

# News & Notes of the UCSC Farm & Garden

Issue 119, Fall 2008

Center for Agroecology & Sustainable Food Systems

# For the Home Orchardist Scion Basics

– Orin Martin

Note: This is the first in a series of article for the "home orchardist" or "backdoor fruit grower," the theme being: this is what the tree does, in terms of physiology and seasonality; and this is what you can do to the tree - how, when, and with what. This first article deals primarily with the scion.

The managed temperate zone, deciduous fruit tree is composed of two genetically distinct individuals fused together via budding or grafting. These two parts are the scion and the rootstock, collectively referred to as the "stion."

Principal fruit tree genera: Malus – Apples Pyrus – Pears Prunus – Peaches, nectarines, prunes, plums, almonds, cherries, apricots, etc. Cydonia – Quince

In thinking about scions and rootstocks, four operative questions need to be asked and answered (in a colloquial sense): 1. What is it? 2. Where does it come from? 3. What does it give you? 4. Where can I get it/them?

### What Is It?

Defined as a family member or offspring, the scion refers to the fruit-bearing or top portion of the tree. Synonyms for the scion are *variety* or *cultivar* (short for cultivated variety). Thus the references would be: the *scion* Fuji apple; the *variety* Fuji; the *cultivar* 'Fuji.'

### Where Does It Come From?

Fruit tree scions are generally of three origins: chance or volunteer seedlings; seedlings that result from conscious breeding programs; and chance mutations, often referred to in the trade as "bud sports." In truth, mutations can be from a bud, a branch, or a whole tree mutation.

While all scions are the result of seedlings via sexual propagation or chance mutations, once their characteristics and qualities have been acknowledged they are then cloned or reproduced asexually by budding or grafting. Thus clones are created and designated, e.g., the Fuji apple clone or the Bartlett pear clone. This ensures genetic (and performance) uniformity and reliability, and gives rise to the fruit tree industry. So, while there are literally millions of Fuji apple trees worldwide, there is really only one Fuji tree (genetically). This is good for reliable production, but perilous if disease or pest problems enter the clone, as there is little or no resistance due to a limited gene pool. The Irish potato famines of the 1840s are a graphic example of over reliance on a limited gene pool for a staple food crop.

Many excellent varieties of fruit occur as chance seedlings. One such volunteer is Hudson's Golden Gem apple, arguably the biggest and most sugary of the rough, dull-skinned, russeted types. In blind taste tests it is often mistaken for a pear. Hudson's Golden Gem is a "found seedling," discovered in a fencerow near Hudson's Wholesale Nursery in Tangent, Oregon (Willamette Valley, near Corvallis). It is thought to be an open-pollinated seedling of Golden Delicious.

Golden Delicious itself is probably a chance seedling cross from Grimes Golden and an old (1600s) European apple, Golden Reinette (reinette = French for russeted). It sprouted on a farm owned by Anderson Mullins of Clay County, West Virginia in the 1890s. In 1914 he sold the tree to Stark Brothers Nursery of Missouri. The Stark Brothers cloned it and named it Golden Delicious (resembling Red Delicious in shape but thankfully not in taste or genetics). It is one of my favorite apples, with a couple of caveats –

– When allowed good "hang time" or fully ripened on the tree.

- When eaten dead ripe, fresh off the tree (it's a handto-mouth affair) and not out of cold storage. If picked prematurely it does not live up to its name, as it is green, not golden, and hardly delicious. At full maturity it's thin skinned, coarse fleshed (leading to a long taste sensation) and cloyingly sweet and juicy – wear a bib!

Golden Delicious has gone on to become the second leading commercial apple in the U.S. (after Red Delicious) and enjoys a loyal following in Central and Northern Europe.

As breeding stock, Golden Delicious breeds with almost any other apple, producing outstanding progeny: Jonagold, Elstar, Freyberg, Spigold, Corailor, Pinova, Rubinette, Arlet, Gala, Russet Beauty, ...

Many scions come into being as a result of conscious breeding programs (often at University or Agricultural Experiment Stations). In the early 1900s the Japanese embarked on an ambitious apple breeding program. The first notable release was Mutsu (known as Crispin in Europe and the Eastern U.S.). A cross between Golden Delicious and Indo, Mutsu was raised in 1930 and named and released in 1948, but didn't achieve fame until the 1970s.

