FEATURED ARTICLES

A LOVE LETTER TO OUR FARMERS: LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ............................................. 2
FINANCIAL REPORT: HOW FUNDING MEETS OUR STRATEGIC GOALS .................................................. 3
SEE THE BREADTH OF RCD WORK ............................................. 4
LIFE BETWEEN THE ROWS ............................................. 5
VALLEY FORD DAIRY DEMONSTRATES CARBON FARMING SOLUTION TO INTERNATIONAL AUDIENCE .......... 6
CIDER APPLE FARM REVIVES HEIRLOOM ORCHARD AND PLANS FOR A CHANGING FUTURE .................. 7
A LITTLE FLOW GOES A LONG WAY ..................................... 8
RCD TEAM GAINS A FORESTER ....................................... 9
ATASCADERO SUBWATERSHED COHO HABITAT ASSESSMENT PROJECT .................................................. 10
SANTA ROSA PLAIN GROUNDWATER SUSTAINABILITY AGENCY .................................................. 11
What are Gold Ridge RCD’s strategic goals to enhance the community, and how are they funded?

Last year’s budget was just over $2.7 million. Our work is funded through federal, state and local grants, a private foundation, and donations from our community. Here’s how those dollars were spent:

Our Strategic Program Objectives and Planned Actions:

CLIMATE RESILIENCY AND CARBON FARMING: We work with our partners to develop and fund programs which reduce greenhouse gases, increase carbon sequestration, improve agricultural and residential water security, and enhance wildlife habitat.

ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATION COMPLIANCE ASSISTANCE: In partnership with our community, we help landowners understand and voluntarily comply with or exceed federal, state and local regulations.

STREAMFLOW ENHANCEMENT AND WATER CONSERVATION: We work cooperatively with landowners and land managers to meet domestic and agricultural water needs, while ensuring that streams in district watersheds have sufficient flow to support aquatic and riparian ecosystems.

CLEAR WATER: We work to enhance water quality, prevent non-point source pollution, and protect aquatic ecosystems.

SCIENCE, MONITORING AND PLANNING: With many partners, we assess and document environmental conditions and trends, and use this information to guide activities and evaluate proposed management projects and strategies.

WILDLIFE HABITAT ENHANCEMENT: We collaborate with and educate partners and landowners to restore and enhance habitat for native wildlife, including riparian and wetland habitat restoration, instream improvements, and promotion of on-farm biodiversity.

AGRICULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION: We create educational experiences for our community, which inspire and encourage a connection to and an appreciation for the conservation of land and its agricultural and natural resources.

ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY: With 77 years of experience, we strive to be relevant, excellent and visible as an organization so that we can provide service to our community for decades to come.

Read our entire 2016-19 Strategic Plan for more information on our mission, vision, priorities, and major strategies and objectives planned for the 2016-19 period, online at http://goldridgercd.org/htm/StrategicPlan.htm
Gallons of water, number of trees, cubic feet of soil, miles of road, tons of greenhouse gases... If you’ve ever been curious about the many metrics of RCD work, and what work has been done in your neighborhood and beyond, you will enjoy the newly created RCD Project Tracker Tool. Launched in July 2017, the RCD Project Tracker Tool has already become an essential innovation to California RCDs. The tool is an online database designed to publicly showcase the vital conservation work of participating Resource Conservation Districts across the state in an accessible format.

In June, California RCDs had catalogued over 100 projects and over $21.8 million in investments into the database, many of them in the North Bay. And that number continues to grow. The districts aim to input all projects currently in progress by the end of the year. In the coming years, historic projects will be entered as well, providing a look at how RCDs’ priorities, partnerships and capacity have grown over time. With the Project Tracker Tool, RCDs are finding a new way to tell their story, streamline collaborative requests for project funding, and, most importantly, engage with you, our stewards of the land.

