

Business school leaders propose cooperative marketing plan for coastal farmers

BY KATHY SWITKY

While many local residents know first-hand the pleasures of a plump coastal artichoke and fresh-off-the-stalk Brussels sprouts, San Mateo County's production of food crops is relatively small. Its annual production of \$180 million ranks just 31st among California's 58 counties.

Though small, the farms along the San Mateo County Coast are an important part of our cultural heritage, and help create the distinctive character and beauty of the coastal landscape.

Unfortunately, these farms are increasingly threatened by competition with cheaper foreign and out-of-state produce, as well as by dramatic increases in land values and related development pressures. While CGF has long advocated County land use policies that protect farmers from land speculation, we recently endorsed a project that could help local farms compete more effectively in the marketplace.

With support from Committee for Green Foothills and leadership from

CGF board fellow Jeff Stein, students in the Stanford Graduate School of Business Leadership Development Platform have developed an extensive cooperative marketing plan to help coastal farmers survive in the face of these challenges.

The report, by MBA Class of 2005 students Charles Dimmler, Fernanda Gandara, Tennyson Liu, Neal Mohan, Jeff Stein and Caroline Tuan suggests that by working together, local farmers can increase their leverage on pricing and promote the freshness and quality of their crops.

"We were surprised to find that some consumers hardly know that farms exist in San Mateo County. Launching a highly visible 'Buy Fresh, Buy Local' campaign on packaging and on in-store displays can help remind consumers of the great value to the county's landscape of maintaining these farms," said Stein.

The biggest opportunity for San Mateo County, say the authors, is a partnership between the San Mateo County Farm Bureau and the Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF)

which has been successful in branding local produce in Santa Cruz County with its "Buy Fresh, Buy Local" campaign and is eager to expand into San Mateo County. Several other organizations in other parts of the state including San Diego and the Central Valley have also successfully launched campaigns to encourage residents to buy local produce.

By working with CAFF, the San Mateo County Farm Bureau could take advantage of the program's successful local branding as well as its experience running the program and well-established relationships in the grocery and restaurant communities.

The San Mateo County Farm Bureau is now seeking funding to launch the program, which has strong support from both Board of Supervisors President Rich Gordon and County Agricultural Commissioner Gail Raabe.

Committee for Green Foothills will continue to work in support of the long-term sustainability of coastal agriculture. The future of our coastal farms, and our enjoyment of their bounty, are at stake. **CGF**

