

## Profile of Craig McNamara, Sierra Orchards



An organic walnut farmer, Craig McNamara has owned and operated Sierra Orchards in Winters, California for 28 years. In 1993, he began working with local schools, creating the Center for Land-Based Learning on his property. The Center engages youth in learning experiences on the land that foster respect for the critical interplay of agriculture, nature, and society.

### Sierra Orchards

Sierra Orchards employs a number of innovative water management practices including buried drip irrigation on all new plantings, tailwater recovery ponds, and sediment trapping ponds. Cover crops both fertilize the fields as well as retain winter moisture and runoff. They have also created over two miles of hedgerows and riparian habitat on their farm. In order to stabilize the creek banks and

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*“Conservation has to be a critical part of what we’re doing on the farm and as citizens of California.”*

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eliminate soil erosion, they have planted over ten acres of native upland oak forest.

Efforts to restore the watershed have been greatly enhanced by partnerships with willing organizations – Audubon California, local Resource Conservation Districts, the Xerces Society, and the local Stream Keeper.

While the cost for these improvements exceeds tens of thousands of dollars, Sierra Orchards was able to receive matching funds through federal Farm Bill conservation programs, including the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the Conservation Security Program. These programs defray the costs of implementing critical on-farm water conservation practices. McNamara argues that these funding programs are essential, “As a taxpayer, I think it’s the best thing my taxes can go to; it’s the long term conservation of our food supply.”

In addition, today McNamara’s Center for Land-Based Learning reaches thousands of students, teaching them about on-farm conservation practices through hands-on activities.

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*“As a farmer I think of myself first and foremost as a conservationist and environmentalist. Protecting our nation’s land, water and air resources are my most important goals. As a farmer, it is incumbent upon me to be an example for the rest of society. Therefore, it is natural that I would want to create educational and demonstration projects on our land.”*

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*“One of the greatest acknowledgements that we have received...came in the form of Conservation Security Program funding. This funding partially compensated us for the voluntary conservation efforts that we had undertaken on our farm over the past 20 years.”*

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