

# Feature

**MOSTLY BYPASSES WEST MARIN STUDENTS**

## Marin Organic launches "National Gleaning Day"

By Andrea Blum

Marin Organic has helped feed 10,000 Marin County school children a year with vegetables gleaned from local farms. Now they have set their goals to go national.

Helge Hellberg, executive director of Marin Organic who launched a local gleaning project years ago to help feed Marin students organic and local alternatives has organized the first ever National Gleaning Day for Sept.ember 20.

The Point Reyes Station nonprofit has garnered participants from more than six

with the idea and reached out to his contacts across the nation.

Come Monday, students, volunteers, families and children across the country will go to the fields and pick the produce left there by farmers to donate to school chefs for their lunches. The effort is also part of a project spearheaded by Teens Turning Green, a student-led clean-food advocacy group in Northern California that has dubbed next week Project Lunch—another educational tool to help get healthy, local school lunches on the cafeteria tables instead of prepackaged

part of their curriculum. Also buying food from the Marin Organic and local farmers is far out of their budget, said Shoreline Superintendent Dr. Stephen Rosenthal.

"It's a wonderful program but it's way out of reach for our budget," Rosenthal said. "The program is labor intensive. We have a very small program. We run two kitchens and only three cooks for all our students in just four hours."

West Marin schools get their produce and food both from a local company and Cisco, a national food distributor. They also have a few small gardens where they can harvest vegetables.

### KINDRED GLEANERS

Here is a sampling of some of the participants in Marin Organic's First Annual National Gleaning Day:

Backyard Bounty in Santa Barbara CA is harvesting extras from home gardens and farmers' markets for donation to food pantries and schools.

Faith Feeds in Lexington, KY will glean from local farms for donation to Kid's Café for school lunches and after-school programs.

Benzie County Schools in Bensonia, Michigan will glean apples from local ranches for her own school food services.

Society of Saint Andrew, based in Virginia and with gleaners across the US, will glean from several farms and markets to then deliver to regional schools and food pantries.

Urban Gleaners in Portland Oregon glean a few times each week from farmers' markets for delivery to local schools.

Valley Stewardship Network's Kickapoo Harvest in Wisconsin will glean extra cherry tomatoes for their local



**GLEANING WITH MARIN ORGANIC AT PARADISE VALLEY PRODUCE** in Bolinas is Miguel Villarreal, Director of Nutrition and Food Services at Novato Unified School District. (Photo courtesy Paige Green, <paigegreenphotography.com>)



**BOLINAS-STINSON BEACH** Unified School District teacher Anny Owen gleans at Paradise Valley Produce in Bolinas with Marin Organic. National Gleaning Day is Sept. 20. (Photo courtesy Paige Green, paigegreenphotography.com)

school district lunches.

Marin Organic is rallying student volunteers from 8 schools to visit 4 organic farms in Marin to harvest extras for their own school lunches.

To join a gleaning expedition: [marinorganic.org](http://marinorganic.org)

states across the nation to participate in what Hellberg calls an educational gesture that looks more closely at an "untapped resource." He also sees the project as a way to redefine the concept of waste.

"Up to 20 percent of the food grown doesn't meet strict market requirements to be sold," said Hellberg of food left in the fields. That food is plowed under and dissolves back to the land even though it is perfectly fine to eat. "National Gleaning Day brings our attention to resources that are untapped," said Hellberg who came up

processed food shipped from afar. Marin Organic and over 100 stakeholders in the world will have a series of events as part of a weeklong lunch project.

In Marin, every Monday a team of volunteers from Marin Organic and the community harvest the extra food still in the fields of local farms. The program is set up to offer a healthy and organic alternative to the typical school lunch. For now, the program only serves East Marin schools, a fact that grates especially hard on parents in West Marin.

### WEST MARIN CAN'T AFFORD

While the West Marin nonprofit is justifiably proud to be exporting their home-grown school lunch program that provides organic produce collected from local organic farms, West Marin schools cannot afford the program. While they occasionally do get food donated from the gleaning program, they do not have the resources or the people power to make it

## Creek bathing warning

Last week the county posted warnings for high bacteria counts at the Green Bridge bathing area on Lagunitas Creek.

The post lets people know that swimming there could result in illness.

The test takes 24 hours to get results so there is always a possibility that the water has lower counts the next day or even the next hour. Or the counts could be higher.

The county takes weekly samples from April to October every year. There is presently no way of knowing the source of the high counts coliform and enterococcus, the indicators for bacteria harmful to humans.

Lagunitas Creek has a tendency to have postings during the summer sample season. "This year the Inkwells bathing area has a much higher tendency to blow," said Robert Turner, Project Manager, Marin County Environmental Health Services. This year the county posted warning at Inkwells 19 times whereas Green Bridge posted eight times.

— Andrea Blum

### "PROJECT LUNCH CLUB"

A look at the week's events:

Sunday Sept.ember 19, a fundraiser hosted by Savory Thymes at Hillside Gardens in Mill Valley.

