

NEVADA COUNTY AG

FALL 2024

CULTIVATING TRADITION

THE FOWLER FAMILY'S
RANCHING JOURNEY

**THEY'RE BAAACK!
LIVESTOCK
RETURN TO MAKE
NEVADA COUNTY
SAFER FROM
WILDFIRE**

**THE FENCE OF
THE FUTURE?**

**NEVADA COUNTY
FREE RANGE BEEF:
A LEGACY
CONTINUED**

NEVADA COUNTY AG

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ON THE COVER



Courtesy Elias Funez

Cultivating Tradition
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THE CALIFORNIA COUNTY THAT PRODUCED ORANGES AT ONE END AND ICE AT THE OTHER

By Maria E. Brower

What was to become Nevada County had its beginning in the California Gold Rush and would prosper for decades with the development of hard rock mining. But in not too many years into the future it would be the riches of the land itself that would bring untold thousands to California and new settlers to what became Nevada County. The climate was touted to health-seekers as a climate unexcelled, which quickly and permanently benefited people with lung and throat troubles.

From the 1850s until 1887 the general area in Nevada County that is now the areas of Chicago Park and Peardale, a very large tract of land, was known as Storms Ranch. A young enterprising man named Simmon Pena Storms was the son of Peter Storms, a Cape Cod sea captain and Simmon was born in Maracaibo, Venezuela in 1830, the youngest of eight children. His mother Susan Collins returned to Massachusetts, leaving Simmon in the care of his godparents, the Simon Penas. Both his parents died in the next two years. An older brother of Simmon kidnapped him to bring him to the United States.

By the age of 18, Simmon was a member of the 150-man Boston and California Joint Stock Mining and Trading Company that purchased and stocked the bark Edward Everett to sail to California. The ship left Boston Harbor on Jan. 11, 1849 and 108 days later arrived at Valparaiso, Chili. After leaving that port there were problems between the company of men aboard and they decided to disband the company and sell the ship as soon as they reached San Francisco. The company decided they could do better in smaller parties and left on their own.

The ship arrived on July 6, 1849 and headed for Benecia. Simmons' 12-man company went over the river and left for Sacramento on August 9. Five days later, they headed for the mines on the Yuba River and two days after that Simmon panned his first gold.

Simmon Pena Storms would eventually own a ranch, hotel and sporting area in the sparsely settled southwestern Nevada County. Pena also served as an interpreter and sub-agent for the California Indian Agency.

In early July 1887, a large part of the Storms Ranch was sold to a party of Chicago colonists, the Chicago Park Company, whom purchased 6000 acres of land. The tract would be divided into ten and twenty-acre ranches and the buyers would agree to improve five acres within a year.

Among the first projects to be done in the Chicago Park section was



Author's collection | Bierwagen's packing shed in Chicago Park.

to be the erection of a hotel, and other buildings, and business houses would be started at the same time. In addition, work had already begun in several places on the town site in order to open the springs to provide water. It was reported by the *Grass Valley Union* in an article on August 23, 1887 that an additional advantage would be a railroad that would be built and passing through the Chicago Park/Peardale lands which would connect to the overland railroad at nearby Colfax in Placer County. This would be an important bonus for the fruit shipment in saving wagon transportation to Colfax to the main line railroad there.

It was first reported in newspapers locally and then picked up by newspapers across the country that the lands of the greatest value in California were to be found in the foothills along the Western slope of the Sierras, and that valley lands did not compare with them in price or production. The soil was rich and to the fruit growers it offered the best soil for the growing of fruits in the state — the famous red soil, and was claimed whose production brought the largest returns to the producers — apples, peaches, pears, plums, olives figs, nectarines, Japanese persimmons, pomegranates, apricots, grapes and is one of the areas in the state where the white wine grape can be raised to perfection as was a variety of nuts including almond, chestnuts and walnuts.

In the early years of settlement water was plentiful from the many local rivers, streams, lakes, and snowmelt coming down from higher

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elevations in the spring. This would change in the decades that followed after advertising and the letters sent back home brought people by the thousands to California and Nevada County who then bought large tracts of land for farms and ranches.