Look online to search projects by performance metric, location, type, theme, funding source, year, and more. www.RCDprojects.org

Beginning in January 2017, the Sonoma, Napa and Mendocino County RCDs created a forum for vineyards to engage on soil health called the North Coast Soil Health Hub. Nearly two years later, the hub has provided a valued network between winegrowers, RCDs and researchers to discuss, experiment and implement improved soil health practices. To date, over 100 growers have engaged with the Hub across the three counties.

John Hervey, a farmer growing Pinot Noir on ten acres in west Sebastopol, engaged the Hub to test his vineyard’s soil quality, prepare a Carbon Farm Plan and attend two educational workshops. He is passionate about the changes he can make to improve his vineyard’s soil health. He says some conventions used in the vineyard that impact soil health, like tilling every other row, have gained popularity but lost their original purpose. “If you ask around, folks may not be able to explain why they do what they do,” he says, and adds that there is room for change, especially if the alternative is better for the ecosystem and if it reduces labor and fuel costs.

On March 9th, Hervey and more than 70 of his fellow farmers and industry professionals attended a symposium hosted by the Hub at the Sonoma County Farm Bureau to hear from four panels of researchers, growers, and technical service providers. The panelists discussed the major practices known to increase the health of vineyard soils: reducing tillage, cover cropping, applying compost, and integrating hedgerows in the vineyard.

In August, winegrowers were invited out with the Hub again, this time to tour Ridge Vineyard in Healdsburg. Vineyard manager and CalCAN Farmer Advisor David Gates toured growers through the rows, talked about his choice of cover crops and how he changed operations to reduce tillage with low-impact equipment and less passes through the rows. Even in the heat of August and in hard clay, the north county vineyard showed life between the rows in the form of wild carrot, lacy phacelia, and Queen Anne’s lace. He also discussed the property’s twenty-year-old hedgerow, planted along a drainage ditch. Flowers and bright foliage in the hedge added color and forage for wildlife to the landscape: red penstemon, purple coyote mint, glossy green rushes, baccharis, ceanothus, and willow.

Stay tuned for future events like these hosted by the North Coast Soil Health Hub by visiting www.SoilHub.org

Funding provided by CDFA Specialty Crop Block Grant

Learn more about your vineyard’s soil health at SoilHub.org!
FARMING SOLUTION TO INTERNATIONAL AUDIENCE

VALLEY FORD DAIRY DEMONSTRATES CARBON FARMING SOLUTION TO INTERNATIONAL AUDIENCE

In the first day, agricultural producers, business leaders and policy makers from around the world gathered at La Crema Estate at Saralee’s Vineyard in Windsor. Attendees learned about the need to scale up climate smart agricultural practices that cut greenhouse gas emissions, capture carbon from the atmosphere, and store it in the soil. Scaling up means that farmers and ranchers need partnership, investment, research and technical assistance to achieve the climate goals that the global community has established.

In the words of the Secretary of California Department of Agriculture, Karen Ross: “These collaborations are essential for progress, and they must cut across the food chain, all the way from farms to consumers.”

Partnerships were on display for day two of the event when attendees traveled to the coast to visit Ocean Breeze Dairy in Valley Ford and Stemple Creek Ranch in Tomales, CA. Ocean Breeze Dairy and the Gary Bordessa Dairy make up the multi-generational Bordessa Family Dairy, whose business model focuses on grass-fed, certified organic milk production. Jarrid and Jackie Bordessa, owners of Ocean Breeze Dairy, have decided to take their commitment to the land another step further. They recently partnered with the Gold Ridge RCD and the Carbon Cycle Institute to write a Carbon Farm Plan, a guiding document to managing carbon resources.

Changes to the Bordessa’s operation—like applying compost, planting vegetation along the creeks, and alternative manure management practices—can remove carbon from the atmosphere where it can do harm warming the planet and build carbon stores in the soil and in vegetation. These practices also provide multiple benefits to the dairy operation as they advance soil health, improve riparian habitat, increase range production and boost soil water holding capacity.

