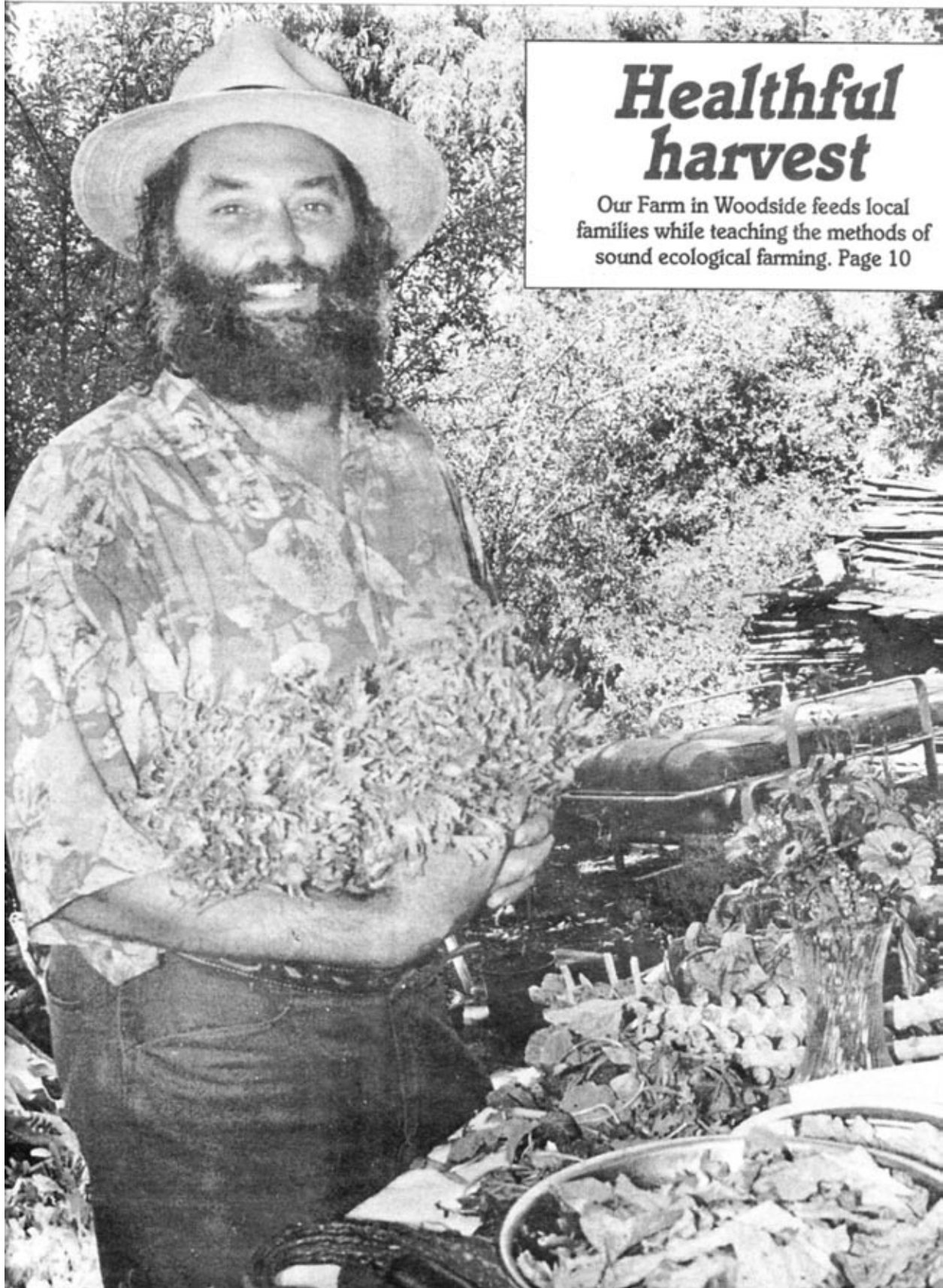


Country Almanac

Vol. XXX, No. 40 October 2, 1996

For 30 years the independent hometown paper for Woodside, Portola Valley and Atherton

Phone: 854-2626 50c



Healthful harvest

Our Farm in Woodside feeds local families while teaching the methods of sound ecological farming. Page 10

Healthful harvest



Photos by Carol Lee

The De Zuttis of Redwood City were recent participants in a tour of Our Farm. Carol De Zutti, a kindergarten teacher at St. Joseph's School, holds son Vincent, and Mark holds daughter Clare.

Our Farm feeds local families while teaching methods of sound ecological farming

By RENEE DEAL

To most people, broccoli is merely a means to stave off hunger pangs while getting a major injection of vitamins and nutrients.

To organic farmer Dave Blume, that's only the beginning: broccoli is also a bird-attractor, a means to control pests, and an important educational tool.

And, it is a popular crop cultivated on the two-acre "Our Farm" — an agricultural project in Woodside headed by Mr. Blume.

Our Farm is a community-supported farming operation thriving at 834 West California Way, near Jefferson Avenue. It supports about 70 local families, who pay about \$24 weekly to receive 5 to 7 pounds of fresh — really fresh — produce every

Thursday.

