, an astounding achievement for a small, still-growing winery.

"It's rewarding to know how we stack up to other producers and Tom's opinion is the one Michel valued most," says Caraccioli about the prestigious awards and one that Salgues, who passed away in 2017, was able to savor. "It also makes it possible to go forward. It's all a process: to continue on our path, to grow and to improve year after year."

Those initial awards were just the beginning for Caraccioli. Most recently they won Best U.S. Sparkling Wine in 2020 (2014 Brut Rosé) and 2021 (2015 Brut Rosé). Caraccioli says the recognition affirms the course of the flagship wines as the winery expands production to single varietal sparkling expressions.

"It allows me to hold the line as to what defines us," he says. "In many ways it made it easier on me because setting that line is harder than holding it. It allows me to say no and be choosy, but to also experiment. It's something I love (trying new things) and gives us the ability to showcase the stewardship and quality of what we're doing. Ultimately, progress is a continuation of Michel's legacy."

To further that aim, Caraccioli moved its winery to Gonzales in 2020, making the vineyard only five minutes away and to achieve the "next level of control."

"We now have the ability to realize

goals that are achievable. We're always looking to get better," says Caraccioli. "I'm really excited about the wines that are coming up, like the 2016 Blanc de Blancs and 2017 Blanc de Noirs. If you're not swimming, you're drowning; you always have to get better."

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**The year 2015 was a banner year for Caraccioli and one that cemented its reputation as one of the best producers of sparkling wines not just in California, but the world.**

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Today the family continues to produce Brut Cuvée and Brut Rosé sparkling wines as well as Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Gamay and Syrah all sourced from the 124-acre Escolle Vineyard under Scott Caraccioli's direction.

Planted in March of 2008, Escolle Vineyard is primarily planted to Pinot Noir and Chardonnay with 46 rootstock and clone combinations throughout the vineyard.

Escolle is sustainably certified (SIP) and utilizes minimal intervention practices throughout the vineyard. No herbicides are used on Escolle, as all weeds are removed manually with either a weed knife or by hand. Minimal to no irrigation is utilized unless an extreme vintage takes place. A healthy cover crop is established to minimize any erosion and aids in ideal canopy vigor.



Scott Caraccioli

In 2018, just under three acres of Syrah were grafted to the vineyard. Likewise, in 2020 and 2021 four acres of Gamay and an additional two acres of Syrah were added. As the vineyard continues to mature, Caraccioli says they can realize the vineyard's full potential and fine-tune accordingly. The family only sources 25 percent of the vineyard (about 6,000 cases) with the rest purchased by 20 other winemakers.

"We could grow 500-1,000 more cases, but this is not a volume brand," he says. "To go bigger I would have to make concessions.

We can grow a little, but not a lot."

Caraccioli feels it's more important to keep the output small, the quality high and leave a little room for tinkering (such as 50 cases of Viognier yet to be released).

When asked if he can still hear Michel's voice in his head, either as guidance or an admonishment, he says "All the time!"

"He definitely sticks with me," he laughs. "We had a lot of laughs, he was funny, humble and real. I got to spend a decade with him and I learned so much from him."

Caraccioli, who graduated with a



master's degree in business marketing from Saint Mary's College, works daily with the winery, vineyard and hospitality teams on all aspects of Caraccioli Cellars' wine production. He has been an active member on the executive board of the Santa Lucia Highlands Wine Artisans and previously held the title of President of the Monterey County Vintners and Growers Association from 2014-16 and 2018-19. He was also instrumental in passing conjunctive labeling throughout Monterey County and remains invested in the evolution of Monterey County as a wine region.

"It's unquestionably a lot of work, but sharing our program with people in the tasting room, and restaurants is very rewarding. It's great to see it grow," he says. "I never pictured myself here, but I love it!"

In addition to the new winery facility in Gonzales, Caraccioli has a tasting room in downtown Carmel on Dolores Street between Ocean and 7th Avenues. It's open seven days a week and available for private parties and events, but due to the intimate nature of the tasting room, reservations are recommended. *Reservations can be made by calling the tasting room at (831) 622-7722 or by emailing [Samantha@caracciolicellars.com](mailto:Samantha@caracciolicellars.com).*

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# Seared Sable with Sunchoke Puree, Sautéed Greens and Roasted Radishes

Courtesy of Wild Fish, Pacific Grove



## What you will need:

- 4 – 6oz servings of Sable/Black Cod Skin on
- 2 Bunches of Kale or other hearty greens
- 2 bunches of radishes halved
- 2 cups sunchokes
- 3 Fingerlings
- Half and Half
- Butter
- Lemon cut into wedges
- Oil
- Salt

## Ingredients for Puree

- 1 tablespoon butter
- 2 cups peeled and thinly sliced sunchokes
- ½ cup peeled and thinly sliced fingerling potatoes
- ½ cup half and half
- ½ teaspoons salt or more to taste

## Method for Puree

1. In a medium saucepan over medium heat, melt the butter until foamy.
2. Add the sunchokes and potatoes, cover with a cartouche lid made of parchment paper, and sweat until tender, about 5 minutes.
3. Add the half and half and bring to a simmer.
4. Cook, covered until completely soft, about 15 minutes.
5. Puree in a blender until smooth and season with the salt.
6. Transfer to a bowl and cool, store.