Mutsu exemplifies the tenets of Japanese apple breeding:

•Large fruit, often approaching 1 pound per apple, with Mustu, Sayaka, and Seiki-Ichi

- Supersweet, with a balancing percent of acidity
- Coarse fleshed
- High juice quotient

• And unlike the U.S., Japanese consumers are not hung up on an apple being all red—so generally, they're not

Further breeding releases from Japan include:

• Fuji: a cross between Rall's Janet (an old Virginian apple preferred by Thomas Jefferson) and Red Delicious (who would have imagined something worthwhile lurking in that gene pool?)

• Many varieties with Mutsu genes in their parentage – often referred to as "sisters of Mutsu," e.g., Kinsei, Sayaka, Tsugaru, Shizuka and Orin (a sweet but latematuring Mutsu – a fact that my wife Stephanie doesn't dispute)

It is worth noting that breeding a fruit scion is a long and arduous process. It can take up to 30 years to breed and successfully introduce a new variety. This includes up to 10 years raising and discarding tens of thousands of seedling crosses as part of evaluative processes to assess tree vigor and performance, pest, disease resistance, fruit quality and storage capability, etc. Then up to 10 years of grower trials and grower acceptance. And finally, up to 10 years of consumer trials and acceptance. For example, the Fuji apple was bred in 1930 but not named and released to the public until 1962. A fruit tree breeder can spend his or her life in the profession and never have a successful introduction. Scions also occur from chance mutations. Both Red and Golden Delicious as well as Fuji apples seem "susceptible" to mutations, resulting in more compact, earlier-maturing and more highly colored (in Fuji's case, redder) strains. There are also red strains of both D'Anjou and Bartlett pears.

Genetically modified fruit trees are possible (today), but breeders fear consumer resistance and the resultant political and public relations turmoil that would ensue.

### What Does It Give You?

The scion determines the fruit variety and its characteristics: flavor, aroma, texture (coarse, crisp, or melting flesh), ability to keep (both on and off the tree), uses (fresh, juice, cooking), season of ripening, and disease and pest resistance or susceptibility.

The scion also genetically determines tree growth habits and is a secondary contributor to tree size or height. Rootstock (more on this in the next issue) is the principal genetic determinant of tree height. Obviously, horticultural practices also contribute to tree vigor.

The scion influences tree growth habits such as: upright, spreading, weak or strong growth, lateral bearer of fruit, stem bearer, strong or brittle wood. Scion also determines flowering and fruit patterns: light (Spigold, Holstein apples), heavy (Gala), annual (Golden Delicious), or biennial (Spigold, Yellow Newtown Pippin, Hudson's Golden Gem).

More specifically, several independent genetic scion characteristics influence the size and shape of a tree. These characteristics can act independently or in combination –

*Internode length* (rate of vigor): Some scions, most notably compact or spur strains of apples Granny Smith, Golden Delicious, McIntosh, Fuji, and Redhaven peach, have shorter internode distances (at maturity), resulting in a shorter tree.

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A sample of russeted and Golden Delicious-type apples grown at the Chadwick Garden and UCSC Farm, available for tasting at this year's Harvest Festival.

### late Fall/Winter Calendar

### **Raising Chickens (and Ducks!) in Town**

Saturday, November 15, 10 am - 12:30 pm Louise Cain Gatehouse, UCSC Farm

Learn how to raise and care for chickens and other poultry in an urban environment. Taught by Paul Glowaski and Cooper Funk, graduates of the Apprenticeship program and the founders of "Urban Eggs," this workshop will cover the basics of tending small flocks in town, including coop design, breeds, and predator control.

\$20 for members of the Friends of the UCSC Farm & Garden; \$25, general public. Space limited; to pre-register, please send a check made out to **UC Regents** to: Joan Tannheimer, CASFS, 1156 High St., Santa Cruz, CA 95064, attn: Workshop, by Wednesday, November 12. For more information or directions to the Farm, call 459-3240, or email Joan Tannheimer at jonitann@ucsc.edu.

### Friends' Holiday Tea and Sale at the Jingle Shells Art & Book Festival

Sunday, December 7, 12 pm - 5:30 pm

Seymour Center, Long Marine Laboratory We once again plan to join in the "Jingle Shells Art & Book Festival" at UCSC Long Marine Lab's Seymour Center. Come shop for t-shirts (including kids sizes), cookbooks, and other Friends' merchandise for the holidays. Because our participation is not yet confirmed, please check the CASFS web site (casfs.ucsc.edu), call 459-3240, or email jonitann@ucsc.edu after November 17 for an update.

