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### Gabriela Sandoval: Partnering with Farmers to Ensure Food Safety

Gabriela Sandoval knows firsthand that farmers are the backbone of our society, and she works every day to ensure they're sustained and supported. As the founder and owner of Ag Food Safety Solutions, Gabriela sees to it that farmers get the support they deserve.



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# So Very Rich *In So Many Ways!*

**W**e are rich in ways many people tend to overlook. I am not speaking of material wealth or money in the bank. I am speaking of the richness of the soil, the bounty that we receive each season from the many crops and commodities that are grown in our region, and the rich history of the families that have toiled long and hard to feed the world! The Central Valley of California, and especially San Joaquin County, is an agricultural region like none other.

Growing up in the Central Valley, I remember many occasions opening our back door to find a lug of fresh produce—no note—just a delicious, anonymous gift! Beautiful freestone and clingstone peaches, garden vegetables and Thompson seedless grapes. Even though we were not farmers and lived inside the city limits (city is a stretch – the place had 3,000 people!), I grew up with a great understanding of the importance placed on all those who worked in the agricultural community. We especially enjoyed the baked peach cobbles and canned jams and jellies made with the fresh fruit that had just been harvested.

For generations, both men and women have been providing us with bounty that we savor and enjoy as we gather our families around the table. In this issue of *HERLIFE*, we are featuring some of



the many women in agriculture who live and work throughout San Joaquin County! I know you will enjoy the stories featuring these hardworking, dedicated, strong women. It has been a joy to get to know them, to tell their stories, and to highlight the importance of the work they do!

Anna and I are blessed to work with one of the legendary, local women of ag, Gail Kautz. Over the past decade, we have been

fortunate to walk alongside Gail as she tirelessly works to support and encourage youth in agriculture. Her annual signature event, Ironstone Concours d'Elegance, since inception, has raised more than \$1 million for 4H and FFA ag programs. Throughout this issue, you will see how these youth programs are woven into many of the stories.

We are all blessed to have women like Gail Kautz, plowing new paths for women to follow. Although Gail isn't featured in this issue, you can read all about her legacy in *KAUTZ – A Story of Farm and Family in California*. Written by Kevin Starr, it is available at the San Joaquin Historical Museum and Ironstone Winery.

Yes, we are rich in agriculture, rich in history, stories, celebrations and especially people. Next time you gather around your bountiful table with family and friends, remember to give thanks!

Blessings,

*Carrie*

CARRIE SASS





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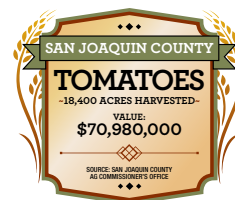
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# HIGHLIGHTING THE SIGNIFICANCE & SHOWCASING THE BEAUTY OF OUR AGRICULTURAL REGION

According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), women today make up 37% of farmers in the U.S, while over half (56%) of all American farms have at least one decision making woman. Women even make up almost half of the world's farmers. Women in Agriculture are working hard to create a better future for the next generation, and generations to come.



Throughout this issue focused on Agriculture you will see this icon that is relevant to many of the crops and commodities featured in the stories. It is a reminder of the significance that our region has, not only locally, but to the world! Thank you to the San Joaquin Ag Commission for the information, available in their 2022 Crop Report.



## MARILYN EGER, ARTIST

Sprinkled throughout this Women in Agriculture issue, you will find the beautiful artwork of local artist Marilyn Eger. A friend and all-around interesting woman, Marilyn has a strong connection to the land and long history of farming. Marilyn's paintings are inspired by her love of the areas in which she lives and the things around her, such as the Acampo landscape, old tractors and cars, curious cattle and old farmsteads. Her works can be found at [etsy.com/shop/marilyneger](https://www.etsy.com/shop/marilyneger), Lodi Community Arts Center and *HERLIFE* Magazine advertiser Fragrant Farmhouse in Lockeford.

## Kamal Bagri

SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY  
AGRICULTURAL COMMISSIONER

San Joaquin County's Agricultural Commissioner, Kamal Bagri, is the first woman to hold this position in San Joaquin County. Appointed in November 2022, Kamal grew up in India, where she received a dual bachelor's degree in education and science from Guru Nanak Dev University. After coming to California in the late 1990s, Kamal worked as a teacher but soon developed an interest and passion for California's agriculture and began her career working in various agricultural commission positions throughout the region. During her free time, Kamal is a Pistachio and Almond farmer. For more information on our new Commission Kamal Bagri, as well as the San Joaquin County Agricultural Commission, visit [sjgov.org](https://sjgov.org).






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# Women in AGRICULTURE

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# Gabriela Sandoval

## PARTNERING WITH FARMERS TO ENSURE FOOD SAFETY

BY ANDREA BEAR | PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANN ISHII

*When it comes to food, there's no denying our world is set on an interwoven web of convenience. From restaurant-to-home deliveries to fully stocked shelves at the grocery store, most people don't think twice about the steps taken to certify safe, quality food. And agriculture is no exception. If it weren't for farmers and the care taken to ensure food compliance and safety, we wouldn't have the staple fruits and vegetables so regularly available.*







*Gabriela with daughter, Mariana*

**F**or Gabriela Sandoval, these thoughts cross her mind daily. As the owner and consultant for AG Food Safety Solutions, Sandoval specializes in supporting farms and agricultural food producers to stay in compliance with agriculture regulations. Raised in a farming family, Gabriela understands the hard work behind the scenes to get food on the shelves and the challenges farmers face to grow quality food and, importantly, maintain its health and safety.

## ROOTS IN FARMING

“It’s important for us to find something that we love to do and make a living out of it. Find what you are passionate about and your passion will be contagious,” Gabriela said, reflecting on her journey into the world

of food safety. If you had asked her in her early years whether she would have pursued a career in ag safety, she wouldn’t have envisioned this path.

Growing up in the 1980s, Gabriela watched her farming parents, Salvador and Gloria Sandoval, farm land and contract labor throughout the Central Valley, and she was no stranger to helping out. She recalls her teenage years running the Caterpillar and driving tractors on their farms. Crops such as watermelon, cucumber, wheat, onions and tomatoes were common harvest. But like most bright-eyed-youth, she wanted to pursue other interests and after high school she would forge her own path.

After college and traveling around the world, Gabriela married, started a family and established a career in the real estate

and lending world. But it wasn’t until 2003, after her divorce, that her path took her back to Manteca and close to family. Her brother, Jesse Sandoval, had carried on the family business after her father’s passing years before. Here, she discovered her untapped leadership skills as her brother leaned on her support to navigate new changes in farm regulation.

“It was asparagus season,” Gabriela recalled. “My mom and brother had picked up an asparagus account and found themselves in the middle of a safe quality food, or SQF, audit. In the early 2000s, audits were fairly new to the farming world and little direction was provided. Calibration of auditors was lacking and led to auditors interpreting criteria. This made it difficult to develop an effective program.” Through their own



---

navigation, self-training and recordkeeping, her family successfully passed their audit and managed to introduce new methods into other fields of packing and safety.

After the audit, Gabriela thought that ordeal was behind her, but she hadn't realized other growers were paying attention. Albert Dal Porto, another farmer and friend, suggested she could help other growers navigate the same process. "Someone needs help with a program, to figure out what we need," Albert had told Sandoval. "If you figure it out, you're going to be good at it."



***"It just really comes down to understanding their plight, their frustration, and it's very much about building that bridge of how to continue to survive and stay compliant."***

---

### CONSULTING AND TRAILBLAZING

In 2009, with his encouraging words, Gabriela began working for a consulting company that took her under their wings and taught her how to speak with growers about food safety and create a system of policies and procedures. She realized this was a new path that sparked a passion in her and connected to her family roots. "What I really enjoyed was talking to my growers and helping them solve their problems. They were really fulfilling something in me," she recalled, thinking also of her father and his experience as a farmer and contractor. But it was clear she had a strong leadership ability and by 2015, she branched off on her own to create AG Food Safety Solutions.

### CREATING A STRONG TEAM

Gabriela acknowledged farmers were already keeping records but hadn't formalized any process. Connecting all the pieces, she began to create a written program, and this brought attention to gaps in the system she hadn't realized. "This opened my eyes to what growers didn't have before," she admitted. As her clientele grew, maintaining consistency became her number one priority.

---







*Gabriela with daughter, Mariana*

Taking on the responsibility of her own business, Gabriela wanted to be consistent with her operations. “I realized food safety would become a legal document.” Acknowledging that the legal aspect could be complex, she called on the help of her best friend and attorney, Kelly Lee Jones. In December 2015, Kelly read through some of her first manuals to articulate the language. It was here Gabriela saw Kelly could help with compliance. By 2016, Gabriela had convinced her to come on board and work for AG Food Safety Solutions as her technical compliance director.

During Gabriela’s career in agricultural food safety, her daughter, Mariana Aguiar, was also observing, watching her mother pioneer in this field. “She was paying attention when we were out talking to farmers,” said Gabriela, smiling with pride. In 2020, after receiving a business and marketing degree from San Francisco State University, Mariana came on board, bringing her experience and innovation.

Just like the generational farmers Gabriela encounters, she acknowledges the mother-daughter dynamic in her business is building that next era. “She’s working with the next generation of farmers. She’s establishing her networks. It’s been such a beautiful experience to see her grow into her style of consulting,” she affirmed proudly. Mariana now works as a food safety consultant next to her mother, consulting with growers and packing sheds throughout California. Mariana spearheaded the creation of the company’s web app, now in its final stages of development. The app will digitize logs required to keep farmers and packing sheds in compliance with their food safety programs.

