



# THE DIRT

AUGUST 2009

NEWS FROM THE OCCIDENTAL BOHEMIAN FARMERS MARKET

WWW.OCCIDENTALFARMERSMARKET.COM

*farmer profile*

## nelsen ranch

BY SARAH HADLER

NELSEN RANCH  
490 FALLON ROAD  
TOMALES CA

*distance from market:*  
14 MILES

Carrie and Robert Stogner are continuing the old-school farming traditions of their ranch's original owner and namesake, the late Elmer Nelsen. Born in 1935, Elmer was a third generation farmer of Danish descent; his ancestors settled the land in the late 1800s. In 2004, Elmer asked Robert, his stepson, and Carrie, Robert's wife, to move from their home in Oregon to Nelsen Ranch, so that they could help him with the farm. Carrie and Robert agreed and soon began to soak up all the knowledge that Elmer had accumulated over the years. Elmer had been growing produce and selling to wholesalers for years, but Carrie, who had experience managing a farmer's market in Oregon, immediately wanted to begin selling their produce at local farmers' markets. Nelsen Ranch sells their amazing 14 varieties of potatoes and soon-to-be 8 varieties of garlic (including Elmer's Giant, a northern Italian red variety that was smuggled out of Europe in a lady's purse and renamed when the original name was lost), as well as onions, greens, sun chokes, tomatoes, and herbs at Sonoma County farmers' markets

**"I GET SEED FROM AS MUCH STUFF AS I CAN."**

—*carrie stogner*



in Petaluma on Wednesday nights, in Occidental on Friday nights, in Santa Rosa on Saturday mornings and in Sebastopol on Sunday mornings.

I visited Nelsen Ranch on one of those lovely foggy mornings where the sun makes cameo appearances a few times every hour. Carrie and Robert, along with their dogs, Trixie and Roscoe, welcomed me and gave me a thorough tour of the land on which they farm. The visit was peppered with heartfelt stories of Elmer, and it was clear to me that his memory is kept alive and well. Carrie and Robert believe in true organic farming: the fields are mostly dry farmed (there is a natural pond that is pumped in by a windmill for watering herbs and greens in the greenhouse), Carrie gets "seed from as much stuff as I can" and starts much of the seed in raised beds in a greenhouse. They rotate the crops every year, and use a mixture of green manure and steer compost tea for fertilizer. Carrie and Robert continue Elmer's practice of being integrated in the community. When the empty fields get overgrown, the neighbors' cows get fed. Beehives (maintained by a local beekeeper) help to pollinate the crops. They keep pests in check by encouraging natural predation. There is a family of foxes that keep the turkeys in line and barn owl houses are scattered throughout the ranch to keep the gopher population under control. Once they built the boxes for the barn owls, they saw a 75% drop in gophers!

Carrie really wanted to show me a new field that they planted over by Tomales High School. We all piled in the car and headed down the road a few miles to see the one and a half acres. The field is gorgeous and potato blossoms abound! Robert figures it will be ready to harvest in a couple of weeks when the green potato stalks begin to yellow. They planted 750 lbs of seed potatoes, German Butter Balls and Russet Burbanks. The soil is rich and fertile and they hope to expand this field next year. When we got back to the ranch, Robert hopped on his tractor to do some harvesting while Carrie, Trixie, a very happy Roscoe, and I walked over to the greenhouse. Carrie told me that she got her green thumb from her grandmother, but "Robert must have been

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CONTINUED FROM FRONT

a farmer in a past life—when there is a problem, he literally dreams about solutions.” They are a good team, hardworking and balanced, with a deep sense of the right way to farm—and they do everything by themselves.

The last thing I saw was a 1920s single row potato planter. Back in the day, it was pulled by a horse; now it’s pulled by a tractor. During planting, Carrie and Robert take turns sitting on the metal seat and feeding the seed potatoes into the rotating hole which drops them into the earth. This planter seems symbolic of the Nelsen Ranch philosophy: the old way of doing things is useful, important, and inspiring. Somewhere up there, Elmer Nelsen is looking down and smiling proudly...



**THIRD FRIDAY OF EVERY MONTH: AUG 21ST, SEP 18TH & OCT 16TH.**

- ➔ Bring old/unused (clean) clothes/fabric/lace/ribbons/etc that you no longer want taking up space in your house and donate them to the Switch&Stitch pile.
- ➔ Go through the Switch&Stitch tables and pick out items that you want to modify, shorten, spice-up, embellish, or recreate.
- ➔ Using the sewing machines, scissors, idea binder, and other crafty resources that you find at our DIY (Do-It-Yourself) stations, go to work on your newfound garments. Get as crafty and creative as you can!
- ➔ Don't hesitate to ask for help, advice, or inspiration from any of our Switch&Stitch Volunteers. We range from craft enthusiasts to super skilled seamstresses, and we are all here to help! (So, nope, you don't have to know how to sew.)

**YES, IT'S FREE—BUT THERE ARE STIPULATIONS:**

- ➔ **Take only items that you want to modify and recreate.** This is what makes it different from an ordinary clothing swap! All you have to do to join in is contribute something you're not wearing anymore...

**MARKET VENDORS**

*Farmers*

- Armstrong Valley Farm
- Blasi Ranch
- Bloomfield Bees
- Bohemian Farmers' Collective
- Fifteen Gates
- First Light Farm
- French Garden Farm
- Hands Full Farm
- Mudpie Farm
- Nelsen Ranch
- Rainbow's End
- Singing Frogs Farm
- Smiling Sun Farms
- Star Mountain Gardens
- Strong Arm Farm
- Twin Peaks Orchard
- Vine Hill Farm

*Prepared Foods*

- Albondigas
- Canary Crepes
- Gerard's Paella
- Kashaya's Brick Oven Pizza
- Lata's Indian Cuisine
- Mommy's Yammys
- Paul's Smoked Salmon
- Sister Pie
- Sonoma Chocolatiers

*Crafters*

Varies

*Services*

Relax Systems Massage

*Community*

- KOWS Radio
- Master Gardeners
- Occidental Center for the Arts

*Please email to confirm attendance by vendors on any given week: info@occidentalfarmersmarket.com.*

*Thanks to our generous sponsors, without whom the Market could not thrive.*

**BLOOM LEVEL**

- Bistro des Copains
- Harmony Farm Supply & Nursery
- Inn at Occidental
- Occidental Arts & Ecology Center
- Occidental Community Council
- Renga Arts
- West County Herb Co.

**SEED LEVEL**

- Freestone Vineyards
- Occidental Veterinary Clinic

**YES, I'm pleased to sponsor the Occidental Bohemian Farmers Market. I know my contribution will help support our local economy and connect our community members to the food they consume.**

- \$50 **SEED LEVEL**
- \$100 **BLOOM LEVEL**
- \$250 **HARVEST LEVEL**
- \$ \_\_\_\_\_

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

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*Please make checks payable to Occidental Bohemian Farmers Market, and mail to PO Box 782, Occidental CA 95465. The Occidental Bohemian Farmers Market is a non-profit mutual benefit corporation registered with the State of California.*