Organic Valley, the dairy company that Ocean Breeze Dairy sells its milk to, also has their focus on climate. At the affiliate event, Organic Valley announced the company’s deepened commitment to climate smart agriculture. “As leaders in food and farming, it is our responsibility to pioneer change for good,” says Jonathan Reinbold, the company’s head of sustainability. Committed to being part of the climate solution, Organic Valley, in partnership with Annie’s Organics, has already financed the development of three Carbon Farm Plans in Sonoma and Mendocino Counties, but in 2018, this initiative will be expanded to other California farmers. From there, Organic Valley can explore how to bring Carbon Farm Planning to their other farmers across the country.

Governor Jerry Brown held an international event in San Francisco to bring attention and renew commitment to solutions to the climate crisis. The Global Climate Action Summit touched on all sectors of society that send greenhouse gas emissions into the air. The California Department of Food and Agriculture hosted a two-day affiliate event in Sonoma County to highlight the role that working lands play in reversing the emissions of harmful greenhouse gases.

“This collaborations…must cut across the food chain, all the way from farms to consumers”– CDFA Secretary Karen Ross

On August 8, members of the apple farming community gathered in Sebastopol around a vanguard in the local movement for innovative orchard management: APPLE BOTTOM FARM.

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Carbon Farm Planning and implementation funding provided by USDA’s NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program and CDFA’s Healthy Soils Initiative

Photo credit: Isabel French Photography

Read the full article online: http://goldridgercd.org/htm/AppleBottomAugust2018.htm

Funding provided by USDA’s NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program

"a healthy orchard ecosystem actually produces more complex and desirable flavors in its fruit."
A LITTLE FLOW GOES A LONG WAY

Watershed

Water Wise Signs Appear in the Watershed

A picture is worth a thousand words – or in this case, many thousands of gallons. Our new Water Wise signage acknowledges landowners who have conserved precious water resources in Salmon, Dutch Bill and Green Valley Creek watersheds, in partnership with the RCD or independently. By drawing water from shallow wells or directly from the creek, households near these streams can have a dramatic impact on the amount of surface water available for wildlife in the dry summer season. Water Wise landowners made a positive change in the watershed by developing alternative water resources for their summer-season outdoor water use, such as rain or spring water capture and storage. Other residents reduced their water use by installing more efficient irrigation or changing their landscapes to be more drought-tolerant.

Read more about the Water Reliability Program and how you can participate: http://goldridgercd.org/htm/WaterReliabilityProgram.htm

Fire, Water & Cheese Come Together Under One Roof

In the place of the Valley Ford Mercantile & Wool Mill, a local creamery is taking root. The Valley Ford Cheese & Creamery Company will be opening a cheese shop on Hwy 1 in the heart of Valley Ford this fall 2018. Come winter, the roof of the creamery will collect and send up to 46,000 gallons of rainwater to a steel tank set behind the shop. Water collected in this system is used for irrigating the shop’s farm garden and will serve as the dedicated water supply for the building’s new sprinkler system. We have also partnered with the Valley Ford Volunteer Fire Department (located across the street) by adding a tank fitting available for their crew if water is needed for fire protection.

Funding provided by CA Department of Water Resources

RCD TEAM GAINS A FORESTER

The Sonoma and Gold Ridge RCDs recently jointly hired a forester to serve the entire county of Sonoma. The following article is from Sonoma RCD’s June newsletter.

The RCD is excited to welcome Jason Wells, a Registered Professional Forester (RPF), to our staff team. Since the wildfires of October 2017, it has become increasingly apparent that the landowners and communities of Sonoma County need more resources to assist with forest and fuel load management. The Sonoma and Gold Ridge RCDs teamed up to garner funding from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, through the National Association of Conservation Districts, to launch a new position focused on providing forestry technical assistance.