Lumber became one of the major industries shortly after the large influx of settlers and the population continued to grow. Lumber was needed to shore up the mines as well as building towns, homes, barns, outbuildings, and fencing and furniture and other consumer needs. The forests throughout the county abounded with pine, oak, and cedar trees and other various species of trees at the lower elevations.

In January of 1888 another large tract of land consisting of 1,280 acres, west of Greenhorn Creek, and five miles south-east of Grass Valley belonging to Michael Monion, was sold to a Chicago syndicate through the Nevada County Land Association. The land was to be subdivided into ten, twenty and forty acre tracts for colonization and fruit growing. The association had other negotiations on hand which was said to soon result in the sale of other large tracts of land. In the meantime, work was in progress on the town site of Chicago Park, which contained 80 acres. Building was to begin in the upcoming spring when the ground dried from the winter weather.

On February 8, it was announced that the Nevada County Land and Improvement Association was making arrangements through T.H. Traver and J. W. Ludlam, well known and extensive dealers in foothill land, for opening a branch office in Chicago, Illinois, where there would be maintained a permanent exhibit of Nevada County fruits, nuts, wines, agricultural products, besides a fine lot of facsimile gold bars.

Land sales continued to boom and on February 12 it was reported that over 3,000 of the original 6,000 acres had been sold by the Chicago Park Association. The land was in the process of being surveyed into sub-divisions as fast as weather permitted.

There was a succession of drawings for lots and lands in the Chicago Park area. At the time of the drawing, each party participating must have deposited \$10 for each lot subscribed and \$5 on each acre subscribed. The price of the acre property was \$75 per acre, one-third cash and the balance in one and two years with interest at 8%, \$10 being rebated from the face of the notes, when paid, for every acre improved by October 1, 1888. The price of a lots on the square and corners was \$100 each, and all the inside lots \$75 each. Each purchase of a lot would be given one share, fully-paid-up stock in the hotel being constructed, or buyers could take more than share of stock and be credited proportionally on each share. No lot would be sold except on those terms, thus giving each person an interest and share in the hotel, the building of which would improve each person's property.

The Planting of the First Tree

At 8 a.m. on Thursday morning February 16, a crowd that gathered on Main Street in Colfax "...ladies and gentlemen were hurrying to and fro filling carriages, buggies and wagons and the procession

begun to roll out of town on the road leading to Nevada County." When they reached a sign posted "To Chicago Park" the long group of conveyances turned and followed until they reached the next sign posted. The party arrived at the property of H. Stafford where they tethered the horses and precede on foot E.F. Sailor's property. "Here was brought forth a beautiful young cherry tree and a spade." Mrs. S.C. Saylor was given the honor and a spade as she chose the spot and prepared a hole in which to plant "a beautiful young cherry tree." The digging of the hole was divided among some of those present and the tree was set. Mrs. Saylor put in the first shovel of soil, and the others gathered took turns to fill up the hole. A long speech was then made by C.H. Stafford, "...as he was favored in being one of the pioneers of the Chicago Park Colony." After the speech was made a bottle of wine was poured and many toasts were made with good wishes and wit. The large group of people then returned to C.H. Stafford's ranch where a large table was set and a bountiful and delicious repast was quickly spread and enjoyed."

Large quantities of fruit trees were being purchased and planted and news of improvements appeared in local newspapers on planting, building and of businesses to be opening soon in Chicago Park including a general merchandise store.

The Bierwagen family, early settlers to Chicago Park when the first generation Johann "Ludwig" and Anna Elizabeth Triebwasser Bierwagen, with their 10 children, emigrated from Russia in 1881, had first farmed in South Dakota for a short time before moving to California and Chicago Park.

Ludwig started by planting 10 acres of pear trees. The old Bierwagen house was one of the earliest residents built in the Chicago Park area. By 1902, part of their farm and orchards were planted in grapes and plums. Over the years, the family has planted a variety of fruit including apples, peaches, pears, cherries and a variety of berries. The now 127 acres that make up the Bierwagen generational family farm is totally organic.