### "Fruit Trees 101": Basic Fruit Tree Care

Saturday, January 10, 10 am - 2 pm Louise Cain Gatehouse, UCSC Farm

Taught by Chadwick Garden manager Orin Martin, OrchardKeeper founder Matthew Sutton, and a team of fruit tree specialists, this new course will cover the basics of fruit tree care: selection, planting, irrigation, pest management, and basic winter pruning. \$15 for Friends' members; \$20 general public, payable at the workshop. Dress for the outdoors and bring a snack. Heavy rain cancels.

### Fruit Tree Q&A Session

Sunday, January 11, 10 am - 12 noon ProBuild Garden Center, 235 River St., Santa Cruz (formerly Lumbermens/San Lorenzo)

Bring your fruit tree questions to this free Q&A session with fruit tree experts from the UCSC Farm & Garden. Learn about varieties that perform well on the Central Coast, along with fruit tree care tips. Note the location: ProBuild Garden Center in Santa Cruz. *Friends' members receive a 10% discount on purchases.* 

### "Fruit Trees 101": Basic Fruit Tree Care

Saturday, January 17, 10 am - 2 pm Sierra Azul Nursery and Gardens 2660 East Lake Ave. (Hwy 152), Watsonville 763-0939, www.sierrazul.com

A repeat of the January 10 workshop, this time at the Sierra Azul nursery, located across from the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds. A Q&A session with Sierra Azul staff will follow the workshop. Heavy rain cancels. *Friends' members receive a 10% discount on purchases.* 

### Other Fruit Tree Series Winter Workshops -

**In-Depth Winter Pruning, Pome Fruits (Apples, Pears)** Saturday, January 24, 10 am - 2 pm, UCSC Farm \$15; \$20 (rainout date = January 31)

### In-Depth Winter Pruning, Stone Fruits (Plums, Peaches, Nectarines, etc.)

Saturday, February 7, 10 am - 2 pm, UCSC Farm *\$15; \$20 (rainout date = February 14)* 

### Fruit Tree Grafting, taught in collaboration with the California Rare Fruit Growers

Saturday, February 28, 1 pm - 4 pm Live Oak Grange, 1900 17th Ave., Santa Cruz \$15 Friends of the Farm & Garden members; \$20 general public; free for members of the California Rare Fruit Growers

If you'd like more information about these events, need directions, or have questions about access, please call 831.459-3240 or see our web site, casfs.ucsc.edu

Please note that we cannot accept credit card payments for classes or merchandise (cash or check only).

Co-sponsored by the Center for Agroecology & Sustainable Food Systems at UC Santa Cruz, and the Friends of the UCSC Farm & Garden.

### **MEMBERS WEIGH IN**

Thanks to the many Friends' members who responded to our membership survey this summer. The nearly 30% response rate was heartening and we very much appreciate the time and thought that you put into helping us improve our program offerings, membership benefits, and communications efforts.

The feedback on classes you'd like to see offered was especially useful, and we'll be doing our best to address your suggestions in the coming year and beyond. There was particular interest in fruit trees, soil health, home food production, and California native plants. Our expanded series of fruit tree workshops will address some of that interest (see calendar, page 3), and we'll be offering a number of "Victory Garden" classes next spring, summer and fall — look for the full slate of offerings with the membership renewal material later this fall. Also on tap are talks on sustainability and food system issues.

Although the majority of respondents indicated that they prefer the UCSC Farm and Alan Chadwick Garden as sites for workshops and lectures, there was signficant interest in seeing events held in other parts of the county. In response, we'll be holding several events in downtown Santa Cruz, Live Oak and South County this year, including a free fruit tree Q&A session at ProBuild (formerly Lumbermens/San Lorenzo Lumber), a fruit tree class and Q&A session at Sierra Azul Nursery and Garden in Watsonville, and a grafting class at the Live Oak Grange. Friends' member and gardening teacher Trish Hildinger will also be teaching a class in Live Oak this fall (see below).

A number of members indicated that they'd be willing to switch to electronic distribution of the *News* & *Notes* and other Friends' communications. We'll be working to make that switch for the next newsletter.

Thanks again for your ongoing support as we work to make the Friends of the Farm & Garden an even better, more responsive organization.

