

RP 1-9-16 Agri-Culture gets \$2M from Lakeside Organic

Agriculture Learning Center in the works

REGISTER-PAJARONIAN STAFF REPORT

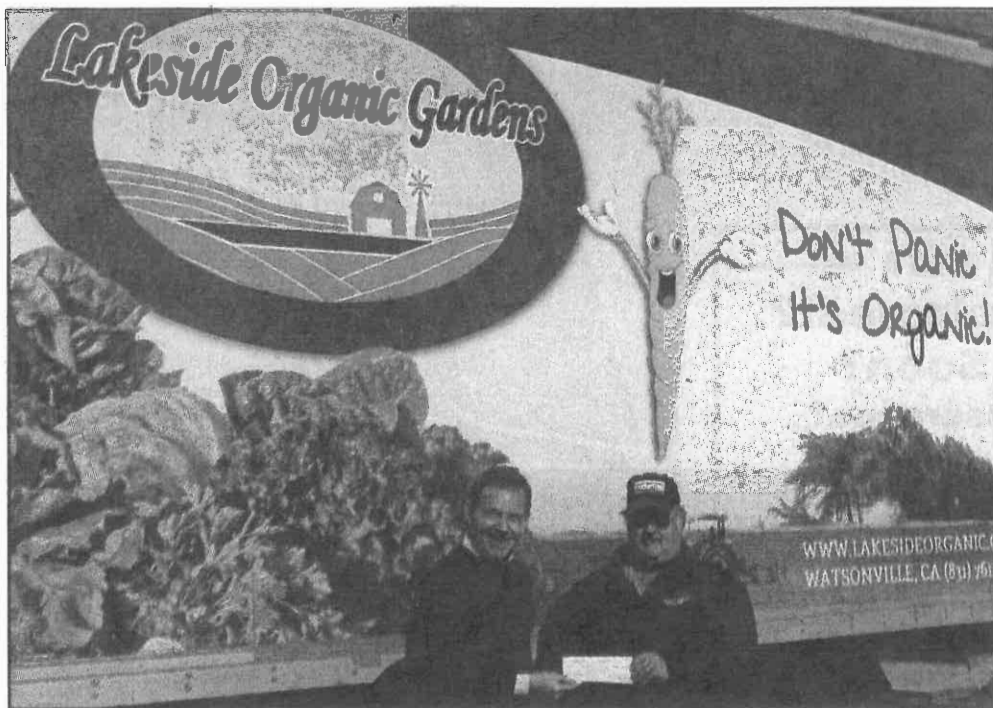
WATSONVILLE — The Peixoto family of Lakeside Organic Gardens contributed \$2 million to Agri-Culture for the development of an organic and sustainable agriculture learning center.

“Dick Peixoto’s dream of having an educational facility to showcase organic farming is closer to becoming a reality,” said Katie Bassmann, spokesperson for Lakeside Organic Gardens. “Dick and this center will be a resource for people interested in starting an organic farm, learning about organic farming or those just interested in seeing how their food is grown organically.”

The facility, which is still in the planning stages, will incorporate education, history, techniques and future innovations of organic farming. All aspects of organic and sustainable agriculture will be benefited, including careers in organic farming.

Lakeside will be working directly with Agri-Culture, Inc. to facilitate the development of the fund and learning center.

“The public has shown us a strong interest in organic and sustainable agriculture,” said Dick Peixoto, founder of Lakeside Organic Gardens. “I feel strongly that



Contributed

Dick Peixoto, founder of Lakeside Organic Gardens, passes a check for \$2 million to Jess Brown, executive director of Agri-Culture.

the proposed learning center will create opportunities that will allow the public to advance its knowledge while encouraging careers in organic agriculture through education and focused training programs.”

In receiving the gift, Agri-Culture, Inc. President Steve Bontadelli said, “We are honored to be chosen to help Dick Peixoto and his family fulfill their dream of providing educational programs focused on organic and sustainable agriculture. Our area has been the leader in organic and sustainable agriculture. It’s wonderful

that the program Dick Peixoto envisions will benefit the public, the industry and our local area.”

Jess Brown, executive director of Agri-Culture, Inc. said, “Other individuals, corporations, foundations, etc. that see the importance of this vision are encouraged to donate to the fund so that more programs can be provided.”