In addition, Christmas trees were planted. They did well at the elevation in Chicago Park, and people would come up to the foothills to buy fresh trees. Another part of the Bierwagen family legacy is the Bierwagen's Donner Trail Fruit and Happy Apple Kitchen established in 1974, located on the edge of the farm. The restaurant is now twice the size it originally was. Lunch is served as well as being able to purchase baked-fresh daily pies and apple cake and fruit. The menu is available on the Bierwagen's website (bierwagenshappyapplekitchen.com/menu).

While in years past the ice industry thrived in Nevada County's higher elevations where the Truckee basin was heart of the ice industry, at the same time at the lower elevations, a thermal belt was responsible for citrus fruit first being planted in the 1870s. The thermal belt extends from French Corral to the Bear River along the low foothills of the western part of Nevada County and embraces thousands of acres, where citrus fruits have been grown successfully. This thermal belt was said to be one of the unappreciated assets of the county.

THEY'RE BAAACK! LIVESTOCK RETURN TO MAKE NEVADA COUNTY SAFER FROM WILDFIRE

Submitted by Nevada County, written by Laura Petersen

For the past ten years, Tim Van Wagner of First Rain Land Stewardship Services has operated a small goat dairy and five years ago he started a targeted grazing business.

Today his animals graze throughout the county in addition to other land stewardship services he provides such as prescribed burning and forest thinning treatments. He has observed firsthand the low-impact and sustainable benefits of grazing as a land management tool.

“Using grazing animals as a land stewardship tool creates fire resilient landscapes by reducing annual vegetative growth such as grasses and forbes and helps to maintain forests with an open understory by managing brush and forest litter build up,” said Van Wagner.

Local schools, parks and trails will soon be a little safer from wildfire thanks to a new program that puts goats, sheep and cattle to work.

Earlier this summer, Nevada County Board of Supervisors approved a \$150,000 contract with the Nevada County Resource Conservation District (NCRCD) to manage a new Livestock Fuel Reduction Program.

It’s an important step in the county’s wildfire mitigation efforts.

“There is so much work to be done to meet our wildfire mitigation goals. The use of livestock is a great resource to help us meet these goals and supports workforce development, climate resiliency and our agricultural community at the same time,” said Craig Griesbach, Office of Emergency Services Director.

It’s a program that supports a local agricultural economy while showcasing the region’s rich ranching heritage dating back to the gold rush.

“This initiative is not just about reducing hazardous fuels, it’s about fostering community resilience, supporting our local agricultural industry and educating the next generation on sustainable land management,” said Executive Director Briana Bacon who hopes the program will become a model for other rural counties.

Nevada County Resource Conservation District is a state mandated special district that has supported ranching families and agricultural education since the organization’s inception in 1943.

The program will provide land management on at least 45 acres around select local schools and public-owned properties in the county. Outreach, community education and engaging youth through the process is another key element of the program.

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Courtesy Tim Van Wagner | Goats from First Rain Farm grazing project at Nevada County’s solar farm on Highway 49 near The Willow.

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“Ranching and farming is the backbone of our history in Nevada County and grazing is an important aspect of the ranching lifestyle that benefits food sustainability, environmental conservation, recreation tourism and climate smart agriculture practices,” said Bacon.

She hopes this is just the beginning.

A Win-Win for Everyone

Representatives from Nevada County Resource Conservation District worked with Nevada County Superintendent of Schools to identify ideal school sites for the project.

Near the intersection of Ridge Road and Rough and Ready Highway, Yuba River Charter School and Bear Yuba Land Trust’s 128-acre Wildflower Ridge are examples of contiguous and complimentary parcels that will benefit from the program.

Down the road, a pine stand behind Nevada Union High School’s property will become a safe buffer zone in a populated area with arteries to residential neighborhoods such as Eskaton and Morgan Ranch, the Litton Trail, the Sierra College campus, BriarPatch Food Co-op and medical offices on Sierra College Drive. Nevada Union students will get the chance to study grazing management in their school’s backyard.