### Winter Garden Workshop

Sunday, November 2, 10 am - 12 pm Green Acres Elementary School Science Garden 966 Bostwick Lane, Santa Cruz

Join Trish Hildinger to learn about mulching, cover crops, double digging, and cold weather protection for your plants. \$15 registration fee plus \$10 materials fee; 30% of registration fees will be donated to the Green Acres Science Garden. Call 469-3963 for more information or to reserve your spot in the class.

# Community Celebrates Fall on the Farm

With rain threatening, there was fear that this year's Harvest Festival might be washed away. And although a few light showers greeted early arrivals, it turned out to be a wonderful day of clouds and sun that showed off the UCSC Farm at its early fall best. This yearly gathering has become a campus and community tradition for the many who come to help celebrate the harvest.

Music by the Rhythm Rangellers, Kevin DiNoto Trio, Rolling Cultivators, and Bean Creek provided non-stop entertainment to a crowd of nearly 1,300 attending this year's event. Roasted organic corn, vegie-kabobs and other treats were featured, and visitors young and old sampled more than 30 apple varieties grown at the Chadwick Garden and on the UCSC Farm. Visitors also enjoyed gardening talks and walks, cooking demonstrations, farm tours, hay rides and lots of kids' activities.

We once again held a "Food for Thought" forum, this year focusing on a discussion of ways to make the food system more sustainable. We look forward to expanding this feature of the event in future years.

The Harvest Festival also offers a place for local farming, gardening, campus and environmental groups to share information, and for local organic farmers to sell their products. Thanks to the many participants who enhanced the event this year, including the new sunflower fundraiser for our "Food, What?!" youth farming and empowerment program.

Business sponsors are a key to making the Harvest Festival a success, and we very much appreciate the support of our major sponsors: New Leaf Community Markets, Stonyfield Farm, and Veritable Vegetable. Other generous business sponsors included Ristorante Avanti, The Flower Ladies, Jacob's Farm/Del Cabo, Barry Swenson Builders, and McEvoy Ranch. Thanks also to the UCSC Campus Student Environmental Council for their financial support.

We also received generous product and gift certificate donations from Odwalla, Gayle's Bakery, Sumano's Bakery, Pacific Cookie Company, Newman's Own Organics, the Santa Cruz Farmers' Markets, Bookshop Santa Cruz, Dirty Girl Farm, and Spa Fitness Center. Jim Rider provided organic apples for making apple juice. Many thanks to all of these businesses for their support. And a special thanks to Candy Berlin and the UCSC Dining Services staff for helping us toward our goal of making this a "zero waste" event. Thanks also to the many volunteers who helped make this year's Harvest Festival such a success, despite the threatening weather. We couldn't have done it without you!

### Now's the Time to Plant Natives

### –Martha Brown

After nearly eight months without a good drenching, those of us living on the Central Coast are ready for some relief from the long dry spell. Native plants are ready too. Natives do much of their growing when fall and winter rains trigger root development. In late winter, spring and summer, that root growth translates to vibrant displays of leaves, flowers, and fruits.

"The extent and success of above-ground growth of natives depends on how well they get established below ground," says Christof Bernau, who manages the handworked garden area at the UCSC Farm. With that in mind, now is a great time to add some native plants to your landscape or backyard garden and give them time to "put down roots" before spring.

Planting now also means less watering later. "You may need to water a few times before winter rains arrive to take over," says Bernau. "But a spring-planted native would need a lot more supplemental water to get it through the first dry season."

#### Range of Plants to Fill Every Garden Niche

With options ranging from bulbs to grasses, screens to showy shrubs, and low-lying perennials to large trees, natives can fill every horticultural niche in your garden. They can also stabilize soil, attract wildlife, and create habitat for beneficial insects that can help control pests in your garden.

Native bunch grasses provide both attractive foliage and extensive, fibrous root systems that can help protect against erosion. Bernau recommends California fescue (*Festuca californica*), which offers an excellent groundcover for slopes. This deer-resistant, mid-sized bunch grass produces 2'-foot tall, fountain-like blue-green foliage with a showy flower stalk, and is evergreen along the coast. He also likes Deer Grass (*Muhlenbergia rigens*), an evergreen dense clumping perennial to 3' tall and 4' in bloom that forms both abundant insect habitat and does an excellent job of holding soil in place.