Known as a "Community Supported Agriculture" project, Our Farm is one of about 500 such operations nationwide. The two full-time farmers and the support staff embrace agricultural methods variously known as organic, sustainable and ecologically based, using no pesticides, herbicides or poisons.

Can farming be successful with those restrictions? If you ask Mr. Blume, be prepared for an earful.

You might ask him while on a farm tour, scheduled about twice monthly through the prime growing season, during which you can see for yourself rows of thriving edible crops grown on a terraced hillside or on flat parcels of manure- and compost-enriched soil.

Or, if you're in the neighborhood any day but Sunday — the farmers' day of rest — you might drop by and look for Mr. Blume. You might find him tending the sunflowers, which are grown to produce seeds that satisfy the ground squirrels so



Dave Blume, one of two full-time farmers at Our Farm, is the master tour guide, brimming with information about sustainable farming.

they won't mutilate the plump, luscious tomatoes on the vines. Or, he might be installing nesting boxes for owls, creatures who solve — naturally — the seemingly unsolvable problem of gophers. No poison needed.

What you'll find on a visit to the farm is a carefully planned growing operation, in which the farmers consider the "big picture" when choosing crops and the locations they are to be planted. Crops include standard fare such as corn, salad greens, tomatoes, squash, peppers, onions, potatoes and herbs, as well as unusual foods that add an ingredient of adventure to cooking dinner.

"Almost everything on the farm is planted for two or three reasons," says Mr. Blume — known as Farmer Dave to the many children who visit the farm.

For example, he says, broccoli plants are put into the ground first as a regular food crop. When the plants are through producing food, they flower, attracting insects that are beneficial to other plants

INFORMATION: Those interested in information about Our Farm may call 365-2992. A tour of the farm is set for 10 a.m. Saturday, Oct. 19.



At left, participants in a recent tour inspected a terraced hillside planted with a variety of edible crops. At right, a bountiful — and healthful — harvest. Lower left, visitors check out plants in the greenhouse.



strategically grown near the broccoli. Next, the plants go to seed, which attracts birds; the birds eat bugs that damage nearby crops.

Flowers also are planted to attract "good" insects that control crop-destroying bugs. And scattered here and there throughout the growing area are small rock piles to attract lizards and toads — which eat harmful insects — and a few gopher-eating snakes. In the greenhouse, toad ponds have been created for insect control as well.

A matter of taste

While the families who take home their boxes of produce every week can feel good about eating food free of pesticides and grown in an ecologically sound way, their satisfaction goes much farther. "You just can't get produce any fresher," says Mr. Blume, noting that produce found in markets has been picked seven to 10 days before.

Not only have the fruits and vegetables lost a significant amount of nutrients in that amount of time, they have lost much of their flavor as well, Mr. Blume says.

Farmers pick the produce that is collected by Our Farm member families on Thursdays either early that morning or the night before, he says. And, he adds, "we wait until things are completely ripe before picking."

If Our Farm uses methods of grow-

ing typically used by farmers of old, the parallel to those earlier farms doesn't stop there. Our Farm is a family farm in many ways, with some members and their children voluntarily helping to pick foods such as strawberries and beans, Mr. Blume says. Sometimes, he adds, adult members will show up on the farm to help with whatever needs to be done that day, saying they needed to break free of their cubicles and research offices for a time.

Members also share recipes, and social events such as a spring "hootenanny" and a fall hoedown harvest party give families a chance to get acquainted.

The farm serves as an outdoor classroom for many members' children

'Almost everything on the farm is planted for two or three reasons.'

— Dave Blume

"who think milk comes from the store," Mr. Blume says. "Parents like to bring their kids to the farm, and the kids get really involved with knowing where (their food) comes from. And kids eat things they might not (other-

wise) eat because they've seen it growing."

Mr. Blume says students from the Foundry School — a San Jose school for "at risk" kids — are brought out to the farm to learn about farming and to take part in the process. "We've seen amazing things with some of these kids after several times here," he says. The work teaches the value of teamwork, and gives the teenagers the sense of accomplishment that springs from farming together, he explains.

Our Farm is a teaching farm in another way. There are two apprentices from other countries, and other countries are trying to arrange to send apprentices as well, Mr. Blume says. After the apprenticeships are over, the participants go back to their countries to teach the methods they learned from Mr. Blume and farmer Reynie Lave. Mr. Blume majored in ecological biology and biosystematics at San Francisco State University; Mr. Lave is a graduate of the agroecology program at the University of California at Santa Cruz.

Located on two leased acres in Woodside, Our Farm cultivates only one acre for food. The farm recently signed a lease for more acreage, a field on Page Mill Road, which will allow it to take an additional 50 families as members.



Clare De Zutti finds something of particular interest among the tomatoes.

Tools, housing needed

Our Farm is seeking donations of shovels, rakes, digging forks and wheelbarrows to use for its youth programs, which include work with at-risk students from Foundry School.

It is also seeking a host family for a young woman who will serve a six-month apprenticeship with Our Farm. "Whoever gives us a room (for the apprentice) will get to eat very well," farmer Dave Blume guarantees.