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— **Dick Peixoto**
Lakeside Organic Gardens founder

Lakeside Organic Gardens gives \$2M to establish learning center

Agri-Culture is developing a learning center with gift

By Samantha Clark

sclark@santacruzsentinel.com
@samanthabclark on Twitter

WATSONVILLE » Lakeside Organic Gardens gave \$2 million to a Watsonville nonprofit to establish a agriculture learning center in the Pajaro Valley.

With the gift, Agri-Culture Inc. is developing the Organic and Sustainable Agriculture Learning Center to advance career opportunities and public knowledge of all aspects of sustainable farming practices.

“For one, there’s just a misunderstanding about what we can do organically. A lot of people say we can’t feed the world organically. I believe we can,” said Dick Peixoto, who founded Lakeside Organic Gardens, the largest family owned organic grower in the United States. “And we’ve come far in organic farming, but we’re still learning a lot.”

He said it might take a few years to build and establish the learning center.

“I think the center will be a tremendous, tremendous asset to have in the community,” said Jess Brown, executive director of Agri-Culture.

AGRI-CULTURE

Agri-Culture is a education nonprofit in Watsonville that aims to build a better understanding of agriculture. The organization offers agriculture classes, endowment funds for scholarships and local farming grants.

Details: agri-culture.us.

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Gardens

FROM PAGE 2

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Peixoto began farm-

Lakeside Organic Gardens gives \$2M to establish sustainable agriculture learning center



Dick Peixoto, founder of Lakeside Organic Gardens, hands a \$2 million check to Jess Brown, executive director of Agri-Culture. (Contributed)

By [Samantha Clark](#), Santa Cruz Sentinel

Posted: 01/08/16, 4:42 PM PST | Updated: 6 days ago

Agri-Culture

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DETAILS: agri-culture.us.

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Lakeside Organic Gardens donates \$2mil to launch organic education center

By [Deborah Luhrman](#)



EDIBLE MONTGOMERY BAY

Lakeside's Dick Peixoto in one of his Pajaro Valley fields

Jan 12, 2016 – With the goal of getting more young people to become organic farmers, [Lakeside Organic Gardens](#) owner **Dick Peixoto** has donated \$2 million for an organic education center in the Pajaro Valley.

Envisioned as a cross between the Steinbeck Center and the Monterey Bay Aquarium, he says: “We want to bring kids at a young age into the center for a day to show them what we do and get them excited about organic systems.”

Adults will also be welcome at the center. “We want to show them that our organic production has surpassed our conventional yields,” he says.

Classes will be offered for beginning farmers and backyard gardeners on specific topics like pest management and soils.

There will also be educational experiences on new farming technologies and on history. “Many times we need to re-learn what farmers did before, in the days before pesticides, and how to re-direct the cropland back to Mother Nature,” Peixoto says.

“Hopefully we can inspire young people to become organic farmers,” he says. “We’re not afraid of competition, there is enough market for everyone. I’d love to see more new farmers get going.”

The center will be operated by Agri-Culture Inc.—a Pajaro Valley non-profit dedicated to ag education. Executive Director Jess Brown says the new center—to be called Peixoto Organic and Sustainable Farming and Education Center—could be “another jewel for our area.”

“We are planning an all-encompassing center that includes research and experiences where the general public can go and learn,” says Brown.

“We’re still in the planning stages right now. More money is needed, but this is a great start,” he adds.

Peixoto hopes to see the center open by the end of 2017 and would like to locate it near his Watsonville headquarters on Holohan Rd.

WATSONVILLE, CA – Lakeside Organic Gardens is investing in a **new facility** that could help shape the future of organic and sustainable agriculture.



Dick Peixoto, Founder, Lakeside Organic Gardens (Photo Credit: Science Notes, UC Santa Cruz)

Founder Dick Peixoto and family have **donated \$2 million** to the Pajaro Valley non-profit organization “Agri-Culture, Inc.” in order to help develop an organic and sustainable agriculture education facility that would serve as a resource to people interested in starting an organic farm, learning about organic farming, or seeing how their food is grown organically, according to a press release.

“The public has shown us a strong interest in organic and sustainable agriculture,” Peixoto said in a statement. “I feel strongly that the **proposed learning center will create opportunities** that will allow the public to advance its knowledge while encouraging careers in organic agriculture through education and focused training programs.”

Lakeside Organic Gardens and Agri-Culture, Inc. will be joining forces to facilitate the development of the fund and learning center. Though the facility is still in its planning stages, both companies are highly optimistic that the development will open up a number of opportunities for the organic agriculture community.