"Other soil-protecting plants include low-growing, spreading shrubs that create an extensive canopy, such as Ceanothus 'Carmel Creeper' and *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*," says Bernau. Both of these woody perennials produce beautiful flowers, attractive foliage and an interesting architecture. For those living along creeks or streams, native willows are also an excellent, fast-growing choice for stabilizing soil.

The range of native perennial, woody shrubs offers options for wonderful garden color. California flannelbush (*Fremontodendron californicum*), bears a profusion of bright yellow, waxy-textured flowers in the spring. The bush anenome (*Carpinteria californica*), produces fragrant white flowers that contrast with its narrow, dark green, glossy leaves. *Malacothamnus fasciculatus* 'Casitas' is another evergreen shrub, reaching 6–8 feet tall. This Mallow family member bears large, soft-pink flowers that bloom throughout much of the summer.

Perennial shrubs also offer more prosaic uses. "Both toyon [*Heteromeles arbutifolia*] and hollyleaf cherry [*Pru-nus illicifolia*] respond well to shaping and can be used as a hedge," says Bernau. In addition, these woody shrubs shelter native birds and other wildlife, while their nectar and fruit offer a critical food source. Coast silktassel (*Garrya eliptica*) can also be used as a hedge or screen, with the added bonus of silvery, pendulous catkins that develop in the winter.

Smaller perennials such as hummingbird sage (*Salvia spathacea*), with its showy magenta red flowers, are an excellent choice for the foreground of a native planting. California fuchsia (*Epilobium californicum*), another lowgrowing perennial, has attractive grey green foliage and striking tubular red flowers in summer, an added bonus as they bloom far later in the season than most natives. Both of the above are also excellent nectar sources to support your local hummingbirds. Also offering wonderful color are the Pacific Coast hybrid irises. Ranging from white to deep burgundy to deep purple, they put on incredible displays in early to mid spring and are tolerant of a range of garden conditions.

Native plants can also boost populations of beneficial insects that prey on or parasitize garden pests. Bunchgrasses create great habitat for native spiders. Tiny beneficial wasps and flies are drawn to broad, flat clusters of white to cream-colored flowers, such as those of the native yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), and the buckwheats St. Catherine's lace (*Eriogonum giganteum*) and Santa Cruz Island buckwheat (*Eriogonum arborescens*). Toyon, with its small white flowers, is also a favorite nectar source for beneficials.

#### **Planting Tips**

When choosing California natives, be sure your yard or garden can meet their habitat needs. "Know their environmental requirements, and match planting locations with the plant's need for sun, shade, dry or moist conditions, good drainage, etc.," says Bernau. Grouping plants with similar needs will maximize the health and effectiveness of the plants, while minimizing maintenance work.

In the fall, water plants in thoroughly at planting, then every week to ten days until the rains start. "Keep an eye on the plants. You may need to supplement with some irrigation if the rains aren't consistent," advises Bernau.

Natives have relatively low fertility needs, and feeding them too heavily can actually shorten their lifespan. Use a light addition of compost or other soil amendment at plantcontinued on next page

### $S_{CION} B_{ASICS} - F_{ROM} PAGE 2$

Wide angle branching (>60–90°): This trait creates a tree that is wider than it is tall. The wide branch angle (crotch) also contributes hormonally to earlier and heavier fruit production. As fruit is an extreme nutrient sink (i.e., requires significant energy to produce), this further restricts tree height. The ideal branch angle for balanced vegetative:fruit ratio is 45–60°. Wider (up to 80–90°) branch angles are mechanically stronger than either narrow or very wide angles. Conventionally, some growers and nurseries apply cytokinin-type growth regulators to buds to induce wide-angled branching. In the world of organics this would be considered cheating.

In *basitonic* (basi=low or wide) scions, wide-angle branching is extremely predominant, especially at the base of the tree. This genetic trait dictates a vigorous rootstock to impart more height or vigor, and greater spacing between rows (within the row as well as row to row).

Examples of wide-branching scions include: apples Fiesta, Cox's Orange Pippin, Belle de Booskop; many prune plums; and Starfire peach.

Conversely, scions with *narrow angled* (<45°) branches tend to be lower in indoleacetic acid (IAA), which control apical dominance. Thus all branches tend to grow upright and be tall.

*Acrotonic* (acro=height) trees combine a high rate of vigor with narrow branch angles. They often have an upright, candelabra- or menorah-like growth pattern. Such trees are candidates for dwarfing rootstocks to control their height, and best trained to an open center form. Examples of acrotonic scions include: Granny Smith, Pink Lady, Chehalis, Elstar, and Ginger Gold (apples), along with almost all cherries and pears, Japanese plums and pluots.