## PAVING THE WAY

Now in its ninth year, AG Food Safety Solutions has grown to help more than 175 farms throughout the United States. In addition to consulting, Gabriela sits on a national technical working committee and she’s a member of multiple associations including the California Sweet Potato and National Onion associations. Through her association involvement, Sandoval can converse with individuals responsible for writing audit questions and is able to provide a farm-level perspective. As part of the Food Safety Subcommittee of the National Onion Association, Kelly Lee Jones joined other association members in Washington, D.C., in February to advocate for legislation and regulations benefiting the commodity.

Looking back, Gabriela thinks about her journey with her family, her experience with consulting and her new-found love. AG Food Safety Solutions has become a trailblazer for other companies and strong support to growers all over the country. Whether it’s a two-acre grower or a 5,000-acre grower, she acknowledges farmers are the backbone of America, and she plans to continue to support and guide them to compliance.

“It just really comes down to understanding their plight, their frustration, and it’s very much about building that bridge of how to continue to survive and stay compliant.” Sandoval is comforted by growers who praise her efforts and say they sleep better at night knowing she’s in charge of their food safety program. ♦





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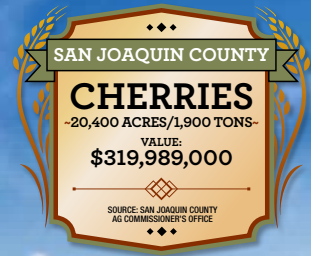
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Photo by John Gibson



# LINDEN-PETERS CHERRY FESTIVAL

## A Sweet Community Tradition

MAY 20, 2023

BY MARY RAFFETTO

*Vic Solari, the chairman of the annual Linden-Peters Cherry Festival, says that one of his favorite things about the event is the way it provides “a big sense of community with a Smalltown USA feel.” As past president of the Chamber of Commerce and a member of the Linden-Peters Fire Department for almost 40 years, Vic is about as deeply rooted as any tree, cherry or otherwise, in the area. He has served his community since high school, when he was the president of the FFA, Future Farmers of America, in the early 1970s when the Cherry Festival was still known as the Linden Community Day Fair.*

**T**his year the festival will take place on May 20 and will honor another very special and accomplished member of their community, famed New York Yankees outfielder Aaron Judge. Raised in Linden, Aaron graduated from Linden High School in 2010 before going on to achieve his multi-record-breaking

career in professional baseball. In homage to him, the theme for this year’s festival is Linden Cherries are Legendary...just like #99 Aaron Judge.

### DAY’S FESTIVITIES

The week before the festival, the Linden-Peters Chamber of Commerce selects

its Cherry Festival Queen, a person of excellence and a positive role model, to represent them throughout the coming year. At 10:00 a.m., the parade will commence the day’s festivities in small town fashion, venturing eight to ten blocks from the intersection of Front and Market Streets to the school grounds of Linden Elementary School. Ad-

mission is free, and from 11:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m., the festival will delight visitors with carnival rides, games, foods and a variety of vendor booths.

The Cherry Festival features a classic car show that attracted over 125 entries last year and continues to grow. Unlike other car shows, which are often held in hot parking lots, this one is situated on cool, clean, green lawn, something Vic says is much appreciated by owners and admirers alike as they stroll amid row upon row of beautiful vintage vehicles, enjoying music and a variety of foods.

### CHERRIES, ALWAYS!

Some of those foods vary from year to year, but you can always count on the Linden-Peters Fire Department booth, where they serve delicious, freshly grilled sausages.



### Makayla Mellinger 2022 Cherry Festival Queen

Makayla currently attends The University of Alabama majoring in Elementary Education. She graduated from Linden High School in 2022 where she was Senior Class President, as well as Linden FFA President. Makayla will be crowning the 2023 Queen in May.

---

***This year the festival will take place on May 20  
and will honor another very special and  
accomplished member of their community,  
famed New York Yankees outfielder Aaron Judge.***

---

Another outstanding option is the fabulous street tacos prepared by the Holy Cross Catholic Church. Over at the FFA's booth, they sell tri tip sandwiches prepared by the Lion's Club. And, for dessert, there are numerous temptations, but one of the most anticipated is always the bake-off contest in which cooks compete to produce the best cherry treats. The original stars of the show, fresh local cherries, are for sale, too, and make a healthy, delicious snack. In addition to selling foods, the FFA has a large booth where they sell plants they have propagated and grown themselves at the Linden High School Agricultural Department.

One of the highlights of the day is the pie eating contest. The pies are cherry, of course. "The contest is hilarious, and the crowd goes wild," Vic laughed. "One year, *Good Day Sacramento* came to do a piece on that. It's really, really a great time."

With live bands, choirs, magicians and cheerleaders, there is an exuberant enthusiasm at the Linden-Peters Cherry Festival. It is no surprise that visitors come back year after year for the nostalgia, charm, fresh food and fun. ♦

*To be a vendor, car show participant, baking contestant or for more information, please visit [lindenchamber.net](http://lindenchamber.net) for the appropriate forms and more.*



# **sass!**

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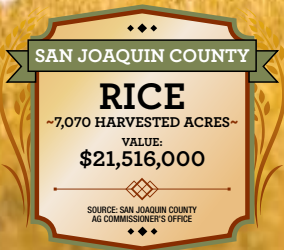
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*Photograph by Steve Sinnock*



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# Kathleen Lagorio Janssen

## FOR THE LOVE OF FARMING

BY CAITLIN HAMER

*Stockton's location in the fertile lands of the Central Valley has always meant that the city's legacy is entwined with agriculture. But it's well known that this is an industry that is primarily populated by men. According to the USDA, in the U.S. alone, only 31 percent of farmers are women. But though their numbers are small, they're still out there making just as much of a difference as men. Locally, one of those influential women is Kathleen Lagorio Janssen.*

Photo by Ann Ishii



The farming gene runs deep in Kathleen. Her father, George Lagorio, was a farmer, as was his father before him. George founded Lagorio Farms in 1932, building the business into something of an empire, creating a lasting family legacy that's still evident through thousands of acres and countless crops raised on those lands over the years. And while the family's vast output is certainly significant, as the Lagorio family currently grows almonds, wine grapes, cherries and wheat, among other crops, Kathleen's view of farming is both practical and sentimental.

"We lived out in the country, in the middle of an orchard," she said, reflecting on her childhood.



"When you grow up with it, you understand the long hours and what it takes to be a farmer. You watch the change of seasons and plant something and watch it grow and harvest it, and that's very rewarding."

The Lagorio family's kitchen table served as George's office, and Kathleen recalls eavesdropping on his business conversations from a young age. She helped her mother with the accounting, and once a year she'd try her hand at farm labor and grade the peaches, a process she described as "hot and itchy." But although she wanted to dedicate her life to agriculture, it wasn't exactly encouraged; while sons were likely to take over family farming businesses, daughters



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***"Most of the people that are involved in farming out here are still family-oriented," she affirmed, noting that deals are sometimes still made through a simple handshake. "These are very salt-of-the-earth people."***

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weren't. Kathleen ended up obtaining a master's degree from University of San Francisco and pursued the kind of career that was considered acceptable for women. "In those days, girls could be teachers or nurses, and I didn't like blood, so I went into teaching," she quipped.

She taught locally for nearly two decades, meeting her husband, Dean Janssen, during that time, and she served as president of the Stockton Teachers Association. But farming continued to call to her. George eventually invited Dean to work at Ace Tomato, the family's Manteca-based tomato packing and shipping company, but Kathleen was also able to play a crucial role there by helping implement a computer system for the company. And in 1985, she launched Lagorio Communications. These two moves helped solidify her father's faith in her abilities and helped her gain respect within the industry, and he began to pass more of the management roles to Kathleen and Dean.

When George passed in 1996, Kathleen became president and CEO of Lagorio Family Farms. By then, she was well versed in the day-to-day operations of the business. Today, her sons run the farming operations and manage the business, but Kathleen is still involved in the strategic planning and major decisions. And although the industry has changed in many ways, from the crops they grow to the



number of women now working in agriculture, Kathleen loves the fact that at its core, the farming community remains largely the same.

"Most of the people that are involved in farming out here are still family-oriented," she affirmed, noting that deals are sometimes still made through a simple handshake. "These are very salt-of-the-earth people."

Kathleen also appreciates the fact that there are more ways for women to make inroads into agriculture now, with women working for seed companies and fertilizer companies and involved in other aspects of the industry in which you typically wouldn't have seen a woman as recently as 20 years ago. And she very much appreciates the farmland region she's called home her entire life, and not just for the sake of the fresh, healthy produce that's grown here. She finds Stockton to be underrated, even by its own residents: "I wish everybody that lived here would be proud of it. It concerns me that we're not boasting about all the good things we have here that other communities don't," she asserted.

In October 2022, Kathleen and Dean were honored with Goodwill's 2022 Helping Hands Award, recognizing the pair's dedication to serving the community. She's following in her parents' footsteps here, too, taking on the responsibility of generously sharing the abundance she was blessed with, tending to the local people as much as she does the land.