In the southern reaches of Nevada County, animals will graze on grasslands surrounding Bear River High School and Magnolia Middle School, near the community of Lake of the Pines. On the remote San Juan Ridge, Little Acorns Preschool located in the historic Oak Tree School campus and the surrounding Oak Tree Park will get the attention it needs.

A big part of NCRCD’s mission is education and each year organizes farm day events and gives out scholarships and microgrants to youth.

“We want to educate the kids early. In our county, agriculture is a really significant educational pathway. Continuing to educate on the

long term economics of ranching is essential to the livelihood of any community,” said Bacon.

Over 90 percent of Nevada County residents live within High and Very-High Fire Hazard Severity Zones. A diversified approach to creating defensible space is ideal, by using mechanized equipment like chainsaws and masticators as the first step followed by livestock for ongoing maintenance. The animals don’t seem to mind. Sheep enjoy tasty grasses while goats prefer herbaceous material such as invasive blackberry. As a secondary benefit, animal manure enriches soil fertility.

Work will commence spring and fall 2025, when vegetation is most nutritious for livestock.

“This is a big opportunity for the county as a whole. By tailoring our approach to each property’s unique needs, we aim to create safer, healthier environments for our residents. The benefits of this project extend beyond immediate fire mitigation, it strengthens community ties and promotes long-term ecological health, making Nevada County a safer and more sustainable place to live,” said Program Director Nathan Alcorn.

County Supervisor Sue Hoek’s family has a historic ranch in Penn Valley, in operation since the late 1870s, and has been using grazing to protect the land from fires for years. She is pleased to see the county returning to the use of livestock as a sustainable land management tool to protect the community from wildfire.

“I love how this strategy supports our hard-working agricultural community. By working together, we can reduce wildfire risks,” said Hoek.

Residents can learn more about preparing for fire season, wildfire mitigation projects, and resources at www.readynevadacounty.org.



Courtesy Tim Van Wagner | Goats from First Rain Farm participating in the County’s Livestock Fuel Reduction Program.

THE FENCE OF THE FUTURE?

By Dan Macon, UC Cooperative Extension

Fencing has been a part of the Sierra Nevada landscape since shortly after domestic livestock arrived. In my home office, I have a display of different types of patented barbed wire from Tuolumne County (where I grew up) dating back to the late 1800s. As a small-scale sheep producer myself, I'm more inclined to use portable electric fencing, which both contains sheep and keeps most predators away. But new technology, involving cellular signals, LoRaWAN technology, and the internet, may revolutionize livestock fencing, here in the Sierra Nevada and around the world!

Virtual fence (VF) technology typically involves collars placed on the animals, which connect either to a base station or to the cellular network (or both). Ranchers can create fence lines in the mapping program (either computer-based or smart phone-based) provided by the VF provider — moving the fence is as easy as a few mouse clicks. When the collars are connected to the network, these boundaries are stored on each collar — in other words, the collars do not necessarily need to be connected to the network at all times (although the LoRaWAN base stations provide for more constant connectivity). LoRaWAN, or Long Range Wide Area Network, is a low-power, wide-area networking (LPWAN) protocol that allows battery-powered devices to connect to the internet wirelessly.

When collared animals approach the virtual fence line, the collar emits an audio tone warning the animal the fence is close. If the animal gets closer, it will receive a shock through the collar. Just as with electric fence, livestock need to be trained to the system — they need to learn that they can avoid the shock by changing direction when they hear the audio cue. The VF companies recommend that animals receive training in a secure (hard-wire) paddock.

Each VF company has a slightly different business model. Some companies rent the collars and sell the base stations; others sell the collars and charge an annual subscription fee. Most companies currently operating in the U.S. are focused on cattle at the moment (specifically, Vence, Halter, and eShepherd). The Norwegian company NoFence provides systems for both cattle and small ruminants (sheep and goats). In the real world, some producers are converting cattle collars for use with sheep and goats.

