

# Farming with Wild Salmon in Mind

BY DAN KENT AND DAN IMHOFF

In a trend where agribusiness is increasingly attracted to the organic farming, and large-scale organic growers produce multi-thousand acre mono-crops, it is heartening to see that life on some farms and ranches are actually getting wilder. Around the country, farmers, government agencies, and consumers are finding that local farms can not only provide essential sources of nutritious food, but also protect wild biodiversity.

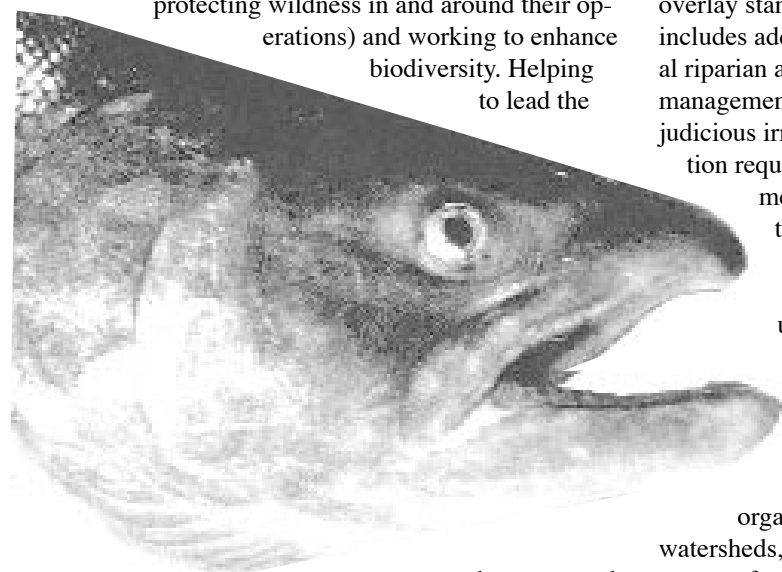
Agriculture at its very root involves the domestication of the wild. Ultimately farming reduces complex landscapes into zones of intensive production for just a handful of plants, or more often, a single monoculture.

What has become particularly apparent in North America is modern agriculture's role in the "biodiversity crisis." Over the past two centuries, agriculture production has converted more and more native habitats to agricultural lands—from river valleys to grasslands to wetlands to uplands and woodlands. In order to compete in global markets, to pay for expensive machinery and inputs, or simply to create "clean" farms void of "weeds," ever-larger amounts of habitats have been erased from already cleared lands. With the clearing of habitat comes the loss of species. The result is that wild biodiversity has been pushed further and further into isolated pockets on the landscape. Agriculture has become a leading cause of species endangerment on the North American continent, a situation not much different in other regions throughout the world.

Discussing sustainable agriculture, we often use the term "biodiversity." This can refer positively to the protection of soil organisms, such as earthworms or mycorrhizal fungi. Biodiversity usually comes up in the negative when citing the devastating loss of traditional crop diversity and the dwindling numbers, varieties and breeds of plant and animal species grown and collected for human uses.

"Wild biodiversity", or the healthy habitats needed to support native flora and fauna in the areas where agriculture takes place is a radical consideration, even in the context of sustainable agriculture.

Fortunately, an increasing number of farms and ranches are incorporating the wild (integrating and protecting wildness in and around their operations) and working to enhance biodiversity. Helping to lead the



charge towards protection of native biodiversity is Wild Farm Alliance (WFA), a California-based coalition of conservationists and sustainable farming advocates founded in 2000. WFA works nationally to reconnect ecosystems and food systems with a vision based on organic farming as the foundation of a

new agriculture which embraces aquatic and terrestrial biodiversity.

Organic farming has made great ecological strides through crop diversification and biological pest control, but healthy farms within degraded landscapes can offer only minimal value to biodiversity. Organic farmers can use a variety of practices to conserve biodiversity within the larger natural landscape: planting sequentially flowering pollinator and beneficial insect hedgerows; timing farming activities to avoid disturbance of nesting pollinators, birds and other wildlife; protecting priority species; preventing the introduction and spread of invasive species; conserving natural areas of the farm, in addition to linking to and buffering wild lands. These activities often improve farm productivity as well.

In the Pacific Northwest, Salmon-Safe has been working for almost a decade to highlight the connection between food production and wildlife preservation, par-

executive director of Oregon Tilth, said. "Working with Salmon-Safe is a way for us to bring additional value to family-scale organic farmers in the Northwest." For organic crops to earn the Salmon-Safe logo, they must be produced according to rigorous conservation guidelines. These guidelines include using cover crops to minimize erosion into streams, promoting natural methods to control weeds and pests, planting trees near streams to keep streams cool and improving irrigation practices. Farms receive Salmon-Safe assessment by Oregon Tilth inspectors as an optional addition to their routine organic inspection. Private foundations and companies including Organic Valley and Portland's New Seasons Market chain of natural food stores support salmon-Safe's work with organic farmers.

In southern Oregon, farms have implemented a variety of practices to achieve or enhance their Salmon-Safe status. Members of the Applegate's Siskiyou Sustainable Cooperative have worked to fence and re-vegetate riparian corridors, conduct erosion control projects, and restore native woodlands. Liz Baum, of the Siskiyou Coop's L & R Family Farm, likes the message behind the Salmon-Safe label. L & R Family Farm fenced and planted their part of the riparian area along Williams Creek, home to coho and Chinook salmon, steelhead trout, and diverse wildlife community. The Salmon-Safe



The combination of farm landscaping with flowering plants between fields and abundant wild habitat in nearby lands gives Full Belly Farm all the pollinators it needs in producing dozens of fruit and vegetable crops. Capay Valley, California.

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particularly the protection of wild Pacific salmon. In 2003, Oregon Tilth and Salmon-Safe developed a streamlined Salmon-Safe organic overlay standard jointly by comparing Salmon-Safe's certification program with the national organic standard. The overlay standard includes additional riparian area management and judicious irrigation requirements that are either not covered or covered only indirectly under organic certification.

The joint certification program has been field tested extensively in southern Oregon, where it directly addresses habitat conservation concerns that aren't fully addressed by organic certification. "While organic farmers tend to be the best farmers in their watersheds, every farmer is looking for ways to better manage farm resources and every farm presents opportunities for habitat improvement or conservation," said Tim Franklin, organic farmer and Salmon-Safe project manager in southern Oregon's Applegate Valley where the program is working with over 20 farms.

"The project has proven to be a great complement to the National Organic Program," Pete Gonzalves

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Applegate program helps people distinguish between conventional organic and what we're trying to achieve, which is family-scale, sustainable farming - it's beyond organic," says Baum.

Dan Imhoff is president of Wild Farm Alliance. Dan Kent is managing director of Salmon-Safe and a board member of Wild Farm Alliance. Find out more about Salmon-Safe's overlay certification for Oregon Tilth certified organic farmers at [www.salmonsafe.org](http://www.salmonsafe.org) or by calling Salmon-Safe at (503) 232-3750. Find out more about Wild Farm Alliance at [www.wildfarmalliance.org](http://www.wildfarmalliance.org) or by calling (831) 761-8408.