

# PENINSULA

[LOCAL NEWS FROM PENINSULA COMMUNITIES]

**Darling daughter**  
Damesha Craig is carving out a sports identity reliant on her own skills, not her famous father's. [P-4]



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## Down on Our Farm



EXAMINER PHOTOS BY KIM KOMENICH

### Earth-friendly practices of "sustainable agriculture" find a home at this year-old project in Woodside

**By Elaine Larsen**  
SPECIAL TO THE EXAMINER

**E**VERY THURSDAY after work Jim Jensen of San Bruno drives to Woodside to pick up a bushel of organic vegetables and herbs, handpicked that morning.

Depending on the season, he and wife, Christine, feast on succulent corn, crisp turnips or juicy tomatoes all grown without chemical fertilizers or pesticides. It is their share of the bounty produced on the fields of "Our Farm," a pioneering Community Supported Agriculture project that links consumers of produce directly with the farmers who grow it.

For a set weekly price, share holders receive a picnic cooler packed full of vegetables. They also become part of a group of people who share their love of healthy food and the spirit of community agriculture.

Run by longtime farmers Dave Blume and his partner, Reynie Lave, Our Farm reflects the earth-friendly practices of "sustainable agriculture" where the land is naturally cultivated and enriched, yielding the finest in produce flavor and quality.

"We use only soil, compost, water, sunlight, labor and love to grow wholesome food for people," said Blume.

"We checked this out and were impressed," said Jensen, a plumbing contractor who has been a share holder with Our Farm since it began last year.

Since they've been eating organic, the Jensens have noticed a marked improvement in the way they feel, especially Christine, who has a sensitivity to all chemicals.

"The nice thing is that you get the food the day it's picked. It's so fresh and sweet that sometimes we don't have to cook it," said husband, Jim. "And we get a lot of things you can't get at a regular

supermarket."

Farms in Woodside?

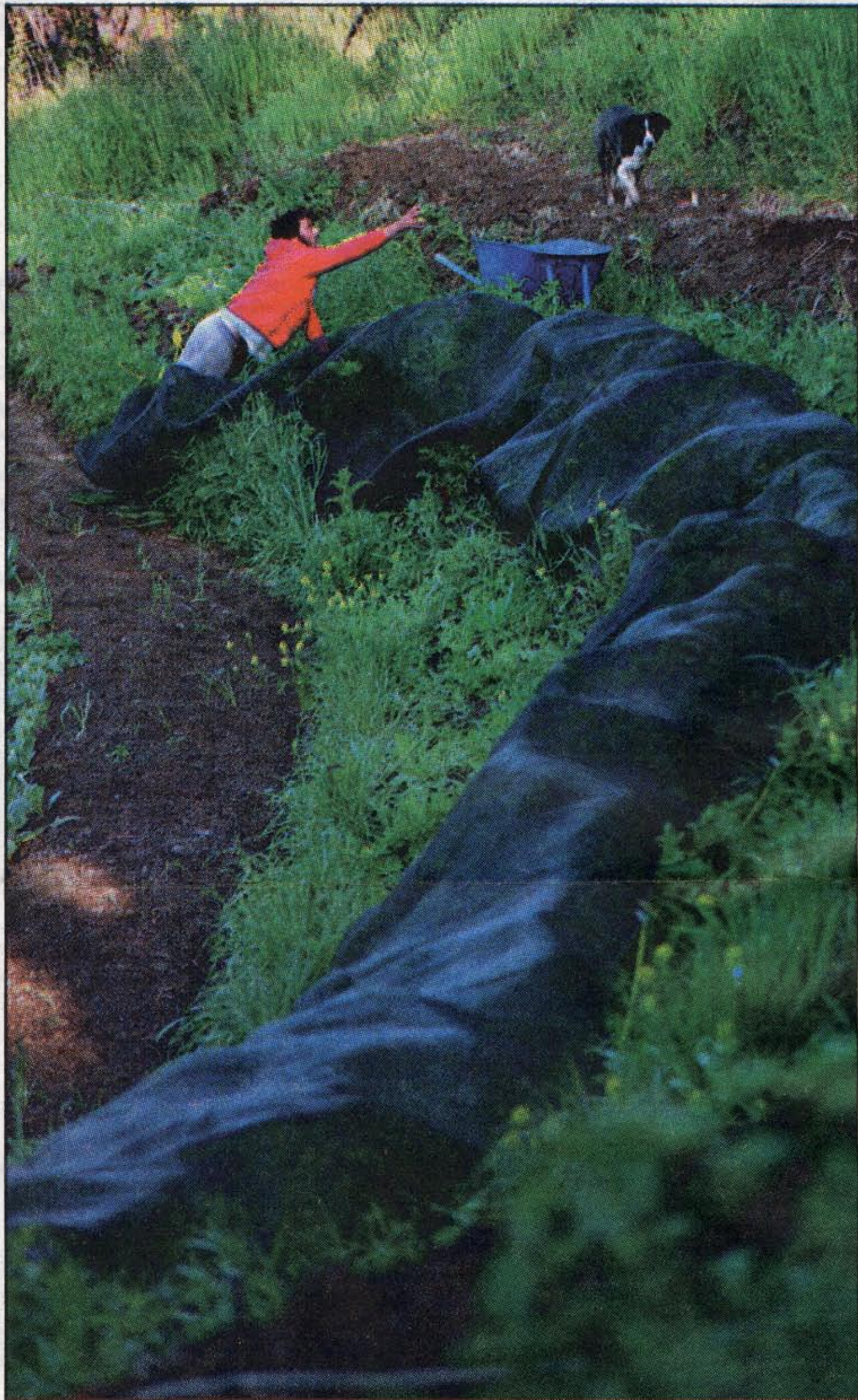
Located just above Redwood City, Our Farm's main property is tucked amid the misty mountains and horse ranches that make up Woodside.