Monday will be the first annual National gleaning day

Tuesday; Teens Turning Green will launch Project Lunch Club with students food service staff, and the schools.

Wednesday; Marin Agricultural Land Trust's Farm visits

Thursday; Marin Farmers' Market Field Trip

Friday; School Lunch Celebration sourced with locally sourced produce hosted by Agricultural Institute of Marin (AIM)



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# Feature

GUEST COLUMN

## Gleaning is for everyone



By Chester Densmore, Marin Organic School Lunch and Gleaning Program Associate

Every week I find myself witnessing and participating in amazing acts of generosity, caring and well being for the land and people of Marin County. One recent week, thanks to Green Gulch Farm in Muir Beach, the Marin Organic School Lunch and Gleaning Program received more than 20 boxes of fresh beautiful, delicious and nutritious Rainbow Chard. After Green Gulch sold and distributed what they could of the high quality chard, the rest became gleaned food for our program. With nearly 30 years of Buddhist teachings and ecological gardening practices at Green Gulch, this chard was as good as it gets, destined to bring good health to anyone who enjoys it.

After loading the bountiful harvest on the Marin Organic truck, I delivered four boxes to three grateful and excited school chefs. As it was Thursday afternoon, the

school chefs couldn't take all 20 boxes so I distributed the remaining chard to two active local resource centers in Marin that serve food to low-income communities.

St. Vincent de Paul in central San Rafael took ten boxes (nearly 250 pounds!) of chard to incorporate into their menu. The St. Vincent de Paul Free Dining Room relies on a completely volunteer-driven program where neighbors provide neighbors with hot food, a place for respite and a listening heart. They serve all who enter the doors, 365 days of the year. <http://www.vinnies.org>

Meals of Marin happily welcomed the remainder of the gleaned goods. From their small kitchen in San Rafael, the Meals of Marin crew works to prepare and deliver appetizing, healthy, home-cooked meals to people with life threatening illnesses living in Marin County. In January 2009, they passed the 900,000-meal mark. Due to funding challenges, Meals of Marin is no longer open five days a week, but down to three. One hundred pounds of

locally produced organic chard was a welcome addition to their menu this week and a wholesome option for the people



GLEAN TEAM INTERN JULIE DASHIELL harvests for school lunches at Paradise Valley Produce in Bolinas. (Photo courtesy Paige Green, <[paigegreenphotography.com](http://paigegreenphotography.com)>)

<<< **FOUNDED BY MARIN ORGANIC**, National Gleaning Day on Sept. 20 intends to unite communities, farms and schools across the nation for a day of harvesting healthy food for students. As part of Project Lunch Week: MARIN, the Marin Organic Glean Team will glean extras from the fields of local member farms to take back to schools throughout the county. To join in: [marinorganic.org](http://marinorganic.org), or contact Program Manager Scott Davidson at 663 9667. Glean Team members shown at Paradise Valley Produce in Bolinas include program leader Chester Densmore (standing in back with hat), and Bob Densmore, of Bolinas, who teaches science at Marin Country Day School (kneeling center front). (Photo courtesy Paige Green, <[paigegreenphotography.com](http://paigegreenphotography.com)>)

they serve, whose health benefits greatly from eating such nutritious food. <http://www.mealsofmarin.net>

What a blessed land we have here in Marin. The daily efforts of our local farmers and their dedication to grow high quality food, when partnered with Marin Organic's role in making it accessible to as many people as possible, is truly an amazing act of life and well being.

### GROWING COMMUNITY AND GROWING FOOD

I see the Marin Organic School Lunch and Gleaning Program as a source of building community. Every week I drive the Marin Organic truck through the county, across highways, neighborhoods and school parking lots, with the refrigerator unit filled with organically produced foods from a variety of Marin farms. I imagine the community's thoughts when they see the truck on the road: Chefs thinking to themselves, "Hey, I cook with those foods;" students and teachers saying to each other, "Our school lunch is made from some of that food;" or parents proudly knowing that a delivery may have just been made to their child's school. I envision restaurant goers and farmers market customers smiling because they have recently eaten something connected to Marin Organic; local business owners, volunteers and Marin Organic supporters nodding in satisfaction because they've supported our efforts; and, of course, I think about the farmers, the soil architect geniuses, who might say aloud, "I grew that food."

It's thanks to all of us that this is possible.

There are many community projects oriented around food, like community gardens and school garden projects. I recently saw a forum about the Novato Community Garden Project. It is amazing how many organizations, teachers, parents and city councilors are involved in making this happen. Contact the Novato Live Well Network for more information about that project: <http://www.novatolivehell.org/>

I'm also actively involved with making friends at the College of Marin Indian Valley Campus Farm and Garden Class. Thanks to community organizing by the Conservation Corps North Bay, the University of California Cooperative Extension, College of Marin, the instructor and participating students, this project is a thriving success.

Growing food is a fabulous tradition for growing community. Knowing where our food comes from and who grew it, and eating healthy foods with our friends and family, sows seeds and plants roots that flower for generations. Spring is here, and it's so inspiring.

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