

Farmers Up the Creek

By Rick Shade

Like many residents of the Carpinteria Valley, local farmers have taken an active role in protecting and improving the health of the Carpinteria Creek Watershed. Local farmers' interest began generations ago and continues to this day. Like many others, local growers look to the health of the creek as a bellweather for the health of the area where we live, work, raise families and grow the food and flowers we need to nurture body and soul.

Concerned involvement began years ago when local farmers politely but firmly declined the offer of a concrete channel to replace the native vegetation and natural creek bank. Since that time, either directly or indirectly, creekside farmers have helped protect the creek and maintain the conditions that make the channel so attractive to fish and wildlife. By not working in the creek, we have protected the gravel beds and pools vital to wildlife and fish health. The thriving native plants and trees provide cover for wildlife and shade to cool the water necessary to fish vitality.

Carpinteria farming operations are evolving and changing in ways that have positive affects on both the creek and the bottom line. Gone are the days of guesswork when it comes to fertilizing the crops. Fertilizer programs are designed using laboratory analyses of leaves, soil and water. Crops are then fed only the nutrients and minerals shown to be lacking. Often, the fertilizers are applied with the irrigation water, so that the nutrients go right to the roots where the plants can absorb them. Solar power is even used to power the fertilizer pumps, and computers monitor the application at a parts per million level. All this ensures that the crops get the nutrition they need, but the nutrients stay where they belong.

Pest control is another area where great strides have been made. Long past are the days when spraying was done by the calendar or "because the neighbor is". Farmers now use licensed pest control advisors to monitor levels of both critical pests and natural enemies. Only when pest populations grow to a damaging level are control measures taken. Control measures could include minor changes in farming practices, releasing "good guy" insects or spraying. When spraying is called for, state law mandates that the safest, most selective materials are chosen. Application is undertaken when conditions are such that the materials will stay on the farmers property and not drift off site. Spray rigs and crop dusters have entered the computer age as well. Rigs are equipped with satellite based control systems to assure that only the target property is sprayed, and only with the exact amount called for.

Carpinteria growers have always cared for this special area and will continue to do so for many years. Remember, we live here and use the crops we grow just like you!