From a cost perspective, each of these systems is potentially less expensive than barbed wire fence (depending on many factors, like the cost of steel, the lifespan of the fence, the terrain, etc.). But the potential benefits go well beyond the economics. For example, for ranchers who graze on public lands (Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management) who have lost miles of fencing to wildfire, virtual fence may be an option for getting livestock back out on these rangelands more quickly — after all, a base station or two is typically cheaper and easier to install than miles of barbed wire and t-posts. From a wildlife perspective, these



Courtesy Scott Oneto (UCCE Central Sierra)

“invisible” fences allow for wildlife movement while still containing livestock. And producers also receive real-time data on the location of their livestock — on their phones or on their computers. As one producer told me, “This information is huge! When we gather our cattle now, I know where to start looking!”

As with any new technology, there are still bugs to work out. Each collar has a battery that requires monitoring and potentially replacement. Several VF companies include solar panels on the collars that extend battery life, but the technology is too new to know whether these batteries will last indefinitely. In targeted grazing systems, or in high-density short-duration management systems, battery life is typically much shorter, since animals are activity the audio and electrical cues more frequently (because they are constantly closer to the virtual fence). And as with any fence — even barbed wire, if the forage on the other side is more attractive than what the animals are currently grazing, they'll likely go through the virtual fence.

Here at UC Cooperative Extension, a number of livestock advisors and specialists are developing a number of lines of research around this technology. We'd like to know if all animals in a flock or herd need to be collared, or just the “leaders”? Do calves, lambs, and kids learn from their mothers, or does each generation need to be retrained? How do we incorporate livestock guardian dogs into a virtual fence system — do the dogs need collars, too?

Finally, this technology seems to be developing quickly. I anticipate that each of these existing companies will move to a satellite-based system in the near future. Other researchers are evaluating the potential for using ear tags rather than collars. And just as with physical fencing, producers are innovating and using the technology in new ways. Stay tuned!

For more information, contact Dan Macon at dmacon@ucanr.edu.

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CULTIVATING TRADITION: THE FOWLER FAMILY'S RANCHING JOURNEY IN NEVADA COUNTY



Courtesy Elias Funez

By Dora Scott

Brad and Alana Fowler, lifelong residents and ranchers of Nevada County, are dedicated to preserving their agricultural heritage and raising their family on their ranch. With deep roots in the area, Brad's family has been in California since the Gold Rush, and Alana grew up in Penn Valley, participating in 4-H and later FFA, where the couple met. Their agricultural career began after they got married in 2006, with a shared vision to build a sustainable, family-oriented ranching operation.

"Our family has been here for a long time, since 1865," Brad shared. "We thought this was the lifestyle we wanted to pursue. We didn't understand at the time that it's a great lifestyle, not a terrific livelihood. But it's probably the best way in the world to raise kids."

From their early experiences in livestock grazing to managing a successful ranch today, the Fowlers have continually adapted to the challenges of ranching while instilling values in their children.

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The family has raised meat birds, cattle & goats, to name a few. They have also participated in local farmers markets and have used goats for contract grazing. "We've ebbed and flowed, but we've always sought out what we've perceived to be in demand," Alana explained, describing their flexibility in exploring different agricultural opportunities.

Despite the unpredictable nature of ranching, the Fowlers have enjoyed the lifestyle they've created. "Fun still drives what we do," Brad stated.

The Fowlers are strong advocates of community-supported agriculture and encourage locals to be more conscious of where their food comes from. "Most of the families that come to us for meat want to know where their food comes from and they want to support the local community," Alana said. "I think that's super important."

As ranchers, the Fowlers are also dedicated to land conservation and fire abatement, recognizing the vital role agriculture plays in maintaining the health of the environment. For 15 years, they used goats for land management, focusing on fire mitigation efforts in the region. "The goat thing, when we started it, it was just about managing invasive weeds," Brad noted, adding, "And then it turned into all of our work was about fire mitigation. Then we started having some pretty good fires in California, and fire mitigation just drove everything."

Brad's involvement in several local agricultural boards, including his position as Vice President of the Nevada County Farm Bureau, highlights the couple's commitment to not only their ranch but also the broader agricultural community in Nevada County. Brad is running for a position on the Nevada Irrigation District's board in the November election. "I'm probably a little more aggressive on water storage," he stated, explaining how his stance focuses more on water storage. "It's not an academic exercise for me. Water storage and the health of this agency is not just a thing I can feel good about, it's to protect my children and their children."

