

Agricultural Land Use Committee
Marin Conservation League
Friday, July 25, 2014 – 9:00 am
Board Room, Marin County Farm Bureau
Point Reyes Station

AGENDA

1. Review and approval of Minutes of Meeting of April 25, 2014
2. Approval of Agenda.
3. Background on wooly distaff thistle and purple star thistle biology and management: Guy Kyser, Weed Specialist University California Davis Plant Sciences Department
4. Presentation of agricultural community composition and priorities – David Lewis, Advisor, University of California Cooperative Extension.
5. Update on MCL Board Actions since April 25 meeting.
 - Measure B on June ballot.
 - Scoping comments on NPS Ranch Management Plan.
 - Recommendation on solar array installation on the Cooley Ranch
 - Program(s) on Carbon Farming Project
6. Housekeeping:
 - a. Suggestions for topics for future quarterly meetings.
 - b. Planning Subcommittee: to meet from 11 – 12 on first Wednesday.
7. Announcements:
8. Adjourn.

Next general meeting: October 24.

MCL Ag Land Use Committee
Inaugural Meeting
Friday, April 25, 2014, Marin County Farm Bureau

Judy Teichman and Sally Gale co-chaired the meeting, held 9 to 11:10 AM at the Marin County Farm Bureau Board Room in Pt. Reyes Station. Also present: Gordon Bennett (Save our Seashore), Priscilla Bull (MCL), Nona Dennis (MCL), Debbie Friedman (Moms Advocating Sustainability), Dominic Grossi, Ralph Grossi, Melanie Gunn (PRNS), Jana Haehl (MCL), Burr Heneman, Bob Johnston (MCL), Lynnette Kahn (Alliance for Sustainable Local Agriculture), David Lewis (UC Extension), Stefan Parnay (County Agricultural Commissioner's office), Christopher Peak (*Pt Reyes Light*), Pamela Reaves (MCL), Jo Ann Stewart (Alliance for Sustainable Local Agriculture), Susan Stompe (MCL), John Taylor, Ann Thomas (MCL), Jamison Watts (MALT), Jeffrey Westman (Marin Organic), John Wick (Nicasio Native Grass Ranc), Donna Yamagata (Alliance for Sustainable Local Agriculture).

This was the inaugural meeting of a new MCL committee devoted to agricultural/environmental issues. Established by the MCL Board at the March 18, 2014 meeting, it succeeds a “working group” focused on the impact of the growing herd of elk in the Point Reyes National Seashore pastoral zone and Park Service planning for new use permits for pastoral zone ranches. It resurrects in part a West Marin Committee that met in Point Reyes in the past. The agenda called for discussing how the committee can “best support environmentally sound agriculture,” learning meeting preferences, providing an update on issues addressed by other MCL issues committees and Committee action as appropriate.

Following introductions, attendees brainstormed potential items of interest, etc. These included the following:

Agricultural Concerns/Issues

- Proposed Invasive Weed Management Plan to address noxious and invasive weeds infesting Marin ag lands. Organic farming/ranching has saved ag in Marin, one reason being the seasonal pastures that are available, but this business model is threatened by invasives (mostly star thistle) taking over productive pasture. Once the invasive weeds take over a pasture it is not usable for organic agriculture and organic practitioners do not have resources with which to remedy the spread of the invasives.
- Infrastructure and services needed to support healthy ag community, e.g. slaughter house, amount of acreage in ag, etc.; note that needs can vary from ranch to ranch
- The public’s failure to respect the land. The example was erosion caused by pedestrian and bicycle misuse of already rutted trails and roads
- National Park Service management, development of 20-year leases and the scoping process now underway.
- There is a need for diversification to support viability of agriculture in Marin. Note 76% of county’s ag value is animal-based. Explore niche projects such as bed and breakfasts. There is a need to define “diversification” for this purpose.
- Hobby farming and agricultural zoning, to discourage it, e.g. ag land acreage minimums and ag-exclusive zoning to ensure lands remain in agriculture.
- Educate the public on the variety of factors taken into account in determining “best management practices” for any particular agricultural activity and how they may be impacted

by one-size-fits-all regulations. Using 2010 Ag Summit as a base, are BMPs being used by ranchers and farmers and what is improvement trajectory?