Jason Wells, a California Registered Professional Forester (RPF), comes to us with six years of experience in private industry throughout Humboldt and Mendocino Counties. His experience includes writing CEQA equivalent Timber Harvest Plan documents, integrating knowledge of forest operations with environmental impact mitigations, silviculture (applied forest ecology), forest health and protection, economics of forest management, and road design and layout. Jason has also been certified by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CALFIRE) to conduct archaeological surveys for plans in which CALFIRE is the lead agency. Born and raised in Petaluma, he graduated from Humboldt State University with a B.S. in Forestry with an emphasis in Forest Conservation.

At the RCD, Jason will provide technical and planning assistance to landowners, help build a forestry program capable of addressing vegetation and fuels management concerns throughout the county, as well as address post-fire recovery efforts. If you are an owner of forestland in Sonoma County with questions about forest management, Jason wants to hear from you! He can provide as-needed technical advice, forest management planning, and will also be looking to identify potential forest management and fuel load reduction projects for future grant funding.

Jason can be reached at 707-569-1448 x107, or jwells@sonomarcd.org.

Special Notice: We are looking to support neighborhoods in designing Community Wildfire Prevention Plans. These plans effectively address local forest and range conditions, values-at-risk, and priorities for action. Neighborhood groups with a collective size greater than 30 acres or located in high-risk areas are strongly encouraged to contact Gold Ridge RCD to begin the planning process. Learn more about a CWPP: http://www.cafiresafe.org/CWPP/
HABITAT ASSESSMENT PROJECT

Lying just west of Sebastopol is the Atascadero-Green Valley Creek watershed. This important watershed starts in the coastal hills, flows through Graton and Forestville, and continues north to empty into the Russian River. It has been identified as critical and restorable habitat for the endangered Central California coast coho salmon, and it regularly supports the Russian’s most robust wild coho population.

However, for reasons that have never been identified, the Atascadero Creek subwatershed, which is the system’s largest subwatershed, hasn’t shown evidence of coho since the California Department of Fish and Wildlife started monitoring the creek in the 1960s. The lack of coho is puzzling since the upper tributaries—particularly Redwood and Jonive Creeks—appear to have high-quality salmon rearing reaches, which are known to contain steelhead trout. Without coho present, the area hasn’t been a high priority for restoration efforts. The lack of attention to this critical subwatershed has also been in part a problem of inaccessibility, due both to the highly parcelized ownership of the Atascadero’s upper stream reaches and to the access challenges imposed by the braided wetland complex comprising its lower reach (known as the Atascadero marsh, located in the vicinity of Graton).

However, with the Russian River’s coho recovery program releasing coho juveniles into the Atascadero’s upper tributaries as of last fall, a comprehensive planning effort to support their survival has never been more pressing.

In September 2018, the Gold Ridge RCD received a grant from the Department of Fish and Wildlife’s Proposition 1 program to work with the Atascadero watershed community to perform an assessment of the Atascadero subwatershed, to identify potential limiting factors to coho passage and survival, and to identify and prioritize site-specific projects to address them. In addition, the assessment includes a stormswater analysis, as high winter stormflow has been identified as a primary limiting factor to coho in lower Green Valley, with the Atascadero subwatershed contributing significantly. Additionally, the RCD’s work in Atascadero will coincide with and support Sonoma Water’s work reshaping the mainstem of the Green Valley Creek to alleviate winter flooding across Green Valley Road.

The Atascadero subwatershed is sizeable; it comprises 60% of Green Valley’s blue-line streams and contains 21 stream-miles. The assessment work will require extensive collaboration from over 180 private landowners throughout the stream network. Over the next several months, Gold Ridge RCD staff will be contacting Atascadero Creek landowners to request limited access for the on-the-ground stream habitat assessments and identification of potential fish passage barriers, as well as learn from the Atascadero Creek community what resource issues they have that we may be able to help address.

FUNDING PROVIDED BY CA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE’S PROPOSITION 1 PROGRAM, WITH MATCHING FUNDS FROM SONOMA WATER COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT.
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BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETINGS

Third Thursday of every month
3:30-5:30PM (unless otherwise posted)
Gold Ridge RCD Office
2776 Sullivan Road,
Sebastopol, CA 95472
Meetings are open to the public

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