"Several years ago, it was pointed out to me that there's a quote in Genesis that says God put man on earth to sow and care for the earth and that really struck me as a farmer," she said. "That's why I'm here. That's my job: to care for the earth." ♦

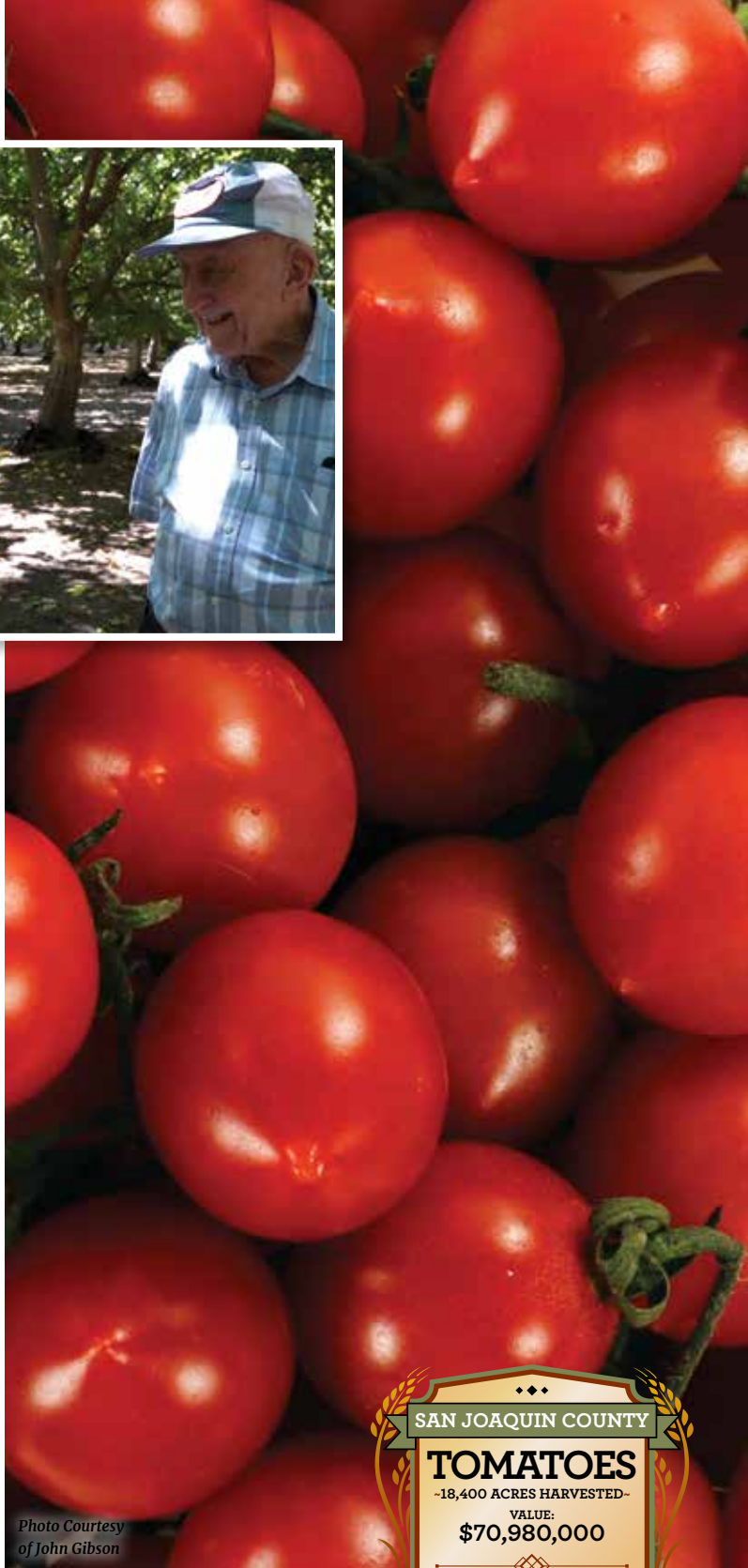


Photo Courtesy  
of John Gibson

To view the Goodwill Helping Hands tribute video about Dean and Kathy, use this QR Code. For more information on Lagorio Family of Companies, visit [www.lagorio.com](http://www.lagorio.com).





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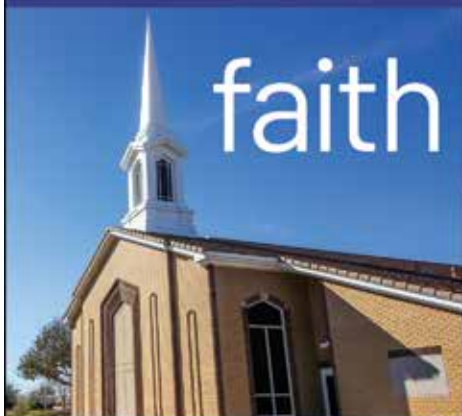


## Wellness

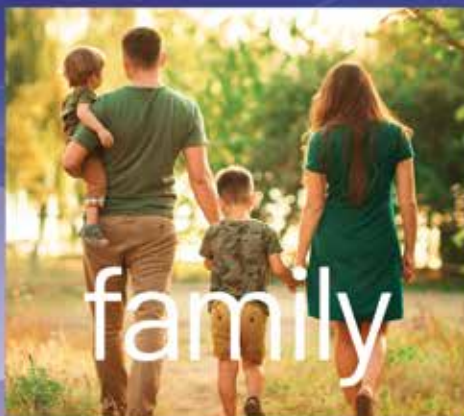
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A high-angle photograph of two surgeons in an operating room. They are wearing blue scrubs, masks, and surgical caps. They are focused on a surgical site, illuminated by two large overhead surgical lights. The surgeon on the left is wearing an orange cap, and the one on the right is wearing a blue cap. Both are wearing glasses and have surgical loupes. They are using surgical instruments on a patient who is lying on the operating table.

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# CELEBRATION IN THE COUNTRY

The California Women in Agriculture held their 26th annual Table Setting Viewing event at the Roberts-Union Farm Center on February 3. Guests enjoyed refreshments and champagne as they wandered throughout the venue, enjoying the beautifully decorated tables. ♦

PHOTOGRAPHY BY HELEN RIPKEN





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# THE BEST THING I NEVER KNEW I WANTED

STORY BY SAM MONKS

Photo by Krissy Botz Coffey  
of K Botz Photography

*Two city kids who knew nothing about living in the country, Craig and I wanted to raise our two boys in the dirt. We didn't know exactly what that meant, what that looked like or where that would be, but we knew we wanted our boys to be raised with space to be wild, free and learn the value of work. A place to plant a seed and see it become a beautiful flower, a place to raise a few animals, and a garden to grow their own food. And here we are, five years later, living on a five-acre, beautiful piece of land, the former property of dear family friends. Yes, it is a lot of work, like everyone told us it would be, but we have found such joy here. It is all the things we thought it would be and so much more.*







Several years ago, we started a little pumpkin patch, and every year it gets bigger and bigger. The boys are involved in all aspects of this orange carpet of harvest, from gopher hunting to laying down the water lines, sowing seeds, harvesting and working the long Saturdays selling pumpkins. Our hope is that this will be that cute little pumpkin patch just outside town where families can create memories as they enjoy the traditional hunt for their jack-o-lanterns and fall décor.

Our small garden out back started out with lots of vegetables and a little fruit. Realizing the family loves fruit more than vegetables, we transitioned to plant more of these foods we like to eat. Now we are preserving jams, jellies, pie fillings, to name a few. We are blessed to have the space to experiment with and grow a wide variety. We are learning every day! Laying out the crops, harvesting, canning, all of it. Thank goodness for YouTube and local Master Gardner resources to walk us through the many steps.

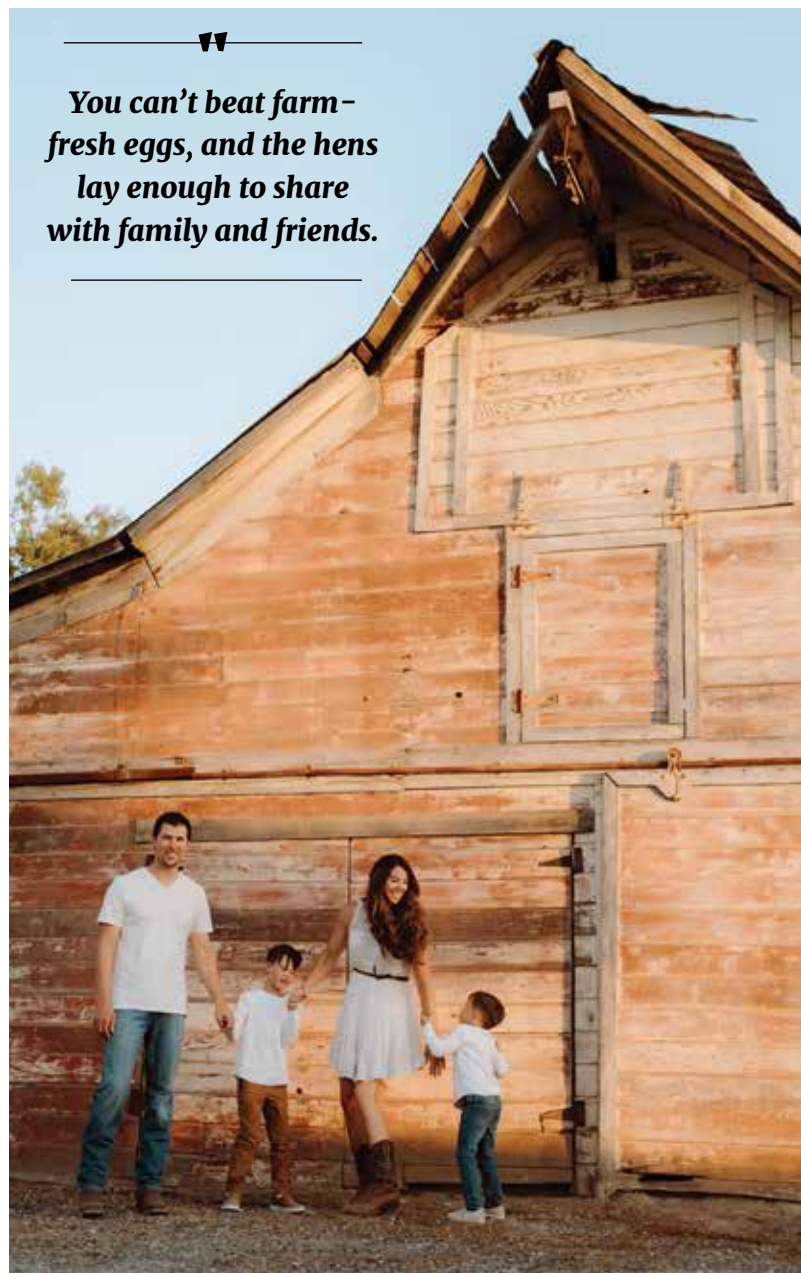
Thirteen chickens, two goats, two dogs and a cat.