Steve Bontadelli, President, Agri-Culture, Inc. “We are honored to be chosen to help Dick Peixoto and his family fulfill their dream of providing educational programs focused on organic and sustainable agriculture,” said Agri-Culture, Inc. President Steve Bontadelli. “It’s wonderful that the program Dick Peixoto envisions will **benefit the public, the industry, and our local area.**”

Other individuals, corporations, or foundations interested in furthering this cause are encouraged to donate to the fund as well.

Letters, Jan. 13, 2016: Peixoto family donation a gift to entire community

POSTED: 01/12/16, 4:04 PM PST UPDATED: 2 WEEKS, 5 DAYS AGO
[71 COMMENTS](#)

Peixoto family donation a gift to entire community

The Peixoto family continues its generosity to the Pajaro Valley and beyond. With the family's \$2 million gift, the nonprofit Agri-Culture Inc. is developing the Organic & Sustainable Agriculture Learning Center. This learning center will be a tremendous asset to the entire Santa Cruz County community. From personal experience of working with nonprofit agencies, I recognize what an extraordinary gift this is for our community. I am surprised to see such a small article in the Santa Cruz Sentinel, without even a picture of this amazing family. Front page headlines were reserved for increased gun sales in Scotts Valley, local Powerball sales and a carjacker fleeing in Santa Cruz. I hope others will join me in applauding Lakeside Organic Gardens and the entire Peixoto family.

— *Ginny Solari Mazry, Aptos*

gram covers topics such as ethnic groups in agriculture, labor, new technology, land use, politics, the environment and health care.

Members of the 2015 graduating class of Focus Agriculture include: Robin Boyle, director of marketing and sales, California Certified Organic Farmers; Shannon Brady, philanthropy director, Palo Alto Medical Foundation/Sutter Maternity and Surgery Center; Jimmy Dutra, councilmember, city of Watsonville; Marcus Frost, director of development and communications, Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History; Rebecca Garcia, councilmember, city of Watsonville; Javier Gomez, representative, state Assemblymember Luis Alejo; Eileen Hill, associate director, Cabrillo College Foundation; Sarah Hullock, horticulture and agronomy research scientist, Dole Fresh Vegetables; Meg Janes, tax manager, Plantronics, Inc.; April Jernberg, soil conservationist, United States Department of Agriculture; Maritza Pozzillo, Loyola private event director, Seascope Golf Club; Jacob Martinez, executive director, Digital NEST; Sheila McDaniell, land use planner, Santa Cruz County Planning Department; Rachel Montoya, controller, Sambrailo Packaging; Josh Morgan, manager, Café Cruz; James Panetta, prosecutor, Monterey County District Attorney's Office; Brian Spector, principal, Spector Corbett Architects, Inc.; Jon Sisk, SVP, director of real estate/construction, Santa Cruz County Bank; Tom Takano, educator; and Alec Wasson, president, Idea Farming, Inc.

Agri-Culture's next class will begin in March 2016.

New graduates

Congratulations to the 2015 graduates of Focus Agriculture, an educational program sponsored by Agri-Culture.

A ceremony and reception was recently held at the Pajaro Valley Historical Association's Bockius-Orr house on Beach Street in Watsonville to celebrate the Class of XXXVI.

The graduation ceremony included a graduation certificate and an Assembly certificate prepared and presented by Assemblyman Luis Alejo's office.

"This was an excellent class," stated Agri-Culture's President Steve Bontadelli. "We are appreciative of the speakers and participants for giving their time during the year."

Focus Agriculture allows community leaders a chance to gain firsthand knowledge about agriculture in Santa Cruz County and the Pajaro Valley. The nine-session pro-

NAME DROPPING SENTINEL 1/3/16



Recent graduates of the Focus Agriculture class.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Focus Agriculture Class XXVI graduates



The 2015 Focus Agriculture graduates. Top row: Sheila McDaniel, Jacob Martinez. Third row: Sarah Hulick, Maritza Pozzi-Loyola, Eileen Hill, Meg Janes, Robin Boyle, Jon Sisk, April Jernberg. Second row: Jimmy Dutra, Alec Wasson, Rachel Montoya, Rebecca Garcia, Jimmy Panetta, Josh Morgan. Bottom row: Tom Takano, Brian Spector, Javier Gomez, Jess Brown. Not pictured: Shannon Brady, Marcus Frost. Contributed photo

Staff report

WATSONVILLE — November brings graduation to the locally-based national award-winning Focus Agriculture program. A ceremony and reception was held at the Pajaro Valley Historical Association's Bockius-Orr house on Beach Street in Watsonville on Nov. 27 for Class XXVI of the Focus Agriculture program.