- Need for permitting process flexibility. [Ed. Note: Agricultural operations are subject to variety of regulatory and permit processes administered by multiple agencies, ranging from permitted land uses and building code requirements, to public health and safety standards, to coastal commission review of ranch road construction. The Pine Gulch Creek restoration project is an example of a voluntary environmental improvement undertaken by three produce growers that is still not complete after 12 years because of multiple agency permitting requirements.] The example cited at this meeting of a problem created by building standards was a maximum height of 12' for a barn when a barn of that height that would serve no function.
- Relationship between/coordination with Marin and Sonoma ag communities, and agencies including MMWD, NMWD

Habitat/Environment

- Examine the effects on agriculture of surface and other water regulations. Nationally, farmers and ranchers need to prepare for stronger regs controlling sediment/erosion/nitrogen. BMPs could help agricultural practitioners to get ahead of the curve on this problem.
- Prepare for climate change impacts on agricultural areas, including unpredictable rainfall, temperature swings, species and vegetative migration and changes, acidifying ocean and bay waters. Get ready to address and cope with changes that could unfold in coming decades.
- County Stream Conservation Area ordinance and work program, and watershed planning in general in agricultural areas. Several comments on this topic included suggestions that it would be helpful to do the following: 1) calculate labor and costs related to protective measures such as waterway fencing, water quality maintenance, erosion control; 2) commodify (identify a market value for) the intrinsic benefits of stream/riparian conservation/protection, including sediment reduction, increases in bird and wildlife populations, plant diversity, and other ecosystem services from which the public at large benefits; 3) find ways to make it easier to protect land and waterways; 4) Itemize the environmental accomplishments of the West Marin agricultural community, e.g. the number of miles of creek that have been restored.
- Solar ordinance - is there or is there not a need?
- Encourage and support relationship with Marin Resource Conservation District

Outreach/Education

- Engaging and educating larger public about agriculture; e.g. MALT and Marin Organic do good work but this needs to be expanded. Great need for public outreach to Marin and greater Bay Area communities. Currently farm tours focus on youth programs but MCL could reach out to other groups. It was suggested that MCL focus its tours on specific topics such as sediment or nutrient control, coho salmon and structures in streams, humane treatment of ranch animals, animal housing, how milk is produced, etc.
- Education about meanings of organic, environmental and “local” ag. Note “local” doesn’t always mean better; depending on how stock is raised or land farmed imported products can be environmentally preferable
- Work with groups, such as: EAC, Farm Bureau, MALT, MCSTOPPP, Marin Audubon, MRCD, Ag Extension, Western Watershed Working Group, Marin County Ag Commissioner’s Office, seashore ranches. Engage with Marin Carbon Project
- There is a need to facilitate education about ag, in particular, to decision-makers

Other

- MALT and use of Measure A funds
- Benefits of working landscape.
- Social justice and food justice, sufficient worker wages and living quarters, access to food, also benefits provided workers that augment total remuneration
- Differing values and priorities (between urban and ag areas?)
- Coastal concerns
- Balancing farming with other uses, look for common ground, perspectives
- MCL concern is with environmental advocacy and education
- Don't discuss mariculture

Reports and Other Business

Judy T and Nona Dennis reported briefly on an earlier joint meeting of MCL's Parks and Open Space and Land Use Committees at which NPS personnel updated committee members, representatives of elected state and local officials ,and some Seashore ranchers on NPS efforts to alleviate the problem the elk in the pastoral zone are for several dairies and ranches and an anticipated ranch management permitting and planning process, for which scoping was announced this past Monday

There was also a report that MCL land Use had recommended endorsement of Measure B on the June ballot. It was subsequently agreed, by consensus, that the Agricultural Land Use Committee would also recommend support for this measure.

Melanie Gunn announced two scoping meetings for the Point Reyes National Seashore ranch planning process: Tuesday, May 6 in Point Reyes, and Wednesday, May 7 at the Bay Model in Sausalito. She said there would also be workshops on the planning during the summer and fall.

Judy broached the idea of holding a "community conversation" type meeting at which ranchers, farm and ranch advisors and representatives of the Seashore could be available to answer questions pertinent to the development of a range management plan for the pastoral zone . She suggested that this would enable participants to offer informed comments during scoping for the Seashore's ranch management plan. With the exception of two "no" votes, the proposal met with general approval .Judy is to follow up on this proposal.

For future meetings of this committee, participants indicated a preference for quarterly meetings held in West Marin on Friday mornings with more advance notice. As there is a fairly large group of likely participants, and of issues, there was also agreement that subcommittees would be formed to work on the issues of concern between meetings of the full Committee. Co-chairs Sally and Judy and Nona will announce dates for future meetings.

A recording of the meeting, preceded by a minute and 20 seconds of participants assembling, is available at: www.dropbox.com/s/puw7yam4o2mfhqv/Agricultural%20Land%20Use%204%3A25%3A2014.MP3

Notes: A Thomas