

## He's off to D.C. to push organic farming

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Nevada City farmer Alan Haight is visiting Washington, D.C., with a group of other growers from across the country this week to boost federal support for small organic farms.

The group of nine are part of a growing movement of food connoisseurs and farmers who say small organic farms have the potential to play a major role in feeding the United States.

With a vegetable garden now growing at the White House, the Child Nutrition Act coming up for reauthorization and the U.S. Department of Agriculture pledging to pay more attention to organic farmers, the time is ripe for action, organic advocates say.

"It's absolutely essential that small family farms get their voice into that mix," said Ted Quaday, of Organic Farming Research Foundation, host of the trip to the nation's capitol.

Haight is one of two farmers from California who will meet with staff from the offices of Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Granite Bay, and Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., this week.

Haight and his wife Jo McProud own River Hill Farm on Cement Hill Road, just north of Nevada City. They feed 500 to 600 people each week from a six-acre plot of organically grown fruits and vegetables.

Small farms like River Hill show promise for feeding a growing population while using less land and water and avoiding petroleum-based fuel and sprays, advocates say.

It's the first time Haight has become active politically.

"We desperately need as a society to arrive at an environmentally sensitive method for meeting the needs of food," Haight said. "We need hard science to support ways of pest control so we can continue to enjoy high-yielding crops."

The 2007 Census of Agriculture showed more than 20,000 farms engaged in organic production in the United States, compared to a total of 2.2 million farms nationwide.

Since 2002, the number of farms in the United States has grown 4 percent, with most of that growth coming from small operations, the census reported.

Despite being outnumbered, very large farms continue to produce 63 percent of agricultural products sold in the country.

With more federal funding for research, organic farmers can prove the benefits of this form of agriculture, they say. But often, funding for organic farming research gets the short end of the stick.

"To have good science, we need good funding," Haight said.

This year, River Hill Farm partnered with the federal nutrition program Women Infants and Children, supplying a discounted box of fresh produce to low-income mothers and their children each week.

Mountain Bounty Farm on the San Juan Ridge has worked with local schools to link children to the land where their food grows.

The two farms are among nine locally that offer CSA (community supported agriculture) programs, an arrangement in which consumers invest in the farm early in the season by paying for a summer subscription of weekly vegetable boxes – just when the farmer most needs cash for seeds and other start-up supplies.

In addition, six area restaurants and four grocery stores offer local produce.

Farms in Nevada County grew from 599 in 2002 to 690 in 2007, according to the national census.

More than 30 local farms sell produce locally, with 14 inviting the public to farm stands and another six allowing the public to pick their own. Wineries, flower farms and tree farms also dot the county.

To view the entire list of local farms online, visit [www.NevadaCountyGrown.org](http://www.NevadaCountyGrown.org).

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