Focus Agriculture, a program of the organization Agri-Culture is a program that allows community leaders to learn firsthand about agriculture in Santa Cruz County and the Pajaro Valley. The nine session program covers topics such as ethnic groups in agriculture, labor, new technology, land use, politics, the environment and health care.

The members of the graduating class are:

- Robin Boyle, Director of Marketing and Sales, California Certified Organic Farmers

- Shannon Brady, Philanthropy Director, Palo Alto Medical Foundation/Sutter Maternity and Surgery Center
- Jimmy Dutra, Councilmember, City of Watsonville
- Marcus Frost, Director of Development and Communications, Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History
- Rebecca Garcia, Councilmember, City of Watsonville
- Javier Gomez, Representative, State Assemblyman Luis Alejo
- Eileen Hill, Associate Director, Cabrillo College Foundation
- Sarah Hulick, Horticulture & Agronomy Research Scientist, Dole Fresh Vegetables
- Meg Janes, Tax Manager, Plantronics, Inc.
- April Jernberg, Soil Conservationist, United States Department of Agriculture
- Maritza Pozzi-Loyola, Private Event Director, Seascape Golf Club
- Jacob Martinez, Executive Director, Digital NEST
- Sheila McDaniel, Land Use Planner, Santa Cruz County Planning Dept.
- Rachel Montoya, Controller, Sambrailo Packaging
- Josh Morgan, Manager, Café Cruz
- James Panetta, Prosecutor, Monterey County District Attorney's Office
- Brian Spector, Principal, Spector Corbett Architects, Inc.
- Jon Sisk, SVP-Director of Real

Estate/Construction, Santa Cruz County Bank

- Tom Takano, Educator
- Alec Wasson, President, Idea Farming, Inc.

The graduation ceremony included a graduation certificate plus an Assembly Certificate prepared and presented by Assemblyman Luis Alejo's office.

"This was an excellent class," Agriculture President Steve Bontadelli said. "We are appreciative of the speakers and participants for giving their time during the year."

Applications accepted for Focus Agriculture

Staff report

RP- "THE LAND"
JANUARY 2016

WATSONVILLE — Applications are currently being accepted for Class XXVII of Focus Agriculture, a "first-in-the-nation" program, designed for selected community leaders to learn about agriculture in Santa Cruz County and the Pajaro Valley.

The program consists of once-a-month, daylong seminars, held over a period of nine months. Speakers, ranging from elected officials to representatives from environmental groups, address the class. The sessions cover such topics as: environment and technology, ethnic groups in agriculture, regional diversity of commodities produced, and many farm tours and hands-on experiences.

Twenty-one people will be selected for Class XXVII.

"Many people who are involved in the community are interested in agriculture," said Agri-Culture President Steve Bontadelli. "Focus Agriculture was created to allow community leaders an opportunity to learn, through discussions and hands-

on experiences, about local agriculture. We are proud that the program received a National Award in 2011."

Alumni of the program include: John Laird, California Secretary of Resources Agency; Zach Friend, Supervisor; 4th District Supervisor Greg Caput; Jimmy Panetta, Monterey County District Attorney; Willy Elliott-McCrea, CEO, Second Harvest Food Bank; Bud Colligan, Founder/CEO, South Swell Ventures; Ted Burke, Owner, Shadowbrook Restaurant; Michael Watkins, Superintendent of County Office of Education; and Ceil Cirillo, Tannery Arts Center.

Seminars will be held one full day per month commencing March 11 and ending Oct. 21.

Applications are available online at www.agri-culture.us or at the Agri-Culture office, 141 Monte Vista Ave. in Watsonville, and by calling 722-6622.

Applications are due Jan. 15.

Applications available for scholarship

RP "THE LAND"
JANUARY 2016

Staff report

WATSONVILLE — Agri-Culture is now accepting applications for the 2016 Jimmie Cox Memorial Scholarship.

The \$4,000 award is for a student entering or currently attending college and majoring in agriculture. This award will be allocated for the remaining years in college (maximum of four years) with verification of registration for each session of full time classes. This award is made possible through the Jimmie Cox Memorial Scholarship Fund and a \$2,000 contribution from American AgCredit.

To be eligible for the scholarships, students must live in Santa Cruz County

or within the Pajaro Valley Unified School District boundaries, or be a member of the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau. Criteria for the scholarship are based on student leadership skills, a demonstrated commitment to the industry, grades and financial need.

