

Farm fresh in Woodside

*Subscribers are able to taste the
seasons in produce from Our Farm*

By KATE DALY

It's easy to miss. What was once a private home in Woodside, with horses grazing in the pasture, is now a Community Supported Agriculture project called Our Farm.

Located at the corner of West California Way and Jefferson Avenue, it's where dozens of subscribers go every week to pick up "ecologically grown" produce.

(Community Supported Agriculture is a collaboration between consumers and farmers, where produce is raised for a limited number of sharers at a fixed price. There are more than 500 such projects in the United States.)

Our Farm is a two-acre hill terraced into many levels and planted with crops you may never have heard of; kohlrabi, for instance. Greenhouses also dot the property.

For more than a year now, David Blume, an ecological biology and biosystematics major at San Francisco State University, and Reynie Lave, a graduate of the agro-ecology program at UC Santa Cruz, have leased the hill and gardened at 834 West California. They also have another plot in Los Altos Hills, and are looking to add on more acreage in Woodside.

Subscribers to Our Farm receive

as many as 10 kinds of produce each week, enough to feed a hungry family of three.

Shares in Our Farm cost \$925 for the combined spring, summer and fall growing seasons. It's also possible to buy single-season shares, and, sometimes, to work off the cost.

Dozens of kinds of fruit, vegetables and herbs are available at different times of the year. This past winter, a mix included mizuna, mibuna and various mustard greens. All were planted in one patch, harvested in the morning, field-washed, bagged and ready to eat that afternoon.

Tomatoes, cucumbers and squash are picked the night before the Thursday pickup. As Mr. Blume explains, "We're aiming for the highest sugar content for optimum flavor."

Mr. Blume, bearded and comfortable in jeans and T-shirt, says his grandfather and parents farmed in Palo Alto and San Francisco, respectively.

He has farmed in Mexico and headed up Hidden Villa's gardens in Los Altos Hills, but this is his first project on his own.

Margaret Koster, who lives on the property and helps with the business, talks about the wide variety of produce on the farm, and of

how customers have brought in seeds from Egypt and India to be planted. Some have purchased seeds from Chinatown for the farm.

Our Farm practices "permaculture," whose goal is "to grow functional plants to provide sustainable food. . . . It's a system of design with ecological components," says Mr. Blume.

For example, he puts out piles of stones and brush near water to entice lizards to come and eat all the insects that bother crops. For the same reason, the farmers created toad ponds, because "one toad will eat 160 bugs a night." The toads also eat snails and slugs.

The farmers have dug swales into the hillside, making mini-reservoirs to water crops. They also collect Starbucks's used coffee grounds and spread them on the soil as a natural insect repellent. Flowers are planted in the garden, attracting beneficial insects such as ladybugs,

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Photo by Kate Daly

David Blume checks the lettuce at Our Farm in Woodside, where people can buy shares of the produce on a seasonal basis.

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which eat aphids.

Sharers are encouraged to bring back fruit and vegetable trimmings to add to the compost pile for fertilizer. Our Farm also contracts for horse manure to be hauled onto the site.

People pick up their shares of produce at the farm, but there are drop-off points in San Francisco and Berkeley as well.

"We're trying to increase the number of locals . . . because it gives you more of a connection with your ecosystem and bio-region," Mr. Blume says.

"I think farming has a quieting effect on a community," he adds.

Lynn Green, both neighbor and customer, agrees. "It's a great thing they're doing, and it would be great if more of us were doing it, and supporting the community and environment that way."

Our Farm also sponsors social events for its subscribers, such as the spring hootenanny, summer corn party, and autumn hoedown.

Our Farm welcomes group visits, and is offering a tour on Saturday, April 20, at 10 a.m. in honor of Earth Day.

This summer Our Farm is participating in a multinational exchange program for sustainable agriculture, and will be taking on two apprentices. Mr. Blume is looking for host families in the area.

For more information call 365-2993.