

## The Vision for St. Helena as the Regional Agricultural Center

by Sandra Ericson

In the past, farming communities were considered unsophisticated, old fashioned and lacking the cache of more urban, contemporary cities with their younger demographics and faster lifestyles. However, there has been a transition and today there is a much greater appreciation for fresh produce and growing your own food sustainably -- this even includes a change in the personal image of the farmer.

Today, modern farmers are the heroes of Farmer's Markets throughout the nation; they have advanced degrees and their operations are complex, organic and sustainable for the long term. They possess a social status that they may have lacked in the past. There is a new magazine called Modern Farmer which recognizes this social and cultural transition and lays out a wide variety of agricultural topics that match St. Helena's history and present activities. Modern farming is a key part of many popular destinations at this time when travelers seek experiences more than they do products. There is even a new authentic, earthy aesthetic that is finding it's way into fashion and interior design.

Today, younger generations are more interested than ever in assuring a safe and healthy future food supply as climate change becomes an everyday reality, even as they become the first generation that will predominantly spend their lives in cities. Because so many live in cities now, they have a balancing interest in day trips to the countryside -- not so much as we may believe, to taste wine, since wine tasting shops are in the city too, but to experience the natural environment. St. Helena is an antidote to urban life and it should capitalize on that.

Although this social change has happened, Napa County, the county considered to be the most known for agriculture in northern California, has not (aside from wine) recognized this cultural transition and the new desire by many to learn about and visit agricultural locations. There is no city in Napa County that has made all the incarnations of agriculture a destination for visitors. St. Helena naturally owns that identity and, if it chooses to foster it, the city would be unique among regional cities. An additional advantage for St. Helena as the agricultural headquarters for the region, would be to ensure political protection against development if and/or when climate change forces a transition from grapes to other crops. St. Helena, as the agricultural center of northern California, through it's educational programs, events and experiences, is a way to assure a smooth transition into a healthy and sustainable future for the region.

St. Helena can address this cultural transition by offering as many agricultural opportunities as possible to engage visitors and also to serve professionals in the field. The following programs, exhibitions and events are but some of the possibilities:

### **Educational Programs, Conferences and Seminars for visiting professionals and/or consumers:**

- Community Gardens
- Landscaping Tours
- Food Preservation
- Food Banks and how they work.
- Growing Your Own
- Hydroponics
- Winemaking
- Farmer's Markets
- Permaculture

### **City Visitation Sites:**

- Historical Society Building (Carnegie? Near Library? Main St.), local farming history -- with shop.
- Model Community Garden
- Home Winemaking Exhibition - Vintners?
- St. Helena Library for all educational materials on St. Helena Agricultural programs.
- St. Helena High School Ag Programs, Tours
- UpValley Campus Demonstration Site

### **Events:**

- St. Helena Flower Festival (similar to Floriade in Rotterdam)  
All community segments participate and feature flowers: flower foods in restaurants, flower displays, flower tours, flower contests, flower prints in clothing stores, flower wines, flower lectures, poems, movies -- flowers everywhere -- total coordination for a month in the spring, the counter point to the harvest festival in the fall.
- Food Sustainability Conference at NVC UpValley
- Agriculture Innovation Conference.