The deadline for submitting applications for the Agri-Culture Scholarship Program is Wednesday, Feb. 24.

To request an application, contact the Financial Aid office at your school or the Agri-Culture office, 141 Monte Vista Ave. in Watsonville, call 722-6622 or email agri-culture@sbcglobal.net. Applications are also available at www.agri-culture.us.

SENTINEL 1/23/16

PV farmers cautiously optimistic about El Niño

Rain is slowly recharging aquifers

By Samantha Clark

sclark@santacruzsentinel.com
@samanthabclark on Twitter

WATSONVILLE » During the drought, John Pisturino's cattle at Rancho Santa Maria kicked up dust when they wandered the bone dry brown foothills near Hecker Pass outside Watsonville. Now that El Niño is bringing rain, the grass grows green and their hoof prints create little mud puddles.

"Our springs and the wells had dried up," Pisturino said. "We had to haul water up the hills to the cows, which I've never done in my 45 years."

But since October, the Watsonville area has seen 13.72 inches of rain, which is 100 to 110 percent of normal, according to the National Weather Service. El Niño is a global meteorological phenomenon associated with wet winters in California.

The much anticipated arrival of rain means local agricultural can start shifting gears, but they're not overly optimistic because the drought isn't over yet.

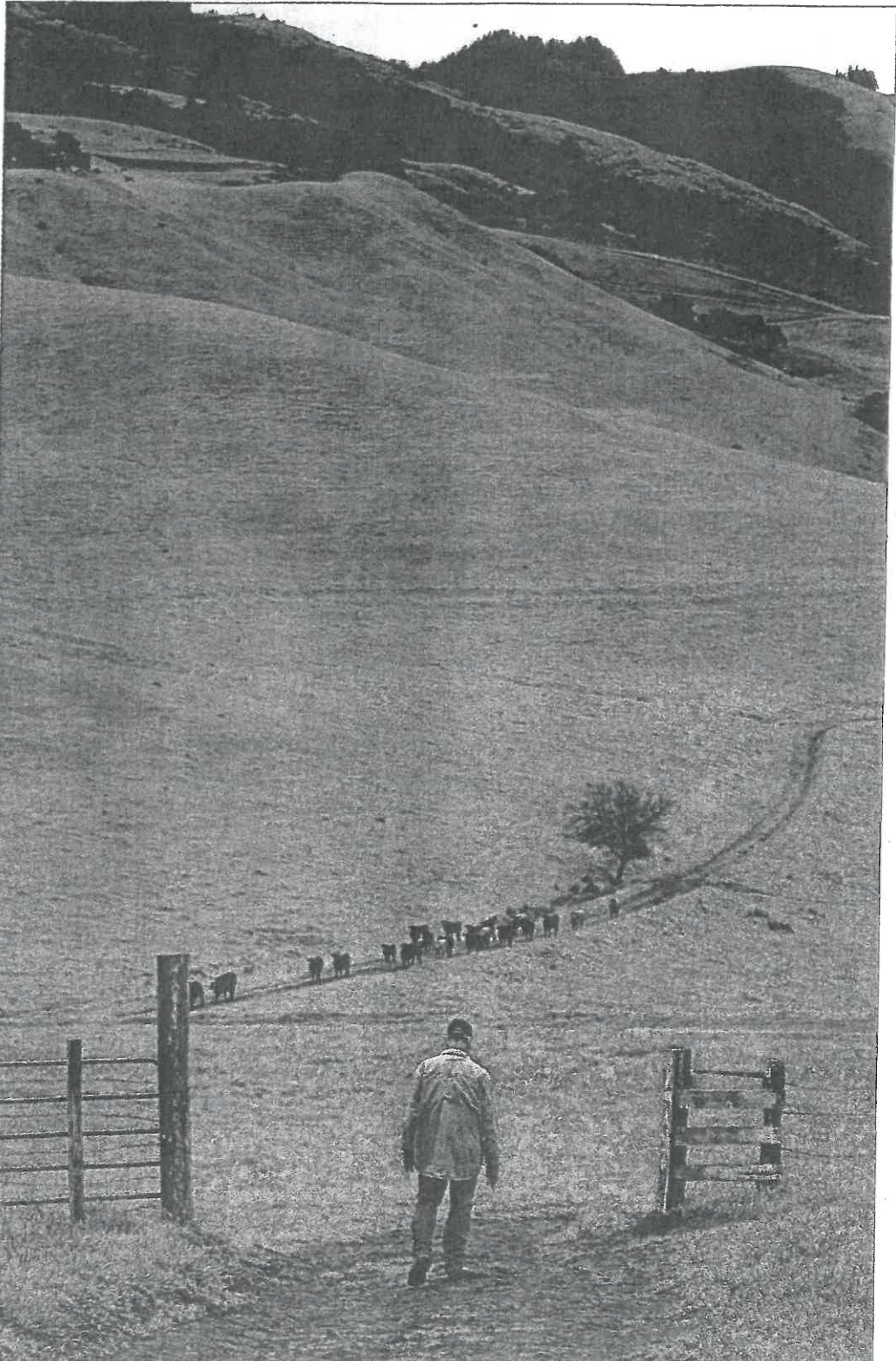
Cattle ranchers on the Central Coast such as Pisturino are beginning to rebuild their herds slowly.