All of them have their purpose around here. We started out with four chickens and now have 13 hens. We treat them with leftover salad and goldfish crackers. And they love those crackers! You can't beat farm-fresh eggs, and the hens lay enough to share with family and friends. Our goats, Gunnar and Justice, are not meat goats or milk goats. Nigerian Dwarf goats, they are perfect for us, fun pets that also work hard. They keep the property tidy as they eat down almost all our trimmings and cuttings on the property. The boys are also learning what it takes to care for the animals.

Right now, I'm most excited about starting our flower business, Monks Blooms! I can't think of a better way to spend my time, growing beautiful flowers to bring joy to others. This spring we hope to be the local flower farmer for fresh-cut flowers, wedding needs and sweet bouquets.

Part of the freedom of living in the country is the open fields, the ditches and areas available for adventure and fun. We added a dirt bike track out back, which the boys enjoy. We have the most amazing neighbors on our fence line who have quickly become more like family.

**You can't beat farm-fresh eggs, and the hens lay enough to share with family and friends.**





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This journey to live off the land is still in the beginning stages. Our little desire to buy dirt was really the start of a bigger plan that was unknown to us. Our boys are still young, and it is a joy to watch them love the dirt, the many farm projects and gardening. We know that time is fleeting, and we want our family to soak up as much of this farm life as we can. We wanted to have a place for more time together and fun gatherings with family and friends, and to experience a homestead business, and we realize moving out to a little bit of dirt was honestly the best thing we could have done. We can't wait to see what's to come! ♦





# VISIONARY HOME BUILDERS

*Building the Dream*

BY ANDREA BEAR

There's an old expression: "If you can dream it, you can achieve it." No matter what your position or circumstance, if you work hard, anything is a possibility.

In 1983, Carol Ornelas, owner of Visionary Home Builders, had a grand dream to create a business in construction. She was one of the few women in homebuilding at the time, with very limited prospects, but as fate would have it she encountered others with dreams just as big; that would change everything. In Sierra Vista, California, just past Merced, Carol met eight farm working families who wanted to maintain a permanent residency in the United States, rather than migrate from farms and return to Mexico. At the time, farm workers weren't making more than 50 cents for a bucket of tomatoes and migrant living conditions were substandard. Establishing financial backing, Ornelas was able to help these families secure funding to build houses and in turn help one another construct their homes. Such a collaboration allowed both parties to achieve their dreams. "They gave me a steppingstone, and I gave them a steppingstone," Carol said proudly as she saw her dreams of homebuilding made into reality. Later that same year, those farm working families became first-time homeowners on Marabis Court in Stockton, California.

After that exchange, Ornelas recognized building houses was more than constructing four walls; it was in addition creating a home, a place in which families could establish themselves, form stability and a future. By providing that steppingstone, Carol understood families with stability had more opportunities that could lead to better



Marilyn Eger, Artist

lives. "Many went on to have their own business, other jobs progressed and so did their children," she said, referring to the first families. Their goal of achieving the American dream pioneered a new method of affordable and quality housing for other farm workers and Visionary Home Builders came to be.

## FROM HOME TO COMMUNITY

As the word spread and more families wanted the same opportunities, Carol realized not all could afford or achieve permanent placement the same way. The demand for housing was high and many farm

workers had growing families with limited childcare. While leasing apartments was common, conditions were substandard due to poor upkeep or high-crime locations. "We saw the conditions where they were living; some didn't have floors, they were just dirt," she said, recalling cases of poor housing. As a result, she had to consider housing that was efficient even if it didn't mean single-family homes. "We didn't have enough permanent housing for everyone, so we ventured into multifamily agreements."

Carol knew that with the right planning she could create more than just cheap apartments and add richness to the lives of each tenant, while improving and adding value to the surrounding neighborhood. "I wanted to create housing that wasn't considered projects," she said. And the way she did this was to carefully consider the needs within the community.

One such development was Casa De Esperanza, a multi-unit complex built with stucco and tile and designed with a Spanish style.



Rather than installing the basics, which most property owners often used, her tenants received energy-efficient appliances, community rooms, a community computer lab, even a daycare center to help families thrive and gain opportunities to better their lives. Casa De Esperanza would serve as a com-

munity rather than a slum; it's a place farm worker would be proud to call home. Thirty-five years later, Casa Esperanza continues to thrive, and the foundation is as strong as ever. Carol also partnered with Head Start, a federally funded program to serve children ages three to five, providing education and childcare; many of her communities now have a Head Start as the heart of their community. Other communities include Valle de Sol and Villa de San Joaquin. With these improvements, she created a community.

### EXPANDING THE VISION

Visionary Home Builders has also opened its business to help other communities for families other than farm workers to support safe and affordable low-income housing. Carol takes pride in knowing that because of the stability in these communities, some of the residents have elevated their careers, which might not have been possible without stable housing. Former Stockton City Council member Jesus Andrade and former Stockton Mayor Michael Tubbs were both prior residents of Visionary Home Builder communities.



Today, 40 years later, Carol looks back at the success of helping families in the San Joaquin Valley and affirmed that her dreams of homebuilding far exceeded her expectations, because Visionary Home Builders has helped others achieve their own dreams. "When you stabilize housing, you give residents the opportunity to do things with their lives." ♦

To learn more about Visionary Home Builders, visit [visionaryhomebuilders.org](http://visionaryhomebuilders.org).

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# From CowBelles to CattleWomen



## EDUCATING THE PUBLIC ABOUT BEEF FOR MORE THAN 65 YEARS

BY MOLLY WATKINS | PHOTOS PROVIDED COURTESY OF CATTLEWOMEN



The San Joaquin-Stanislaus CowBelles started in 1957. Some of the charter members of the unit were Kathryn Beckley, Marilyn Lyons, Marilyn Erickson, Dorothy Fitzgerald and Janet Smythe. Many of these women worked alongside their husbands and contributed to decision-making, bookkeeping and ranch work.

The CowBelles were an auxiliary of the California Cattlemen and began in 1951. The women organized to promote the cattle industry and promote cooking with beef. One of the founding activities for all CowBelles was participating in the Beef for Father's Day program. Beef roasts, equal to the weight of the first baby born on Father's Day, were presented to new dads in hospitals around the state. The

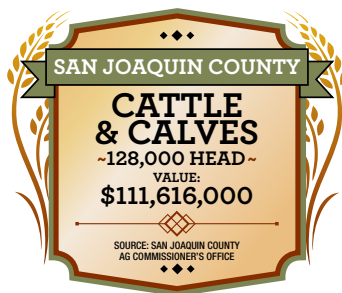


CowBelles worked closely with the California Beef Council to promote and distribute their cattle and cooking publications and educational materials, a practice they continue today.

In 1987, the organization voted to change their name from CowBelles to CattleWomen in cooperation with the change at the national level. California CattleWomen have been very effective on legislative issues, helping to defeat adverse legislation and to promote the passage of friendly bills. There are about 1,800 CattleWomen in California and about 5,000 members in the American National CattleWomen. There are approximately 50 members in the San Joaquin-Stanislaus Chapter.

Many members operate cattle ranches in our county and adjacent counties. Some of the cattle are purebreds such as angus, red angus and shorthorn, but many herds are crossbred cattle. However, some of the members do not own cattle. All the members have a love of agriculture, cattle and eating beef. The CattleWomen's mission is to promote the beef industry, educate consumers on how to purchase and prepare beef, and teach children the value of cattle in everyday life. They do this by attending events, cooking meals for groups and having a media presence. The members attend student farm days at schools, fairgrounds and in classrooms. They also broaden their visibility by participating in community events such as street fairs, agricultural fairs, museum events, food festivals and conferences. The displays and presentations feature information on animal health, livestock identification, beef by-products, ranch life, nutrition and cooking techniques. Members share information that fascinates listeners from toddlers to senior citizens, such as the fact that gummy candy is made with gelatin and gelatin comes from the bone marrow of cattle. A statistic that piques interest: one cow hide can produce 144 baseballs, 12 basketballs or 15 to 20 footballs.

One of their biggest accomplishments was organizing and serving 85,000 samples of beef at the California State Fair in early



2000s when the fair had a vibrant agricultural building promoting California farm commodities. The members also collaborate with the other agricultural educational groups in both counties to provide fresh beef and produce to all the high school consumer science students. Along with the locally produced ingredients, they provide recipes, handling and storage information and a connection to local farmers for the students and teachers. They continue to expand the classroom resources, giving students more opportunity to cook more days in the classroom. The CattleWomen also provide ingredients that are often out of the school's budget such as beef, nuts, eggs and cherries. The teachers are grateful for the variety and freshness of the products donated.