Examples of the effect of scion vigor on overall tree size:

Cox's Orang	e Pippin (weak scion)	
Rootstock	Tree Height	
M111	10–12′	
M7	6–8′	
M27	4-6'	
Mutsu Apple (a	very strong scion)	
Rootstock	Tree Height	
M111	18–20′	
M7	10–12′	
M27	6-8'	

Unfortunately, there are no reliable compendia of information describing scion characteristics. Ferreting out such important information involves trial and error; reading between the lines in fruit tree catalogues (e.g., "Galas have long, arching branches" = vigor!); and chatting up your local orchardist or hobbyist fruit grower.

### Where Can I Get Some of the Scions Discussed Here?

Small-Scale Tree Nurseries (for the home gardener)

Raintree Nursery www.raintreenursery.com 360.496-6400

Sandy Bar Nursery www.sandybarnursery.com 530.627-3379

Trees of Antiquity www.treesofantiquity.com 805.467-9909

Santa Cruz-area nurseries such as ProBuild (Lumbermens/San Lorenzo) on River Street and The Garden Co. on Mission Street feature high quality Dave Wilson Nursery trees, although the scion/rootstock choices are somewhat limited.

**Large-Scale Nurseries** (these will generally sell you a few or even just one tree)

C and O Nursery www.c-onursery.com 800.232-2636

Columbia Basin Nursery www.cbnllc.com 800.333-8589

Dave Wilson Nursery www.davewilson.com (web site offers tips on backyard fruit production) 800.654-5854

Van Well Nursery www.vanwell.net 800.572-1553

### PLANTING CALIFORNIA NATIVES – FROM PAGE 5

ing. Mulch to protect the soil, but be careful not to build compost up against the plant's stem or trunk, as natives need a good "swing" between wet and dry conditions.

This article has touched on just a few of the myriad California natives that can be incorporated into the landscape. In future issues of the *News & Notes* we'll discuss other favorites, including the native Salvias as well as some of the edible natives.

For more information on selecting, planting and caring for California native plants, contact your local chapter of the California Native Plant Society (www.cnps.org). Many local nurseries stock natives, including Sierra Azul Nursery and Gardens, Elkhorn Native Plant Nursery, Native Revival Nursery, The Garden Company, ProBuild (formerly San Lorenzo Garden Center), and others.



Apprenticeship graduates have been getting a lot of press over the last few months. Farmers and educators Nancy Vail (1997 grad and former CASFS Farm-to-College / CSA coordinator) and Jered Lawson (1994) of Pie Ranch, and Ryan Casey (2001) and Ned Conwell (2001) of Blue House Farm, both located in southern San Mateo County, were featured in the August 2008 edition of *Sunset* magazine in an article focusing on making a living off the land. The same foursome appeared in the fall issue of the Peninsula Open Space Trust's magazine, *Landscapes*, talking about their efforts to preserve productive farmland in concert with the landtrust.

Amy Rice-Jones, 2006 graduate and a second-year Apprentice in 2007, is now running Petaluma Bounty Farm, producing food for low-income residents of Petaluma, California. An article on the farm and Amy's work appeared in the September 18 issue of the *Petaluma Argus Courier*. And across the country in Tennessee, the September 26 issue of the *Chattanooga Times Free Press* carried a long article on Williams Island Farm and its CSA program, started this year by 2007 Apprentices Ryan Power, Kelsey Keener, and Noah Bresler.

Class of 2006 Apprentice Matt McCue was featured in a September 24 article in the *San Francisco Chronicle* about the Farmer-Veteran Coalition –

### **Food Conscious: Farmers recruit combat veterans** *by Janet Fletcher*

A few years ago, Matt McCue was a U.S. Army infantry soldier trampling through fields and farms in Northern Iraq looking for enemy weapons. Today, the 26-yearold veteran traipses through 15 acres of fennel, beets, chard and kale as manager of the French Garden farm in Sebastopol, a job secured for him by a fledgling Bay Area organization dedicated to helping vets learn to farm.

"There was a sense that our farms had something to offer, not just for the soldiers coming back but for the whole nation," says Michael O'Gorman, a founder of the new Farmer-Veteran Coalition and the former production manager for Del Cabo, an organic tomato-growing cooperative in Baja.