"We were at 220 cows, then we went down to 180, then 140 and now we're at 100," Pisturino said. "I can probably get another 25, but I don't want to get too many before the drought actually ends."

Dick Peixoto of Lakeside Organic Gardens, the largest family owned organic grower in the United States, farms 1,400 acres here.

He said thankfully most of this season's rain has come in spread out spurts, giving time for the water to percolate.

This week's heavier rainfall, however, has delayed Peixoto's planting schedule a bit. He said crops need to get in the ground now so they're ready for the springtime harvest.



DAN COYRO — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

Rancher John Pisturino walks out to some of the approaching Herefords at Rancho Santa Maria outside Watsonville where Pisturino is seeing much-needed rain over the 1,400 grazing acres.

Farming

FROM PAGE 2

"If we can't, we have less product to sell in April," he said.

Recent stormy weather also brought a little flooding to his fields, but it's nothing like during the El Nino of 1982 and 1983 when there was so much rain that the ground couldn't hold it.

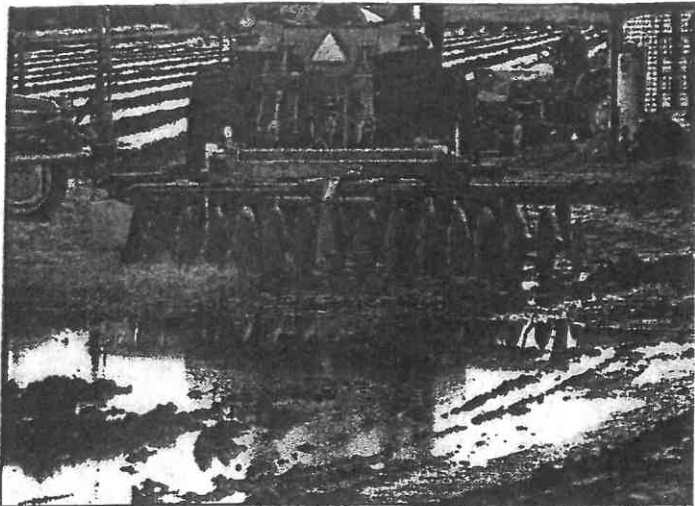
"We lost a lot of crop then, but I'm more fearful of having no El Nino than the continued drought," he said.

The past four years have been the driest on record for California, which has a lasting effect.

"We're still in a severe drought, but absolutely, we've reached a point where the rain is starting to recharge the aquifers," said Mary Bannister, head of the Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency. "It's good news, but it'll take a number of years to replace the deficit that's developed over the last 50 years."

The Pajaro Valley and nearby Soquel Valley made the California Department of Water Resources list of the 21 most critically overdrafted basins in the state this week.

First-time state groundwater regulations signed in 2014 require that basins are brought back into balance by 2040, which means the Pajaro Valley needs an average of 12,100 acre feet of water returning back into it each year, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.



PHOTOS BY SHMUEL THALER — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

When it rains, it pours, and local farmers seem to be digging out from one rainy system when the next one comes.



A field along Highway 129 outside of Watsonville after heavy rains.

An acre foot of water is 326,000 gallons — enough to irrigate a half-acre of strawberries or to supply water to two families of four for a year. An inch of rain falling on 1 acre of ground is equal to about 27,154 gallons.

PV Water has been busy building new infrastructure and promoting conservation methods to reach that

goal. Local water managers are installing a 1.5 million gallon storage tank and more pipeline to increase the amount of recycled water available to coastal ranches. They also recently drilled new wells to better understand the basin, which is stressed due to overdraft, saltwater intrusion and the unprecedented drought.