In addition to the five meetings throughout the year, the members enjoy an annual Christmas party and participate in the California CattleWomen events and conferences. Learn more about the San Joaquin-Stanislaus CattleWomen at [sjscattlewomen.org](http://sjscattlewomen.org) or SJS CattleWomen on Facebook. ♦



***One of the founding activities for all CowBelles was participating in the Beef for Father's Day program. Beef roasts, equal to the weight of the first baby born on Father's Day, were presented to new dads in hospitals around the state.***

Marilyn Eger, Artist







## JULIE K. EILERS CLARY

BY HERLIFE STAFF

*Julie K. Eilers Clary, farmer and ranch manager of Eilers Ranch LLC, sat down with HERLIFE Magazine recently to share her dedication to family and community.*

**HLM:** *How long have you lived here? What do you love most?*

**JC:** I grew up in Linden, involved in 4-H, raising lambs for fair, driving tractors for a summer job, showing horses, playing volleyball and serving on church youth group. After graduating from St. Mary's High School, I left the area to study at Fresno State and UCLA in order to pursue a career as a nurse anesthetist. After my father, Henry Eilers, passed away in 2015, I returned with my husband, Brian, to care for our family farm and provide our sons the opportunities I had as a child. Raising our boys in agriculture, enjoying cherished relationships and the joy of bringing a crop to harvest are what I love most about Linden.

**HLM:** *How is your heart inspired to serve the community?*

**JC:** Many young people today do not know where their food is grown, and I am inspired to teach them that the fruits of their labor can feed the world. Since returning to Linden, my husband and I have served as leaders of Linden-Peters 4-H teaching welding and cooking, hired young adults interested in agriculture onto our farm and hosted the first St. Mary's FFA fundraiser at our barn.

**HLM:** *What sparks joy for you?*

**JC:** One of the most joyful times of year is harvest. I take pride in watching our walnuts and almonds grow and leave the ranch to feed people all over the world. For me personally, I take joy in watching our boys learn from my mother, from cooking and sewing to golf and pickleball. I'm so grateful for the relationship, inspiration and encouragement she provides in their lives!

**HLM:** *Top three bucket list goals?*

**JC:** Raising two healthy and happy sons, growing my knowledge of farming practices to continually improve our product, and raising awareness of women to explore careers in agriculture.

**HLM:** *What accomplishment are you most proud of?*

**JC:** Transitioning from my first career as a nurse anesthetist to successfully running our family business. This was a steep uphill learning curve that could not have been accomplished without a lot of prayer, guidance from our mentor, Brent Barton, and perseverance. I was inspired by my grandmother, Henriette Eilers, who independently ran the farm for 35 years.

**HLM:** *Can you describe a key event that had an impact on your life?*

**JC:** In 2015, my father passed away and my mother and I underwent treatment for cancer at the same time. Although these were dark days, I discovered my family roots were at the center of what was truly important in my life. This led me to bid my anesthesia career farewell and focus my energy on our farm that my great-grandparents began when they immigrated from Germany in 1858.

**HLM:** *How is your time spent outside work?*

**JC:** Family is the center of my world and I enjoy spending time with my husband and our kids going to church activities, skiing and spending Sunday night dinners with my amazing mom. It's also great to have the time to watch our boys shooting trap, playing sports, caring for their bees and preparing their hogs for the fair.

**HLM:** *Do you have a favorite quote?*

**JC:** "Every day is a gift of God. What you do with it is your gift to Him." Henry Eilers Sr.

**HLM:** *What are you currently reading?*

**JC:** *Almond Production Manual*, and *I Can't Believe You Just Said That! Biblical Wisdom for Taming Your Child's Tongue* by Ginger Hubbard.

**HLM:** *Favorite food or dessert?*

**JC:** Anything chocolate, but walnuts and almonds make it even better! ♦



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# HOMESTEAD FAVORITES RECIPES WITH CHERRY PEPPER JELLY

RECIPES BY CHARLYN HULSMAN | PHOTOS BY BAILEY CASWELL

## Cherry Pepper Martini

### INGREDIENTS

- 3 oz. vodka
- 1 tsp. simple syrup
- 1 lime or lemon, juiced
- 3 tsp. Homestead Favorites Cherry Pepper Jelly

### INSTRUCTIONS

First, run a lime wedge around the rims of 2 martini glasses, dip the edges into a small dish of pepper and salt mixture. Combine syrup and juice and muddle in the Cherry Pepper Jelly. Pour into a cocktail shaker, add vodka, with a dash of hot sauce and freshly ground pepper and a dash of salt. Fill the shaker with ice and shake like crazy. Strain the mixture into prepared glasses and serve immediately.



## Classic Ribs with Cherry Pepper Jelly

### INSTRUCTIONS

The method of cooking is up to you, whether it's oven, grill or smoker! These ribs were cooked on a Traeger grill/smoker. I've cooked ribs on the open grill and even cooked in the oven. Prepare the ribs generously using garlic salt and pepper. Three-quarters of the way through the cooking process, heavily glaze the meat with Homestead Favorites Cherry Pepper Jelly. Continue cooking the rest of the way and enjoy! ♦



Charlyn Hulsman has been immersed in local agriculture her entire life. She continues to be involved in cherry farming on the ranch that's been in her family for over 150 years, producing some of the finest cherries in the area. Some of those cherries are used to make her famous cherry jellies. After 36 years of teaching, including having Yankees player Aaron Judge in her fifth-grade class, Charlyn began to share the family tradition of making cherry jellies as gifts for friends and neighbors with the public. After several festivals and local retail stores began carrying her Cherry Jelly, Cherry Pepper Jelly and Cherry Chutney, their popularity grew! You can now find Homestead Favorites in more than 45 locations throughout the Central Valley. Visit [homesteadfavorites.com](http://homesteadfavorites.com) to pick up your next jar and find delicious recipes to make with your new favorite local jelly.



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# Asparagus Bundles

RECIPE & PHOTOS BY ELISABETH WATKINS

## INGREDIENTS

2 pounds fresh asparagus, ends trimmed  
12 slices bacon  
½ cup light brown sugar  
½ cup butter  
1 tablespoon soy sauce  
1 clove garlic, minced  
½ teaspoon freshly ground pepper  
½ teaspoon salt

## DIRECTIONS

Preheat the oven to 400° F. Divide the asparagus spears into 12 bundles, about 3 to 4 sparser bundles. Carefully wrap 1 piece of bacon around each bundle, starting about one-half inch from the bottom of the tips. Secure the bacon-wrapped spears with a toothpick. Lay the bundles in a low-sided casserole dish. In a medium saucepan, combine the brown sugar, butter, soy sauce, garlic, salt and pepper. Bring the mixture to a boil. Pour the hot sugar mixture over the asparagus bundles. Transfer the dish to the oven and roast until the spears have begun to wilt and the bacon looks fully cooked, about 25 minutes. Remove the toothpicks before serving. Serves 12. ♦



Elisabeth Watkins is known by many as the Farm Girl Chef from Linden, California. She is a winner of Food Network's Chopped Junior and an MBA student at the University of Nevada, Reno. Elisabeth learned to appreciate food growing up on a sixth-generation family farm and ranch, producing tree crops, beef cattle and hay. Beginning at age nine, she acquired culinary skills through the 4-H cooking project, which gave her a platform to promote agricultural commodities through food and cooking. Currently, she works to reconnect consumers to where their food comes from and how it is produced. The Farm Girl Chef's mission is accomplished through appearances on television, radio segments, podcasts, various print media articles and through her blog [farmgirlchef.us](http://farmgirlchef.us).



WEDDINGS . NEWBORNS . FAMILY . EVENTS . PHOTO BOOTH



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# BEE SWEET!

STORY AND PHOTOS  
BY RACHEL FENTON

Since I was a child, my family has kept bees on our little amateur homestead. The hives nestle in the shade of the ancient walnut tree, and if you're close enough, you can hear the soft buzz of their occupants. Many of us have a healthy fear of honeybees and leave them to the farmers or professionals. But even those of us who have small gardens or flowerbeds can cultivate a friendship with the bees. My family and I aren't farmers, but we have grown to cherish these dancing insects that love our land as much as we do.

A beehive usually consists of a few boxes; the bottom one is known as the nursery, where bees nurture their brood. The second box is the pantry, holding all the honey the hive needs to thrive through the colder months. Any other boxes are known as su-

pers, excess honey that we can harvest.

When the supers were full, we'd invite friends over to help with the harvest. Laughing and chatting in our bee suits, we'd re-

move the heavy frames and use a hot knife to scrape the wax caps off the comb. We'd set the frames in a centrifuge, and the honey would filter out through a fine mesh into a bucket, ready for bottling. Each hive and each season seem to produce a different type of honey. Early one season we had a light, floral honey that had hints of minty eucalyptus. At the end of that year, its sister hive produced a dark golden honey from the star thistle flowers, strong, bold and unique. At the end of the harvest, everyone was sticky and covered with the warm, spiced perfume of honey and woodsmoke.

We were also on a swarm call list. If anyone in the neighboring counties saw a swarm of bees, they could give us a call. It was like storm-chasing; we'd hop in our car with our supplies and drive to find a dark, murmuring



cloud of bees clinging to a branch or a gutter or a fence post.

Despite their menacing appearance, bees in a swarm are incredibly gentle. They have no honey or brood to protect. We'd scoop the largest clusters of bees with our cupped hands, setting them in front of the hive we'd brought with a few frames of wax inside. In each handful, we'd search for the queen with her regal, elongated frame. Once we were relatively certain the queen had been relocated into the hive, we'd sit and watch and wait. The relocated bees would stand at the edges of the hive and buzz, abdomens high in the air as they sent the pheromone message to their sisters; they'd found a home.