The residential home of Blume and his partner, Margaret Koster, it is a rustic collection of greenhouses, planter boxes and compost piles set off by several terraced hillsides of growing produce. The farm also grows and harvests produce on field and orchard tracts in Los Altos and Woodside.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a collaboration between consumers and farmers. Produce is raised for a limited number of consumers at a fixed price, rather than for the general market. The sharers receive the farm's produce at or near cost of production throughout the year, sharing both the bounty and the risk.

In its first yer, Our Farm grew

**Farmer Dave Blume** stirs up a pile of compost, above, while Augie watches; at right, partner Reynie Lave picks lettuce on a terraced hillside.



### **Farmer Dave**

*Blume stirs up a pile of compost, above, while*

*Augie watches;*

*at right, partner*

*Reynie Lave*

*picks lettuce on a*

*terraced hillside.*

more than 20,000 pounds of tasty vegetables — some 40 different varieties of produce in all. Many were heirloom varieties — prized for their flavor and nutritional value, rather than shipping quality or shelf life.

Share holders receive about seven to 10 kinds of vegetables, fruits, mushrooms and herbs each week. A full share runs for 39 weeks between April 4 and Dec. 19 with costs averaging out to less than \$24.

a week plus a one-time entry fee of \$30. Single season shares are also available.

Share holders pick up their weekly allotment at the main farm in Woodside, or at neighborhood drop-off points in Noe Valley and Berkeley.

### **A teaching farm**

Our Farm is more than just another vegetable farm. Building community through everyone's

common connection to the earth and food supply is as much the goal as making a profit.

Nicknamed "Farmer Dave" by the kids, Blume regularly hosts school tours and is a collaborator with adult and youth programs at Coyote Point Museum in San Mateo.

One recent sunny day, Blume led more than a dozen prospective

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## Down on Our Farm

share holders on a tour of the main farm in Woodside, giving them a firsthand look at running an organic farm.

"It's an occupation that never gets boring and you never know it all. No day or year is the same," said Blume of his life's passion. "Everything about farming is different parts of a big circle. As organic farmers, most of what we do is take care of the soil, the plants pretty much take care of themselves.

Horse manure — in no short supply in Woodside — is the basis for the organic compost which enriches the soil of Our Farm.

"With conventional farming, soil is just the place to anchor the roots. With organic farming, it's 'dirt first,'" said Blume, wearing a purple T-shirt with that credo. "You can see, smell and feel the difference with good soil, and your plants will just get better and better," he said.

Visitors walked wood chip-covered paths winding down terraced hillside while Blume explained the natural interactions between plants, insects and animals.

Unlike traditional farming, which relies heavily on chemicals, organic farming works with, not against, nature. Plants are often produced in tandem, taking into account their natural growing cycles.