For Alana, community involvement is just as important. She serves on various boards, including the Livestock Producers Board and Bear River FFA Boosters, emphasizing the value of agricultural education and local collaboration. "We just felt like it was important to be involved in the community and have stayed involved in one way or another," she stated.

One of the greatest rewards for the Fowlers is watching their children grow up on the ranch, learning valuable life lessons along the way. "Our kids helped on grazing projects, they went to the farmers market with us, they helped pack CSA boxes, they did everything with us," Alana recalled. "They learned how to do everything we were doing."

Raising children in a ranching environment, the Fowlers believe, provides unique opportunities for growth and responsibility. "I think it's valuable to raise kids in a ranching environment because they are exposed to real life," Alana said. "You deal with life cycles in livestock,



Photos courtesy Elias Funez

and I think that prepares you better to deal with life cycles among your family and friends."

Looking to the future, the Fowlers remain optimistic about the direction of agriculture in Nevada County, but they acknowledge the challenges that lie ahead, particularly regarding land development. "The biggest issue we'll continue to face is conversion from Ag land to development," Brad observed. "I think providing a financial incentive to landowners to keep it in agriculture is the best method."

For the Fowlers, ranching is not just a business — it's a way of life rooted in family, community, and stewardship of the land. As Alana summed up their journey, "It's super important in this day and age that we all work together. Supporting local agriculture means supporting each other, and that's what keeps our community strong."

STATE FAIR AWARDS GOLD AND SILVER MEDALS TO LOCAL CANNABIS FARMERS

By Marianne Boll-See

For the first time nationwide, the State Fair in California allowed the sale and consumption of cannabis and cannabis products as part of its agricultural exhibits.

The Cannabis exhibit was during the entire duration of the State Fair in Sacramento, and it included information about the historic legalization process. Just outside the exhibit was a shaded outdoor lounge where sales and consumption of cannabis was allowed.

Information about the permitting requirements and farming techniques was available at the exhibit, and adult fair-goers had a chance to chat with farmers about their products.

“The exhibit was pretty cool,” Donna Panza, who owns Frogville Farms, a small cannabis farm in Grass Valley said. “It was very educational for people who didn’t know much about the industry.”

Frogville Farms won a first place gold medal in the indoor-caryophyllene category for their Durban Mintz strain.

“We won based on the terpene profile,” Panza said. “Terpene is what gives the plant aroma and taste. Caryophyllene is an anti-inflammatory and is often used for medicinal use to reduce pain.”

“It was nicely done and very normalized,” Panza spoke of the comfortable setting for fair-goers. “I think it’s going to be a permanent thing, just like they have wine and beer gardens, now they have one for cannabis.”

Panza and her husband Jon say that they are finally getting the accolades they deserve; their prize-winning Durban Mintz is available for purchase at Grass Valley Provisions and Elevation 2477’ Cannabis Dispensary.

Panza also said that she would like to see a similar exhibit, sales, and tasting lounge at the Nevada County Fair, and that Nevada County should be proud of their farms.

“We have the perfect weather and elevation for cannabis farming in California, just as wine in Napa — cannabis in Nevada County should get recognition.”

Emily Thomas and her husband Ronnie from Heritage Canopy in Nevada County won a silver medal in the mixed-light-ocimene category for their Tuscan Gelato strain.

It was the first time that they participated in the State Fair, and Ronnie said it was “pretty humbling” because they have a small 2,500 square foot grow, and they came in second to a farm that was thousands of square feet.



Courtesy Donna Panza | Donna Panza (left), owner of Frogville Farms in Nevada County, accepts a gold medal at the California State Fair in Sacramento for an indoor cannabis category which is known to act as an anti-inflammatory to reduce pain. The strain of her cannabis bud is called Durban Mintz and is available at local dispensaries.

The terpenes in the Tuscan Gelato strain are known for relaxing and relieving anxiety, and are part of the products sold at Elevation 2477’ Cannabis Dispensary in Nevada City.

“It’s in the ‘sleepy time’ category,” Emily Thomas said.