As a child, I imagined our honeybees were fairies, flitting from flower to flower. Because of my family's beehives, my relationship with bees changed from one of fear to one of wonder. Even if you can't keep a beehive where you live, you can join our little bee-loving community. Plant native wildflowers and other pollinator-friendly plants. Buy wax candles and honey from your local farms. Set out a birdbath with small stones inside it as a water source for a local hive. If you see a swarm, don't call pest control; call your local bee store or beekeeper. They will help safely relocate the bees to a new hive, and you'll most likely make a beekeeper very happy in the process. And above all, encourage those around you to learn more and do more to support these fairies of the insect world. ♦



Rachel Fenton is a writer and mother who homesteads on the family property with her parents and grandparents. When she's not running after her baby, you can usually find her knitting, reading, writing or gardening. Follow their homesteading journey at [fiveacresfourgenerations.wordpress.com](http://fiveacresfourgenerations.wordpress.com).



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# ERIKA CEARLEY

*"I always wanted to be a cowgirl!"*

---

STORY BY ERIKA CEARLEY | PHOTOS COURTESY OF CALAVERAS RIVER FARMS

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*Calaveras River Farms is a grass-fed cattle ranch located in Linden, California. We're first-generation ranchers, and it hasn't been an easy start, but with hard work and dedication we are now going strong. My husband, Bobby, and I are cofounders of Calaveras River Farms. We raise Scottish Highland cattle, produce USDA-certified grass-fed and finished beef, and run a farm-based skin-care boutique using tallow sourced from our farm. We also offer farm tours, photo shoots and educational opportunities.*

**A**s a young girl, I always felt a draw to our way of life, and if you had asked me what I wanted to be my answer was always, "A cowgirl." Growing up, I would visit my Great-Grandma Bernice in Fresno, California, where she taught me how to identify the trees and plants she grew, facts about the cattle in the field behind her home, and even how to preserve the food she grew. Her knowledge made a lasting impact on me that I still think of to this day when I'm collecting and growing food for our family or identifying beneficial plants on our ranch. While Grandma Bernice had a major impact on me, I would say the largest came from my father, Harold. My father has been a meat cutter since the late '70s, when he started at Payless Market in Lockeford, California, where he met my mother. Later in his career he moved to Podesto's, where many customers know his friendly smile. Growing up, I spent many years around and behind that meat counter with the master butchers who now carefully prepare our meat. After we processed our first steer, it was my father who introduced me to tallow, which is now the key ingredient in my farm store.

In 2018, we purchased our first few head of cattle while stationed in Washington State, where Scottish Highland cattle are more







abundant. Scottish Highlands are known for their docility and are renowned for their grazing abilities; they consume a wider variety of plants including those considered pests and improve the pastures they are on. This natural finishing creates beef with lower fat and cholesterol and superior flavor.

Tallow comes from the fat of cattle. It is rendered down at low temperatures and strained to remove any impurities. It is a healthy, beneficial fat that has amazing benefits at the cellular level. Beef tallow is a wonderful cooking fat, but it also acts as a fabulous topi-







cal superfood for the skin. It is incredibly nourishing and full of skin-loving vitamins such as vitamin A, D, K and E as well as conjugated linoleic acid, which is both an anti-inflammatory and antimicrobial. Tallow is extremely effective at treating and improving skin health due to its similarity to the makeup of our own skin.

We use our rendered tallow to create old-fashioned cold-processed tallow soap, whipped tallow lotion and salves that have been effective with helping our customers who have chronic dry skin and eczema. Tallow has been used for hundreds of years for a variety of different treatments and soap recipes. Tallow's fat-soluble vitamins help alleviate redness, inflammation, irritation and cracked, scaly skin. It is wonderfully effective at restoring and repairing the skin's natural barrier.

In the springtime, you can find me foraging with my two young children for our ranch's natural healers. I love teaching them about nature and the bounty we have around us. You can

find stinging nettle, chickweed, elderflowers and lavender in abundance here, all of which I dehydrate and infuse in oil for use all year long in our products.

Another part of our business includes farm tours, seasonal photo sessions and education about the Scottish Highland breed and ranching. We host our guests through the Airbnb experience platform, where they can book their preferred tour. Our farm also participates in local events, such as the Calaveras County Celtic Faire, where local school children can see and learn about this special breed and see them up close. We recently became a destination to meet our cows and calves, and we helped set up a proposal for a couple visiting all the way from Australia! During the holidays, we offer Christmas photo sessions. We also had two of our calves, Luna and Lucky, at a local business where the children who came to meet Santa could also see his "reindeer." This month we will be hosting spring photography sessions on our ranch.

We sure do love what we do and enjoy sharing these experiences with our community! ♦

For further information about Calaveras River Farms scan:





# Barsetti Vineyards

## A SMALL FAMILY WINERY WITH HISTORY

BY TRACCI DARE | PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANN ISHII

*In the early 1900s, Gottardo Barsetti came to America from Switzerland to fulfill his dream of owning and farming his own land. That dream became a reality in 1912, when he came to Galt in the Lodi Wine Region of California. After three generations, the Barsetti family continues to fulfill the vision that began over a century ago, farming the land that they love with the same passion.*



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In the early 1900s, Gottardo Barsetti came to America from Switzerland to fulfill his dream of owning and farming his own land. That dream became a reality in 1912, when he came to Galt in the Lodi Wine Region of California. After three generations, the Barsetti family continues to fulfill the vision that began over a century ago, farming the land that they love with the same passion.

Wanting to know more about Barsetti Vineyards, my friend and I took a trip up Highway 99 to quaint Old Town Galt. We stepped into Barsetti Vineyards, where we were greeted with the warmest welcome by owner Janis Barsetti Gray.

Barsetti's wine grapes are grown locally in Lodi, California. With a nice selection of wines before us, we opted to try the whites, asking Janis for her favorite varietals. She graciously poured a glass for each of us, tasting the Verdelho and the chardonnay, both of which



were quite lovely. We spotted a guest with a wine flight and made a mental note that we would give that a try on our next visit.

After we finished tasting and chatting it up at the bar, we were curious about the wine slushy machine we spotted across the tasting room. There was a zinfandel slushy and a non-alcoholic strawberry option. We tried both and enjoyed sipping the refreshing slushies while relaxing in the sunshine on the charming outdoor patio.

The tasting room at Barsetti Vineyards regularly has live music along with fun events such as paint and sip parties and more! Janis shared, "We offer a wine club subscription with a plethora

of perks, such as complimentary tastings, discounts on wine purchases and invitations to special Barsetti Vineyards events and pickup parties."

The overall experience at Barsetti Vineyards was well worth the trip up Highway 99 to Old Town Galt. Cheers! ♦



*Tracci Dare is a social media creator, influencer and coach. She currently lives in Lodi where she enjoys spending time with her family, friends and supporting local businesses. You can follow Tracci on Instagram (@daringdarlingbold), sharing fashion, wine, home decor and more.*

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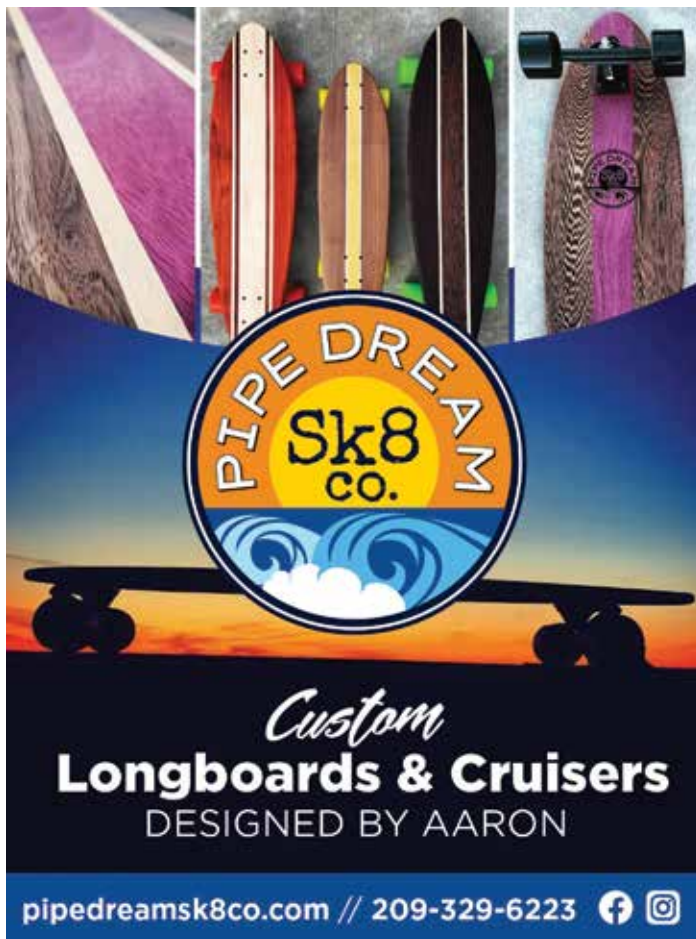
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**PHOTOGRAPHY**

*Ann Ishii*

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*Karen Chandler, Vance Gross,  
Ashlynn Tucker*

# FARM LIFE FASHION















# SHE MADE IT WITH *Wool!*



BY HERLIFE STAFF  
PHOTO COURTESY OF MOLLY WATKINS

Olivia Frenette, current president of the Linden-Peters 4-H Club and freshman at Linden High School, won the People's Choice Award at the 75th annual National Make It With Wool Contest.

Olivia constructed a fully lined fitted sleeveless dress with a back zipper. She also made a jacket with bound buttonholes, a back pleat and three-quarter length sleeves. Both garments were made from 100 percent wool fabric. She has been sewing for six years, and this was her first experience competing in a national contest.