The Our Farm grounds also boast several man-made piles of rocks and ponds, providing habitat for spiders and toads — predators of destructive bugs. Earth worms are allies as natural tillers of soil while common coffee grounds make ideal fertilizer. Even farm dog Augie, an Australian Shepherd mix, provides a natural gopher patrol.

Rather than chemical herbicides, the farmers use a roofer's flame torch to eradicate weeds. Instead of incinerating the weed, the flame heats up water inside the plant, turning it to steam and bursting the plant's cell structure. A few days later the weed withers and dies.

Inside man-made greenhouses, more ponds attract toads, keeping the tiny seedlings free from insects. Even the transplanting is au naturel. Cube-shape plants are grown

sans pots — leaving no plastic containers to discard.

And in an intriguing insulation method found in many centuries-old homes in Europe, straw bales make up the walls of the farm's outdoor "walk-in refrigerator."

Tour visitors also get a chance to sample vegetables right from the ground — including fresh turnips, cabbage and edible purple flowers that taste like cucumbers.

A particular hit is a spicy mustard green that tastes remarkably like Grey Poupon.

"Everything is edible, right from the ground," said Blume, who frequently converts even the most staunch beet haters with his sweet variety.

As much an educator as he is an ecologist and businessman, Blume offers intriguing tidbits of information during his tours. Garlic, he explains, is a native of Egypt and so drought-tolerant its roots can reach depths of 6 feet. The Mexican herb Epazote is revered both as a medicinal tea and as the spice in many flavorful bean dishes.

A vegetarian himself for more than 20 years, Blume said share holders are always coming up with new recipes, which are shared in a weekly newsletter. Members have a say in what is grown on the farm, and can just visit or roll up their sleeves and participate in the work.

Our Farm also recently linked up with the Foundry School, providing opportunities for at-risk teenagers to learn ecology and value of teamwork behind farming.

### A legacy of farming

The roots of Blume's interest in all things organic and ecological run deep.

A native of San Francisco, he learned organic farming while growing up the son of sharecroppers. Our Farm in Woodside is only a few miles from where Blume's grandfather farmed on Palo Alto's now-residential Alameda de Las Pulgas.

Blume, 40, studied ecological biology and biosystematics at San Francisco State University and later worked for Mother Earth News where he helped establish an ecovillage that taught thousands of people alternative agriculture and sustainable living skills.

During the 1980s, Blume taught farmers across the country how to produce alcohol fuel, or ethanol, as well as how to grow nontraditional crops for both fuel and animal feed.

He also wrote and produced a 10-part television series on PBS called "Alcohol as Fuel," which aired in 1983.

He is executive director of Hidden Villa Farm and Wilderness Preserve in Los Altos Hills and serves on the board of the nonprofit Committee for Sustainable Agriculture, which puts on conferences to help conventional farmers adopt sustainable agriculture practices.

Lave, 29, who grew up playing in the orchards of Los Altos, is a graduate of a pioneering Agroecology program at UC-Santa Cruz.

He spent more than a year in Guatemala teaching sustainable-agriculture techniques and worked for two years at Peninsula-based organic farms before joining up with Blume.

The idea of being self-employed while sharing a common vision appealed to Lave, who after his first agricultural ecology class was hooked. Although the two hope to make a modest living from the CSA program, both Blume and Lave are also committed to keeping small farming alive.

Our Farm trains apprentices to one day run their own CSAs and routinely hosts interns from as far away as Croatia and Germany. They hope to sponsor two apprentices from Guatemala this summer and are seeking host families and people interested in contributing to a scholarship fund.

### Saving the small farm

The CSA concept is being touted as one way to save the family farm from extinction.

"What CSAs do is bring people who want to see the continuation of the small farmer together with people who want to do the work," said Blume. "We want to show people is that you can make a living as a farmer."

According to Jered Lawson of Santa Cruz' CSA West, the number of U.S. CSAs increased from just two farms in 1986 to 500 today, a decade later.

"Many look at CSAs as catering only to people who can afford specialty produce," said Lawson whose organization is a program of the Community Alliance with Family Farmers Foundation in Davis.

For more information on Our Farm, becoming a share holder or the next public tour call 365-2993. For a current list of CSAs serving the By Area contact CSA West at (408) 459-3964.