Emily Thomas said that she was very impressed with the way the State Fair’s cannabis exhibit and lounge were set up and managed.

“We were way, way, way, out of the way from other parts of the Fair, and the Department of Cannabis control was participating and monitoring the area,” Thomas said.

Consumption of cannabis products outside of the designated premise may result in expulsion from the California State Fair, according to the Fair’s website.

The Nevada County Cannabis Alliance, whose executive director

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is Diana Gamzon, reached out to all its members letting them know that if farmers from Nevada County would like to participate in the competition and exhibit, that they would cover all the fees to enter the contest.

“They are an amazing resource,” Emily Thomas said of the Nevada County Cannabis Alliance.

Thomas said that simple techniques, such as planting garlic in the cannabis garden, can keep away bugs and burrowing critters naturally; garlic also acts as an anti-fungal/anti-microbial factor.

Other information that visitors to the State Fair had the opportunity to learn about was the techniques of light deprivation to cause the cannabis plant to flower early and produce quality buds, according to Emily Thomas.

“We manually cover and uncover the green houses,” Thomas said of the light deprivation process.

Emily Thomas named the silver winning bud “Tuscan Gelato” because she herself is Italian and wanted to bring her heritage into what she does.

Other Nevada County winners included Mark Greyshock, owner of Greenshock Farms, who won a gold medal in the outdoor-caryophyllene category for their Green Lantern strain.

Greyshock says the participation in the competition has grown over the past three years at the State Fair, and working with Embark, a dispensary chain, who were able to bring in the sampling lounge was a good move.

Greyshock says there are 230 licensed growers in Nevada County, and that he would be in favor of a cannabis competition at the Nevada County Fair similar to the State Fair.

The judging at the State Fair is partly based on laboratory testing results and seasoned “buddists” who can taste and define the effects of each flower smoked.

The Emerald Cup cannabis show held in Oakland does a “blind smoke” judging process, however, at the State Fair the entries are tested in five categories of terpenes and the highest levels are awarded.

In addition, the “Golden Bear Award” is given by the judges who smoke the cannabis and rate it on unique flavor and effects, according to Greyshock.

Greyshock says that as cannabis growing expands around the world, Nevada County will always be unique because of its ability to grow plants with sun instead of indoors, which taxes the power grid.

“Indoor cannabis grows is 1 to 2 percent of the power grid,” Greyshock said.

The soil, climate, and elevation of Nevada County, also known as the “terroir” has the potential to produce a variety of strains of cannabis; South County has hot dry conditions that allow for a late season, and on the Ridge, at 4,000 feet elevation, the climate and soil is perfect for growing Indica cannabis plants.



Courtesy Emily Thomas | Emily Thomas (right) with her husband Ronnie from Heritage Canopy at the 2024 California State Fair cannabis competition. For the first time Fair-goers were able to purchase and consume winning cannabis entries such as the silver medal won by Emily.

The legacy within Nevada County, the activism, and the farmers with decades of experience are also exceptional, according to Greyshock.

“It’s a special county,” Greyshock said.

Thomas Angeley and his wife Casey Angeley, co-owners of Emerald Bay Extracts won a silver medal in the wellness: tablets/capsules category for their Sherbet Haze strain — 25mg Tablets — Sativa.

This was the first year that the categories were expanded into the wellness category, which includes tablets and capsules that have advantages when used medicinally.

High doses of THC in the form of a tablet or capsule can relieve pain in patients with MS or recovering from an injury, or the Sherbert Haze strain can stimulate appetite for people being treated with chemotherapy; in these types of situations the tablet can be preferred.

“People who don’t want to inhale the smoke or have the smoke odor may prefer our product,” Thomas Angeley said. “Gummies contain sugar which some people need to avoid.”

Angeley said he loved being able to participate in the exhibit and competition, and most of all he enjoyed sharing information with the public who may be “cani-curious.”

“Some people may not have experience with the various forms of cannabis and don’t realize that it is a medical product,” Angeley said. “The event was a great way to meet the community and introduce options, and let people know that it is not a big scary product.”