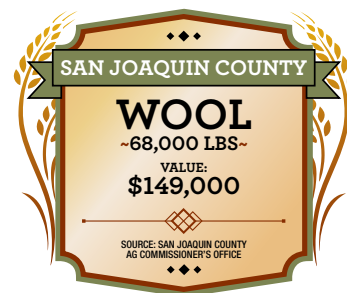
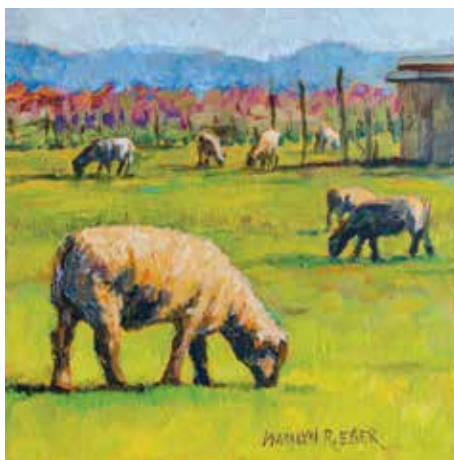
"Competing at Nationals was a great experience. I learned a lot about wool and made some great friends from Montana and Indiana," said Olivia.

The Make It With Wool Contest objective is to promote the beauty and versatility of wool fabrics and yarns, encourage personal creativity and develop life skills. The event was held in Fort Worth, Texas, Saturday, January 21, representing 21 junior competitors and 20 senior competitors from 24 states. In the junior competition, Olivia was also recognized as one of the top 10 junior competitors.

As the People's Choice winner, Olivia received a \$100 cash award. As a competitor in the contest, she received two yards of Pendleton Wool and sewing notions. Olivia is the daughter of Gina and Scott Frenette. ♦



Marilyn Eger, Artist





# PATRICIA MILLER

BY HERLIFE STAFF

*Patricia Miller, California Farm Champions 2023 Farm Advocate of the Year presented by Community Alliance for Family Farmers, sat down with HERLIFE Magazine recently to share her dedication to family and community.*

**HLM:** *How long have you lived here? What do you love most?*

**PM:** I grew up in San Francisco in an Army family, on the Presidio, and moved to Stockton more than 30 years ago. I'm retired from the Stockton Police Department as a senior community service officer/supervisor; I'm community engagement manager, Edible Schoolyard Project Stockton, and project director, African American Farmers California. When I moved to Stockton, I was amazed at the unique environment Stockton offered; community was rich with culture, heritage and legendary roots in family traditions and legendary structure in agriculture and research built around systemic racism around health, education and business. I was able to build relationships of trust for many reasons and the relationships have lasted over time.

**HLM:** *How is your heart inspired to serve the community?*

**PM:** My heart from a child has been to nurture children and families through many lenses and portals. I have many family members who have been of service, starting from my parents, who are my heroes; even though they are no longer alive, their most powerful traits live in me. In my current role, I have been an advocate in changing what food justice and systemic racism look like for food-insecure families. It has been so amazing to see how change is truly appreciated for families of all races and cultures.

**HLM:** *Top three bucket list goals?*

**PM:** Finding my family ancestors, who were farmers/producers in South Carolina; growing my CSA Business March 2023; extending

my resources in growing African American Farmers California and California Black Farmers Rising.

**HLM:** *What accomplishment are you most proud of?*

**PM:** Raising two beautiful, accomplished children in Stockton.

**HLM:** *Can you describe a key event that had an impact on your life?*

**PM:** Retiring from Stockton Police Department and living my best life as a Black ag farmer and producer in San Joaquin County.

**HLM:** *How is your time spent outside work?*

**PM:** Working in the soil and cooking with flavor for family and friends.

**HLM:** *Do you have a favorite quote?*

**PM:** Be the change you want to see in this world; understand our change counts.

**HLM:** *What are you currently reading?*

**PM:** *The 1619 Project* by Nikole Hannah-Jones

**HLM:** *Favorite food or dessert?*

**PM:** I love food, if I had to choose one, beautiful seasonal vegetables that add color in a stir fry with flavor created by my ancestor that is real flavor! Dessert, homemade ice cream, my grandmother's recipe! ♦



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# "EVERYONE RELIES ON AGRICULTURE"

BY KATIE WIPFLI



SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY  
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

It's a part of our everyday lives. And here in San Joaquin County, we are immersed in the rich farmland and agriculture industry that surrounds us.

San Joaquin County is known across the world as one of California's largest producers of agricultural commodities. According to the San Joaquin County 2021 Crop Report, the gross value of our county's agricultural production was \$3.19 billion. Fruit and nut crops continued to be the largest category with a total value of \$1.73 billion, an overall increase of 7.68 percent. As shared throughout the report, growth continues in a variety of commodities in our region.

The San Joaquin County Office of Education, or SJCOE, recognizes the importance of the agricultural industry and its impact on our local economy. Further, the SJCOE believes that our county's students must have access to opportunities that expose them to agriculture education and agriculture-centered events and activities.

With a passion for moving agriculture education forward in San Joaquin County and across the state, the SJCOE has developed a new position dedicated to this work, the director of agriculture and environmental technology. Part of the SJCOE's college and career readiness department, this position is the first of its kind in the state. It supports all high school agriculture programs and teachers who aspire to incorporate agriculture into their classrooms. This includes creating agriculture-based lessons, starting a school garden and promoting agricultural literacy.

The position has also allowed for more support of Future Farmers of America, or FFA, programs throughout the county. The SJCOE hosted the Delta Valley FFA Sectional opening and closing, has pro-

vided judges for public speaking competitions and supports agriculture advisory committees. In addition, through a grant, FFA jackets have been awarded to students, and a 2023 summer Ag Career Exploration program is being developed.

Despite the new position, this passion for agriculture education at the SJCOE is nothing new. For the past 17 years, the SJCOE has supported AgVenture, a San Joaquin County-sponsored program for third grade students to increase awareness of agriculture and healthy living. AgVenture coordinator Krista McCoon, a dedicated committee and thousands of volunteers make this experiential learning opportunity a reality, serving nearly 10,000 students each year. These in-person opportunities are complemented with year-long virtual programming suitable for all ages, serving students, teachers and the public. These experiences, both in person and digital, provide participants with an adventure in agriculture they wouldn't have otherwise.



Above: AgVenture Program



Most recently, in 2022, the SJCOE hosted the AgCareers Summit in partnership with AgVenture and the San Joaquin Farm Bureau Federation, or SJFB, to expose students to a wide variety of career opportunities in agriculture and throughout San Joaquin County. Volunteers from various agriculture careers attended and shared their career paths with almost 300 high school juniors and seniors. This event is now annual and will be held again in September 2023.

As agriculture education continues to grow in San Joaquin County, partnerships such as these are imperative. And with the new director of agriculture and environmental technology position, these partnerships have strengthened tremendously, with the SJCOE now having a seat on the SJFB Agricultural Education Advisory Committee and the SJFB Foundation for Agricultural Education.

Agriculture is one of the largest industry sectors in California. Students must have opportunities for work experience that will equip them with the skills needed to succeed in agricultural careers. The SJCOE Apprenticeships Reaching Career Horizons program, which is paving the way for youth apprenticeships in California, is an opportunity for students who are 16 and older to enter an apprenticeship training program. The earn-and-learn experience provides students with paid, on-the-job training while they take related supplemental instruction classes. Currently, standards have



Above: Delta Valley FFA Section Opening and Closing Competition hosted at the SJCOE, September 2022

been submitted to the Division of Apprenticeship Standards for the position of assistant farm manager. Once approved, this will allow high school juniors or seniors to be hired as registered apprentices and begin gaining work experience and training in agriculture-related occupations.

Imagine if every student in our county had the opportunity to experience hands-on learning opportunities that inspired them to dream about their futures in high-demand careers like agriculture! In the SJCOE's College and career readiness department, we're working toward doing just that, helping students imagine the career possibilities of the future, while connecting them with opportunities that will equip them with the knowledge and tools to become skilled members of our workforce. ♦



Katie Wipfli is the director of agriculture and environmental technology at the San Joaquin County Office of Education. Katie is passionate about agriculture and agriculture education. She is an active community member, serving on numerous boards and committees. She enjoys spending quality time outside with her husband and twin boys.



From our Sky Mountain Outdoor Education Center in the Tahoe National Forest to our programs in Stockton, like CodeStack Academy, that prepare the community for in-demand jobs and our life-changing programs throughout the county, like our Discovery Challenge Academy and Greater Valley Conservation Corps: we educate, innovate, and inspire. We are your San Joaquin County Office of Education.

Learn more at  
**WWW.SJCOE.ORG**



**SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY  
OFFICE OF EDUCATION**



# AN EVENING UNDER THE STARS

The founding members of St. Mary's FFA and their leader, Jessica Barrett, celebrated their first annual fundraiser dinner titled An Evening Under The Stars on November 5, 2022, at Eilers Ranch barn in Linden. Speakers included lobbyist and former State FFA President John Moffatt as well as St. Mary's President Jim Brusa. Desserts created by FFA members were sought-after auction items! ♦

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JULIE EILERS CLARY







KIDS SHINING BRIGHTLY

# PEYTON DECOITE

## RAISING GOATS REINFORCED HER CAREER PATH

BY HERLIFE STAFF

*When Peyton DeCoite was a freshman at Merrill F. West High School in Tracy, California, she decided to raise market goats as a member of Future Farmers of America, or FFA.*

**H**er sister, Cadence DeCoite, was her inspiration to take on this project. When Peyton was in seventh grade, Cadence had a goat. Peyton shared she was a bit jealous. She wasn't old enough to get a goat and she thought it would be a great project to take on. Once in high school, she was inspired by her sister, advisors and friends to make this commitment.

When Peyton received income from selling a goat or received donations and sponsorships for her market goats, she put the money straight into a special savings account dedicated to her current and future FFA projects. Now that she is done raising goats, all the profit will go toward her college tuition. She has plans to go to a two-year

college, then transfer to a four-year college.

