

# County's bounty celebrated

Farmers reach out to restaurateurs, caterers, grocers

By Sharon Stello  
ENTERPRISE STAFF WRITER

Michael Bosworth's longtime farming family used to sell its rice to brokers, never knowing where it ended up.

Then, after earning his master's degree in agricultural business at UC Davis, Bosworth started marketing the family's rice to restaurants and stores in the region.

The Coffee House, run by the Associated Students of UCD, was the first local business to start buying the rice. Then, Bosworth met managers of UCD's Dining Services and by fall 2006, his family was supplying a large portion of the rice served in the dining halls on campus.

"It's great to know that local people are eating your rice," Bosworth said.

Rue and Forsman Ranch — which grows about 200 acres of organic rice each year in Marysville — has since added The Kitchen and Kru restaurants in Sacramento and Farmers Kitchen in Davis to its list of buyers. And Nugget Market uses the rice in its deli salads.

Bosworth was one of many farmers sharing his story and produce samples at A Taste of Yolo II, an event Monday night in UCD's Terzero Dining Hall.

"It's an amazing event," said Bosworth, a fifth-generation California farmer. "Anything we can do



to connect our consumers with the farms they consume from."

The event was hosted by the Yolo County Agricultural Marketing Initiative and University Dining Services. The goal was to showcase the bounty of local farms and vintners to local restaurant owners, chefs, caterers and grocery store buyers who might be interested in buying from them.

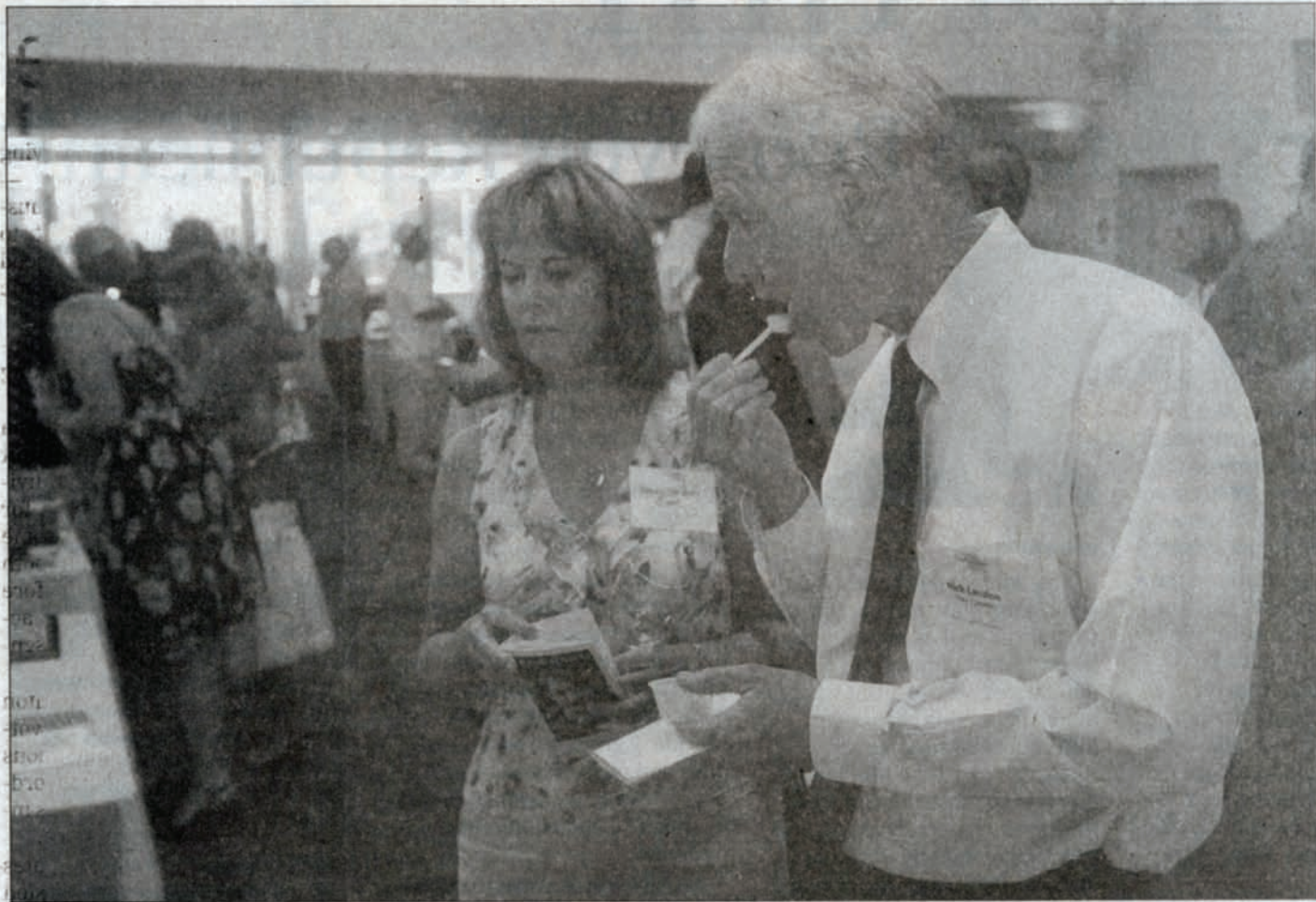
Product sampling in a farmers' market format was followed by a