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NEVADA COUNTY FREE RANGE BEEF: A LEGACY CONTINUED

By Kate Gallagher, Marketing and Events Coordinator for Sierra Harvest

A ranch house sits, with an adjacent barn, at the end of a gravel drive; two dogs lounging in the sunny, fenced front yard. This is the Strong family home that doubles as Nevada County Free Range Beef's (NCFRB) business headquarters. Elizabeth and Grant Strong bought the business in September 2023 from founder, Jim Gates. Sierra Harvest recently sat down with Elizabeth to review the challenges and successes they have experienced in the last year and their plans for the future.

NCFRB has been a local institution since Jim Gates created the company 25 years ago. The transition in ownership has been a long and intentional process. "It wasn't just a business to purchase," Elizabeth clarifies, "It's Jim's legacy." She adds, "Jim can be as involved as he wants to be for as long as he wants to be. We value and love his input and it's priceless." Working under Gate's mentorship, and both with their own extensive cattle experience, Elizabeth and her husband, Grant, are staying true to the company's origins. They both come from ranching families. Until a few years ago, they had been raising cattle in addition to working day jobs. With the birth of their third child four years ago, they decided to return full-time to their ranching roots.

When describing the transition of the business, Elizabeth says raising cattle wasn't new.

The learning curve came with the consistent production demands of a well-established operation. Their business model delivers fresh products to grocery stores, restaurants, and other clientele weekly, 12 months a year. This isn't particularly common in the cattle industry as many family ranches harvest only once a year. Elizabeth explains that, at any given time, they have to have cattle of every age and size. Planning for this scope of production begins years in advance. Elizabeth emphasizes, "From the time we put a bull in with a cow to have conception of a calf, it is about three and a quarter years before that is ready [for the consumer]."

Even with the challenges that such a rigorous production schedule presents, the Strongs have begun implementing a breeding program for their herd. "It's a huge vision and kind of a turning point [for the business], to really dial in some good genetics," Elizabeth explains, "to make sure that product is long-term, consistent, and available." Birth weights for calves and yearly weaning weights are some features that can be genetically selected for along with high milk yields of nursing mothers, all of which ensure the most success for calves and cows and help maintain stability for the company.



Courtesy photo | Nevada County Free Range Beef's products can be found in most local grocery stores in Grass Valley and Auburn.

Another aspect of long-term business planning for the Strongs is managing the 19-plus land leases the company grazes cattle on. The growth of the Nevada County population over the last 25 years has reduced the number of large parcels of land. With 300 to 400 head of cattle to feed year-round, maintaining a diversity of leases has become essential for the business to thrive. Luckily, working with individual landowners, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Bear Yuba Land Trust has proven to be mutually beneficial for all involved. Their cattle are often used for prescribed grazing to lower fuel loads and mitigate fire danger. Elizabeth explains that through the creation of cow paths and the reduction of noxious weeds, grazing on public land also provides more accessible recreation.

Discussing highlights from the past year, Elizabeth considers the most rewarding moments to be in the relationships she's established within the community. She says that Grant loves managing the herd and riding horses. She adds that their children make the most of ranch life and are, in a day's time, headed off to a rodeo to compete in events. As far as plans for the future, Elizabeth says that their goal is

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to expand. Working with the three-and-a-half-year timeline Elizabeth explains that it's a slow and conscientious growing process. She says in the meantime they will continue to serve the community, and their current, and historical customers, with the high-quality products NCFRB is known for.

NCFRB can be found in almost every grocery store in the area: both Auburn and Grass Valley BriarPatch Food Co-ops, Grass Valley and Nevada City SPD Markets, Natural Selection Food & Wine, California Organics, New Moon in Truckee, and Mother Truckers. Along with these buyers, they supply to multiple restaurants and coordinate pickups of larger cuts for individuals straight off the ranch. Large orders take about a month of lead time, so order ahead. Contact them at their email: ncfrbeef@gmail.com. Learn more about their product offerings at their website: nevadacountyfreerangebeef.com/



Courtesy photos | The Strong family bought Nevada County Free Range Beef from longtime founder Jim Gates in September of 2023. The family strives to continue on Gates' legacy by providing high-quality, local beef.



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