

California

FARMER

Suspects emerge in CCD mystery see Page 16

E.&J. Gallo and NFL tackle hunger see Page 20

Land subsidence rates double see Page 32

Land tutor

By **ROBYN ROMINGER**

ONE California farmer's determination to teach today's youths the value of producing sustainable food has earned him a prestigious conservation award.

Craig McNamara, an organic walnut grower from Winters, was recently named California winner of the 2007 Leopold Conservation Award due to his efforts to educate youths and his own sustainable farming practices.

McNamara, owner of the 450-acre Sierra Orchards in Solano County, received a \$10,000 cash prize in Carson City, Nev., and vowed to invest it in the Center for Land-Based Learning, a nonprofit he and his wife, Julie, started in 1993.

Eye on the future

"If we aren't successful in helping this next generation become knowledgeable decision makers about agriculture, I don't think we're going to be able to continue farming in America," McNamara says. "The pressures of urbanization, regulation and consolidation will prevent farming in California if we don't act now."

McNamara defies the stereotype of the farmer who

Key Points

- Craig McNamara receives Leopold Conservation Award.
- McNamara is committed to teaching about sustainable ag.
- His parents instilled in him a sense of giving back.

inherits the land to continue the family farming tradition. He comes from a prominent political family. His father is Robert McNamara, former U.S. secretary of defense. In 1966, his mother, Margaret, founded what has become the nation's largest children's literacy program, Reading Is Fundamental.

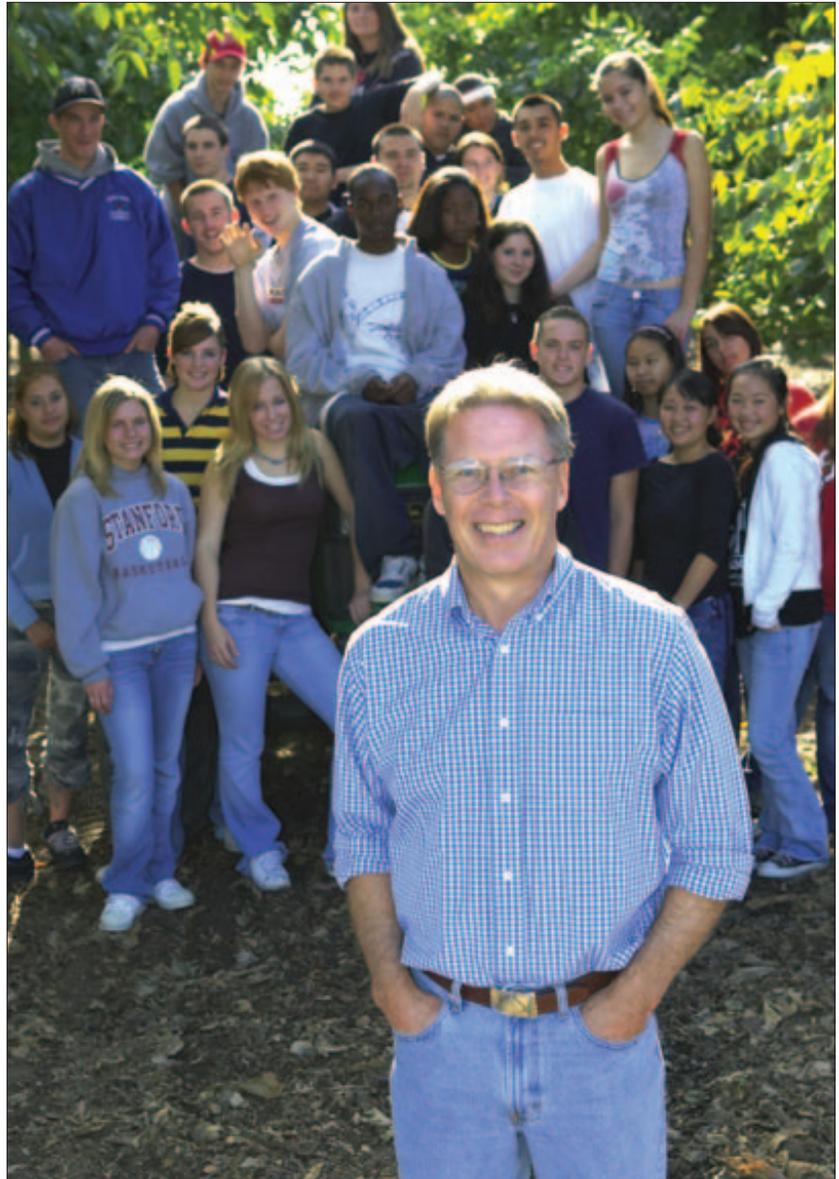
"She also started the first Book Mobile program," McNamara proudly explains.