Above, Jimm Mills, produce distributor for Del Rio Botanical, chats with specialty grocer Darrell Corti and del Rio grower Suzanne Ashworth Monday at A Taste of Yolo II at UC Davis. At left, Lane Giguere pours Crew Wine.

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Yolo County Agricultural Commissioner Rick Landon and his wife Becky taste fruit from Durst Organic Growers Inc. at A Taste of Yolo II on Tuesday evening at UC Davis' Tercero Dining Hall. Landon called Yolo County's agriculture "an economic powerhouse."

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formal three-course dinner featuring foods and wines produced on Yolo County's 550,000 acres of rich farmland. The gourmet meal for about 200 people began with an heirloom tomato bisque with tarragon and smoke eggplant tarator, followed by braised pork donated by Bledsoe Pork of Dunnigan and a dessert of sweet corn fritters served over cold sour-cream rue and rice pudding, topped with peach compote.

The event highlighted local farms large and small — like Free Spirit Farm, a one-acre operation at the Center for Land-Based Learning. Farmer Toby Hastings grows a variety of produce including tomatoes, peppers, melons, eggplants, carrots, basil and more. His business is based mostly on community-supported agriculture, which allows people to subscribe to a weekly box of fresh produce.

Hastings grew up in Davis and majored in geology at UC Santa Cruz before finding his true passion in farming. He sells some produce to Farmers Kitchen in Davis, as well

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**Tony Gruska**  
co-owner of Monticello  
Bistro in Winters

as Serpentine and Slow Club in San Francisco, but said he was excited to make connections with owners of several other restaurants and school district representatives at the Taste of Yolo event.

Tony and Rhonda Gruska, owners of Monticello Bistro in Winters, already knew most of the growers and vintners at the event but appreciated the opportunity to celebrate local food.

"It's kind of our philosophical value," Tony Gruska said. "We really enjoy working with our farmers — we've built relationships with these people."

Buying produce grown nearby, he said, not only supports the local economy, but

provides food with better flavor. For example, he buys tomatoes that were picked only a few hours before at the peak of ripeness and taste.

"He'll go pick up food at the farmers' market and that's what we're serving that night. It's that fresh," Rhonda Gruska added.

Rick Landon, Yolo County agricultural commissioner, told the crowd that the county's growers are "pioneers in making the local food distribution system work."

And Yolo County is "an economic powerhouse" in agriculture, reaching an all-time high of \$454 million in ag production in 2007, a 22 percent increase over 2006.

Landon noted that Yolo County farmers led the way in organic production and direct marketing. The county benefits from a great combination of innovative farmers and some of the best soil, he said.

Events like A Taste of Yolo are important, he said, because when people start eating food grown in their local watershed, they become more interested in preserving ag land.

Rachael Levine, executive chef for Nugget Markets, said

she began cooking about 15 years ago because she needed a job to get through college. She fell in love with the work, which led her to R.H. Phillips Winery in Esparto before coming to Nugget.

Again and again, she's witnessed the grape growing cycle from bud break to the harvest and crush. She started growing some of her own food at R.H. Phillips and learned the joy and pleasure of living off the land — "a canvas for all of us to work with."

The farmers make the paint, a variety of produce in an amazing spectrum of colors. The restaurateurs and consumers, she said, are like artists turning this local bounty into masterpieces every day.

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