### A Win-Win

Sensing a brewing epidemic of unemployed vets in rural areas, O'Gorman and several other California peace

activists with ties to agriculture spotted a win-win solution. With a little assistance, returning combat vets could find healing and productive work on farms, while communities burgeoning with locavores would benefit from new recruits to local food production.

McCue, who started his farm job in December, grows produce for the affiliated French Garden restaurant and for several Sonoma County farmers' markets.

"I feel like this has helped me set my future up," says the vet, who cites the home gardens and pomegranate orchards of Iraq as inspiration for his interest in farming. "I even fantasize about going to Iraq and working as an extension agent."

The coalition recently held its first benefit dinner, at the French Garden restaurant, and netted enough money to lay the legal foundation required to apply for grants. With funding, a paid outreach coordinator will be able to connect with vets through military job fairs and veterans' groups.

"We want to get the word out to these young men and women that this is not your grandfather's farm," says O'Gorman. "This is a new time. You can get into farming with a lot less money doing regional production. You don't need to inherit 640 acres."

For the past year, O'Gorman has volunteered his time as a consultant to vets who are new to farming. Among his proteges is Colin Archipley, a Marine who did three tours in Iraq. At Archi's Acres near San Diego, Archipley now grows avocados and hydroponic basil and tomatoes and welcomes other vets for two- to three-month apprenticeships.

Farming "is a good thing for vets, especially Iraq vets," says Archipley. "We lose a lot of our social skills, and when we come back, we don't want to mingle with people back on the block. We talk a different language." On the farm, says Archipley, vets can find satisfying work that doesn't require daily interaction with customers.

O'Gorman points to the recent Slow Food Nation event in San Francisco as a sign of the appetite for locally grown food and the urgent need for new lifeblood in agriculture.

"This whole exciting, dynamic revolution in food production is not going to happen if we don't have young men and women go into farming," says O'Gorman.

### New Purpose

For many soldiers returning from combat, growing food may be the ideal transition. "I think a lot of the depression in the military spawns from not having a purpose," says McCue. "What is your life going to be defined by? In the military, if you get into an altercation, your life is defined by tragedy. My life is defined by growing and harvesting things, and there's a lot to be said for that."

*For information about the Farmer-Veteran Coalition, call (707) 981-8010, or visit www.farmvetco.org.* 

### **Rainbow Pepper Soup**

Serves 6

- 6 cups vegetable or chicken broth
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 2 cups uncooked white rice
- 5 bell peppers—one green, one red, one orange, one yellow, one purple
- 1/2 teaspoon dried summer savory or 2 teaspoons fresh
- 2 teaspoons snipped chives
- 2 egg volks
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- salt and pepper to taste

Bring broth to boil in large saucepan. Simmer on low to cook rice while preparing the rest of ingredients.

Chop onion and sauté in hot oil until golden brown. Seed, core, and chop the peppers medium dice and sauté a few minutes along with onions. Add to broth along with savory and chives.

Quickly separate and beat egg yolks in 2-cup glass measure. Add hot broth to the egg yolks a little at a time, whisking constantly, until the measuring cup is full. Then add back to soup, stirring to blend.

Add lemon juice, season to taste, and serve immediately.

From **Fresh from the Farm & Garden**, Volume 2, published by the Friends of the UCSC Farm & Garden.

### SAVORY WINTER SQUASH STEW

#### Serves: 6-8

- 3 cups peeled and seeded and cubed winter squash (delicata or butternut)
  1 large onion, chopped
  6 cloves of garlic, minced
  4-5 sweet peppers, roasted, seeded, and chopped
  2 carrots, sliced
  4 potatoes, cubed
  2 early girl tomatoes, chopped
  2 Tbsp salt
  1 serrano or jalapeno pepper, minced (or 1 tsp of chile powder)
  Fresh ground black pepper to taste
- 2 Tbsp olive oil

Sauté the onions in oil until transparent. Add squash, potatoes, and carrots and sauté over medium heat until they begin to soften.

Add tomatoes and sweet peppers to the mix, adding just enough water to barely cover all. Salt and bring to a boil.

Reduce to a simmer, adding garlic, jalapeno, and black pepper. Cover and cook for an additional 20 to 30 minutes (until squash and root vegetables are stewed.)

*From Field Notes, newsletter of the UCSC Farm Community Supported Agriculture project, 17th Harvest* (9.23.08 and 9.26.08)

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