While he had what some consider a privileged upbringing, he credits his parents with instilling a sense of giving back.

Giving back

"I thought my best opportunity would be to gain a new perspective on this country by traveling to Latin America after high school," McNamara recalls. "While in Chile, living on Easter Island, I started a small dairy cooperative, having never milked a cow. Why not develop a dairy co-op for fresh milk?"

Rominger is a Winters writer.



HANDS-ON LEARNING: Craig McNamara is flanked by students at the Center for Land-Based Learning, which he and his wife established in 1993. He devotes 40 acres of his property to the center, and about 2,000 students participate each year. Read more about the center on Page 4.

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NATURAL FERTILIZER: Craig McNamara grows fava beans as a cover crop to fertilize the walnut trees at his Sierra Orchards.

News Net Briefs

Farm bill extended until March

Lawmakers in the Senate and House agreed to extend the 2002 Farm Bill until March to make sure there is no gap in funding as Congress works to produce a 2007 bill. House Agriculture Committee Chairman Collin Peterson, D-Minn., says he relented after senators convinced him it was for the best.

Mexico opens border to California spinach

Mexico will allow imports of California spinach but requires the spinach be from California Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement companies. Canada issued similar requirements earlier this year. In addition, the California LGMA has been used as a model for the new Arizona Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement.

Researchers breed bees to defend against varroa mites

New Zealand researchers have bred bees that are not only resistant to varroa mites, but also fight back by making the mite larvae sterile. "It requires careful artificial insemination of queen bees in the lab," says Dr. Mark Goodwin. "We've bred bees whose hives render up to 80% of varroa sterile."

Teaching nature

By **ROBYN ROMINGER**

AFTER developing a love for agriculture and farm people in Chile, Craig McNamara, the former city dweller, knew he had much to learn.

"I quickly realized that if I wanted to proceed in a career in agriculture, I needed an ag degree," he explains. "I applied to ag schools across the United States and was very excited to come to UC Davis. That was in 1973."

At the University of California Davis, Craig met his wife, Julie, a New York native who was pursuing a master's degree in entomology.

After graduating, Craig had a two-year apprenticeship with Dixon-area farmer Ton Lum. Eventually the two men established a retail produce store along Interstate 80. "That experience made me realize I wanted to grow one crop that is less perishable and have one harvest," Craig notes, and he has been growing walnuts ever since.

The McNamaras moved to the Winters area in 1978. Today they have three children: 23-year-old Graham, 20-year-old Sean and 16-year-old Emily.

Craig uses a variety of environmentally friendly practices on his farm to improve the health of the land and watershed, such as planting cover crops to fertilize the walnut trees and installing sediment traps to reduce soil erosion.

The McNamaras devote 40 acres of their property to the Center for Land-Based Learning. Its mission is to provide youths with hands-on learning experiences so they understand the critical interplay of agriculture, nature



ORGANIC ORCHARD: McNamara owns 450 acres of walnuts in Solano County.



ALWAYS EDUCATING: This is the student plant demonstration area for the Center for Land-Based Learning, headquartered at the Farm on Putah Creek.

Key Points

- Craig McNamara plants cover crops to fertilize his walnut trees.
- His Center for Land-Based Learning offers an ag leadership program for students.
- Program participants experienced a day in the life of a farmworker.

and society. About 2,000 students participate each school year.

"Our nation's children have been experiencing a nature deficit disorder," Craig says. "Today our fellow Americans spend 95% of time in houses, cars, malls and offices — we're becoming an indoor species almost. So what is happening is that the next generation of

decision makers is disconnected from nature and agriculture, probably more so today than in any time in our history. Julie and I believe it's really important that we engage our fellow citizens and particularly our future decision makers in this process."

The center started the Student-Landowner Education and Watershed Stewardship Program. Students participate in habitat-restoration projects on farms and ranches. Among other things, they build owl boxes, collect native-plant seeds and install drip irrigation.

The center also established the Farms Leadership Program for students who have completed the SLEWS Program. Each year a group of 30 high school students are selected from di-

verse ethnic and cultural backgrounds for the yearlong program in which they examine various agricultural issues.

Recently, a group of Farms Leadership students experienced a day in the life of a farmworker. They visited a childcare center and a farmworker family's apartment. They also accompanied workers at their jobs at Mariani Nut Co. in Winters, where they sorted almonds.

"This idea was actually generated by the students about five years ago," Craig explains. "They said, 'We want to know more about farmworker issues.'"

When queried about any political ambitions, he responds, "I can't think of anything that I'd rather be doing than what we're doing today."

Rominger is a Winters writer.