## Roasted Radishes

Wash and dry radishes, cut in half, toss with olive oil, salt and pepper. Place on sheet pan and roast for about 10-15 minutes until tender and slightly caramelized.

## Greens

Wash and remove the greens from their stalks, tear into bite sized pieces, chop the stems.

## To Serve

Heat a med sized sauté pan to med heat, add a tablespoon of butter and sauté the chopped stems until tender then add greens, cook until tender and wilted. Set aside

Wipe out the pan and heat to high heat, add a neutral oil and heat just until smoking, dry the fish, sprinkle with salt. Place fish skin side down in the pan and cook for 5 minutes to crisp the skin, flip and finish cooking for another 3 minutes.

Spread some of the puree on each plate, divide the greens among the plates and do the same with the radishes, place fish on top and garnish with sunflower sprouts and a squeeze of lemon.



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# Coastal Roots Hospitality

Before the pandemic lockdown, Americans mostly limited their takeout options to pizza and other fast food. Today, nearly 70 percent say they are more likely now to purchase takeaway food from a fine-dining restaurant than they were before the outbreak.

Coastal Roots Hospitality (CRH), known for its ever-popular trio of restaurants (Tarpys and Montrio in Monterey and Rio Grill in Carmel), pivoted quickly toward this takeout trend — but with a twist.

Embracing a responsibility to help strengthen and support the communities it serves, CRH launched an innovative program in late 2020 called Pick It Up, Pay It Forward.

Each CRH restaurant participated in the philanthropic endeavor, giving 10 percent of all proceeds from takeout orders (not including delivery) to various charities. To date, the hospitality group has funneled more than \$150,000 to its key charity partners through its program.

In the last quarter of 2020 (and during the height of the pandemic), CRH partnered with the Monterey County Food Bank, donating more than \$50,000 to its mission to end hunger and promote good nutrition.

In subsequent months, CRH supported the following nonprofits: Jews Christians Muslims United; Kinship Center; Wonderwood Ranch; O’Neill Sea Odyssey; Monterey County Rape Crisis Center; and Gathering for Women.

The restaurants have continued the successful program in 2022, choosing the following nonprofits as charitable partners: Gateway Center of Monterey Inc. (January/February); Kinship Center (March/April); Monterey County Film Commission (May/June); Habitat Monterey Bay (July/August); Read To Me Project (September/October); and Community Partnership For Youth (November/December).

CRH encourages the community to help support the program by ordering takeout from its three unique restaurant menus.

*For more information on CRH, or to view the menus, visit [www.coastalrootshospitality.com](http://www.coastalrootshospitality.com).*



## CRH RESTAURANTS

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(831) 647-1444

[tarpys.com](http://tarpys.com)

### Montrio

(831) 648-8880

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### Rio Grill

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# Hofsas House Hosts Event to Benefit Peace of Mind Dog Rescue

**H**ofsas House Hotel is toasting Monterey County's finest wines and benefitting Peace of Mind Dog Rescue by hosting a "Local's Favorites Wine Fridays" at the hotel in downtown Carmel.

Join Hofsas House throughout 2022 at its poolside meeting room to sip local Monterey County wines, enjoy delicious small bites and support

Peace of Mind Dog Rescue, a resource and advocate for senior dogs and senior people on California's Central Coast. Since October 2009, POMDR has rescued over 2,500 dogs, and has helped over 1,500 Helping Paw Clients and their pets stay together.

The cost is \$15 per person, includes one glass of wine and nibbles. Additional glasses of wine can be purchased for \$5 per glass, with 100 percent of the proceeds benefitting Peace of Mind Dog Rescue. Space is limited to 40 attendees. Reservations required. To make a reservation, contact Carrie at (831) 624-2745 or by email at [carrie.theis@hofsashouse.com](mailto:carrie.theis@hofsashouse.com).

Sponsors include Scheid Vineyards, Bernardus Winery, Twisted Roots Winery, and Hofsas House.

*Hofsas House Hotel is located between Third and Fourth Avenue on San Carlos Street in Carmel-by-the-Sea. Contact the hotel at (831) 624-2745 or online at [hofsashouse.com](http://hofsashouse.com).*



**Dates scheduled for 2022 so far include:**

- 5:30 – 7:00 p.m. May 13, 2022, Twisted Roots Winery
- 5:30 – 7:00 p.m. Sept. 16, 2022, TBD



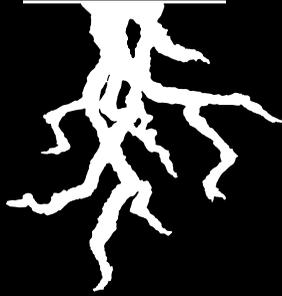
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