Being involved in FFA has changed her life dramatically and in an amazing way. "I have gained so much confidence in public speaking and leadership skills. I have also made so many new friends from all around California," Peyton shared. "I have met these people through conferences, CDEs, LDEs and the San Joaquin County AgFest Fair. I have also created terrific bonds with my advisors that have helped support me through this journey. My goal for the future is to continue being extremely involved in FFA and the agriculture community. I plan to major in agriculture sciences and maybe one day become an ag teacher. I would be a third-generation teacher in my family!" ♦



# STORMIN' NORMAN, THE COW MARIE ANTOINETTE, THE CHICKEN REDBUCK, MR. SANWOOD, AKA BUCK THE HORSE

Stormin Norman

BY HERLIFE STAFF  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SYDNEY SPURGEON

## I WOULD DESCRIBE MY PERSONALITY:

**SN:** I am mischievous, interested in everything, I am really, really cute and always hungry and kind of clumsy.

**MA:** Blingy, prissy and bossy.

**BUCK:** Strong, confident, and a fast learner.

## WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE VACATION SPOT?

**SN:** The fluffy grass and sunny spot in the middle of the pasture.

**MA:** The highest roosting spot overlooking the ranch.

**BUCK:** The beautiful, lush pasture or sleeping in my sandy turnout.

## WHAT I LOVE TO DO WHEN I GET TO GO ALONG:

**SN:** I follow my human family all over. Whenever I see a stroller or wagon, I come bucking and running.

**MA:** Snuggles with my humans.

**BUCK:** Practice my moves in the arena and follow my girl Evelia Joy around the pasture.

## MY FAVORITE PLACE TO PLAY/ROAM/WALK?

**SN:** I like it when I escape to the front porch of my human family. I have done it a few times, they just don't like my pop.

**MA:** The chicken coop after fresh shavings.

**BUCK:** Anywhere with my human girl, Evelia Joy, and my horse girlfriend GiGi.

## MY GUILTY PLEASURE:

**SN:** Eating num nums out of kids and babies' hands. (Num num is a code word for Purina Calf Starter.)

**MA:** Hogging mealworms.

**BUCK:** When Stormin' Norman escapes, I LOVE to work him back into his pasture.

## MY NAUGHTIEST DEED:

**SN:** Escaping through gates and under fences.

**MA:** Taking over the coop. I'm a bit territorial.

**BUCK:** Trying to climb in the muck bucket.



### **I AM OBSESSED WITH:**

**SN:** Food and escaping to see my humans.

**MA:** I know it's obvious. Mealworms.

**BUCK:** Kisses and snuggles, chasing cows and learning new fancy dressage moves.

Clara with Marie Antoinette



### **MY MOST FAVORITE, MOST WONDERFUL TREAT:**

**SN:** Num, Nums, I'm also really starting to like alfalfa.

**MA:** You'd think I would tire of them. Once again, mealworms.

**BUCK:** Fresh green grass.

### **WHERE TO GO TO GET PAMPERED?**

**SN:** The fence where I can easily see and call to my humans, so they come give me head rubs and treats. They spoil me.

**MA:** The coop. I mean chickens don't have a lot of options here.

**BUCK:** The wash rack for baths and beautiful hair braiding.

### **I WOULD LIKE EVERYONE TO KNOW THAT:**

**SN:** I was born on New Year's Eve weighing 95 lbs!. My Mom, Giselle, was in labor for over 24 hours. I am really fuzzy, and oh, so cute.

**MA:** I LOVE MEALWORMS. My life pretty much revolves around them.

**BUCK:** I almost died of West Nile Virus, but I came back stronger than ever. I really like kids to ride me bareback.



Evelia Joy with Buck

### **WHERE I WAS BORN:**

**SN:** Lodi, CA., back pole barn, 9:50pm, New Year's Eve 2022, weight: 95 lbs.

**MA:** Uncle Robert's Farm

**BUCK:** Missouri ♦



Sydney Spurgeon  
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WEDNESDAY

**MAY 24**

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Stockton

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# Remembering THE WOMAN'S LAND ARMY

BY PHILLIP MERLO  
PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE STOCKTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY



*A squad of Woman's Land Army in one of the Tokay Vineyards of Northern San Joaquin – from 9/20/1918.*

Women have played a significant role in San Joaquin County agriculture since the first farms were established on the outskirts of Stockton in the 1850s. One chapter of women's agricultural history in our community that's worth remembering is that of the Women's Land Army, the famed farmerettes of World War I and World War II.

The Woman's Land Army of America, or WLAA, was a ladies' organization launched during the First and Second World Wars with the goal of replacing male farm workers who had been drafted to serve in the U.S. military. Known as the farmerettes, the woman who worked for the WLAA were organized into corps and established camps across the United States, where they would then be directed by officers to report for duty at local farms.

In San Joaquin County, the WLAA was particularly prominent during WWI, establishing a major camp at Villinger's Grove, modern-day Hale Park, in Lodi. After the program was announced by federal officials in May 1918, the Stockton Chamber of Com-

merce put out a call for recruits, and Mrs. A.J. Cook of Stockton was named the chairwoman of the San Joaquin County corps. Enrollment was for a minimum of four weeks. Enlistees were paid a minimum of \$2 a day and were housed and fed for \$1.15 a day. By September 1918, the program had won the hearts and minds of the local agricultural industry, with notables such as William Micke, W. W. Cowell of the Manteca tomato industry and others clamoring for WLAA farmerettes to work in their packing sheds. The following passage was written about the Lodi Camp by investigative reporter Matthew Hamilton on September 20, 1918, in the *Stockton Daily Evening Record*, in an article titled "Woman's Land Army is Doing Great Work At Lodi Saving Northern San Joaquin County Crops."

Lodi has capitulated to the Woman's Land Army.

On August 31st it pitched its tents before the gates of the city, thirty-five strong, and at once went into action.

Suspicion and fear fled before it and to-day it occupies the high ground, command-

ing the Tokay Center, having won the entire population over to its side, and occupies a permanent place in the hearts of the people of Northern San Joaquin."

The WLAA would continue to play a ma-

*June Wilbur, Clorindia Faccini, Ollie Adcock and an unidentified woman of the WLAA, with recently harvested peaches, during WWII.*





for role in alleviating workforce concerns in San Joaquin County agriculture through 1920, at which point they disbanded as veterans returned home from the war. Several of the leading ladies of the San Joaquin WLAA had served as leading suffragettes of the earlier 1911 fight for women to earn the right to vote in California, including Alice Grayden Phillips and Edith Mel, while most recruits were UC Berkeley students or recent high school graduates from Stockton High or the Bay Area.

The WLAA would be revived in 1943 as part of an initiative by the United States Crops Corps and it would employ nearly 3.5 million workers across the United States. While the WWII-era farmerettes received less media coverage, records show that they were more numerous, with nearly 1,000 farmerettes serving in San Joaquin County during the war.

The farmerettes of the Woman's Land Army were a major force in local agriculture. Their story should serve as a timely reminder that when you need something done, you can always count on the ladies of the community. ♦



*Unidentified ladies of the WLAA posing with fruit drying trays in an orchard, during WWII.*

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3RD ANNUAL SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY

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# GET OUT AND ENJOY COMMUNITY EVENTS

**APRIL 1**

**Lodi Wine Festival**

Lodi Grape Festival Grounds

Info: [grapefestival.com](http://grapefestival.com)

**APRIL 3**

**Stockton Chamber of  
Commerce Golf Tournament**

Stockton Golf & Country Club

Info: [stocktonchamber.org](http://stocktonchamber.org)

**APRIL 6**

**Opening Day Stockton  
Ports Baseball**

Banner Island Ballpark

Info: [mlb.com](http://mlb.com)

**APRIL 13 - APRIL 16**

**Cambodian New Year**

Cambodian Buddhist Temple

Info: [StocktonCambodianBuddhistTemple](http://StocktonCambodianBuddhistTemple)

**APRIL 14 - APRIL 16**

**San Joaquin Asparagus  
Festival**

San Joaquin County Fairgrounds

Info: [sanjoaquinasparagusfestival.net](http://sanjoaquinasparagusfestival.net)

**APRIL 14**

**Stockton Garden Club  
Plant Sale**

1661 West Longview, Stockton

Info: [stocktongardenclub.com](http://stocktongardenclub.com)

**APRIL 15**

**Lodi Art Hop**

Veterans Park

Info: [bailey@lodiarts.com](mailto:bailey@lodiarts.com)

**APRIL 18 - 23**

**California Bluegrass  
Campout and Fiddle Contest**

Lodi Grape Festival Grounds

Info: [deblivermore@gmail.com](mailto:deblivermore@gmail.com)

**APRIL 22**

**Champagne & English  
Tea Luncheon**

Presentation Church

Info: [hospicesj.org](http://hospicesj.org)

**APRIL 22**

**4th Annual Chef &  
Survivor Cook Off**

Hutchins Street Square

Info: [eventbrite.com](http://eventbrite.com)

**APRIL 23**

**Stockton Earth Day Festival**

Victory Park

Info: [earthdaystockton.com](http://earthdaystockton.com)

**APRIL 26**

**Denim Day**

Spread awareness of education about  
sexual violence

Info: [denimdayinfo.org](http://denimdayinfo.org)

**APRIL 28 & APRIL 29**

**4th Annual Lodi Beer Fest  
Championship**

Lodi Grape Festival Grounds

Info: [fireitupevents.com](http://fireitupevents.com)

**APRIL 30**

**Walk for MS**

Lincoln Village West

Info: [allevents.in](http://allevents.in)





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