

Marin Independent Journal (<http://www.marinij.com>)

USF buys Star Route Farms in Bolinas to sustain organic farm, education

USF buys pioneer organic grower in Bolinas

By Adrian Rodriguez, Marin Independent Journal

Tuesday, August 8, 2017



Bolinas' Star Route Farms, the oldest continuously certified organic grower in California, has been sold for \$10.4 million to the University of San Francisco, which plans to use the property for research, field learning and community education.

“Our first and foremost commitment is to have this operating as an organic farm,” said Donald Heller, provost and vice president of academic affairs at USF. “We are very respectful to the fact that it is the oldest continuously operating organic farm in the state and we don’t want to do anything to jeopardize that. Everything else would become secondary to that.”

Warren Weber, who started the farm operation in 1974, declined a request for comment but issued a statement that he and his wife, Amy, “are very pleased and honored that the University of San Francisco will continue the Star Route Farms legacy.

“We hope young people, entry-level farmers and farmers around the world who struggle with conventional agriculture will learn from the passion and expertise that USF offers this enterprise.”

The university’s acquisition includes the Star Route Farms business, the 100-acre West Marin property and equipment used there. Farming activities will continue uninterrupted with the current employees. Heller said beginning this fall, university faculty will consider what types of activities educators would like to have take place at the farm.

He said that could include programs for students of the hospitality and tourism program to learn how farms serve restaurants, or for urban agriculture students to see a large-scale organic farm in action and learn how to apply that to urban environments. The university is also considering opportunities in cross-disciplinary research, field learning, community education and nutrition. Part of the farm is situated along the Bolinas Lagoon, lending itself to programs focused on biodiversity, sea-level rise and more, Heller said.

Academic activities will likely not take place on the farm until the 2018-19 school year, Heller said.

Star Route Farms has been a supplier of organic produce to top Bay Area chefs and restaurants and available to consumers at local farmers’ markets.

Weber, a leader in the organic agriculture movement, was on the original board of directors governing Marin Organic, a nonprofit growers association that ended in 2015.

A landmark moment for the West Marin organic movement came when Prince Charles and his bride Camilla, the Duchess of Cornwall, came to tour farms to see firsthand the pioneering organic farming area.

“That was a big hit in 2005 — the highlight of what we were doing,” Weber told the Independent Journal in 2015.

USF is a Jesuit Catholic school founded in 1855, San Francisco’s first and oldest university. The university enrolls nearly 11,000 students across five colleges and schools. Its Jesuit Catholic mission “helps ignite a student’s passion for creating a more just and humane world, while encouraging the pursuit of academic excellence,” according to a press release.

“The excitement connected with this purchase is matched only by the multitude of opportunities we envision for students, faculty, and the local community in the years to come,” said university president, the Rev. Paul J. Fitzgerald, in a statement. “We are grateful to Star Route Farms founder Warren Weber and his wife Amy for entrusting this resource to the university and enabling us to enhance USF’s commitment to environmental and social justice.”

URL: <http://www.marinij.com/general-news/20170808/usf-buys-star-route-farms-in-bolinas-to-sustain-organic-farm-education>

© 2017 Marin Independent Journal (<http://www.marinij.com>)