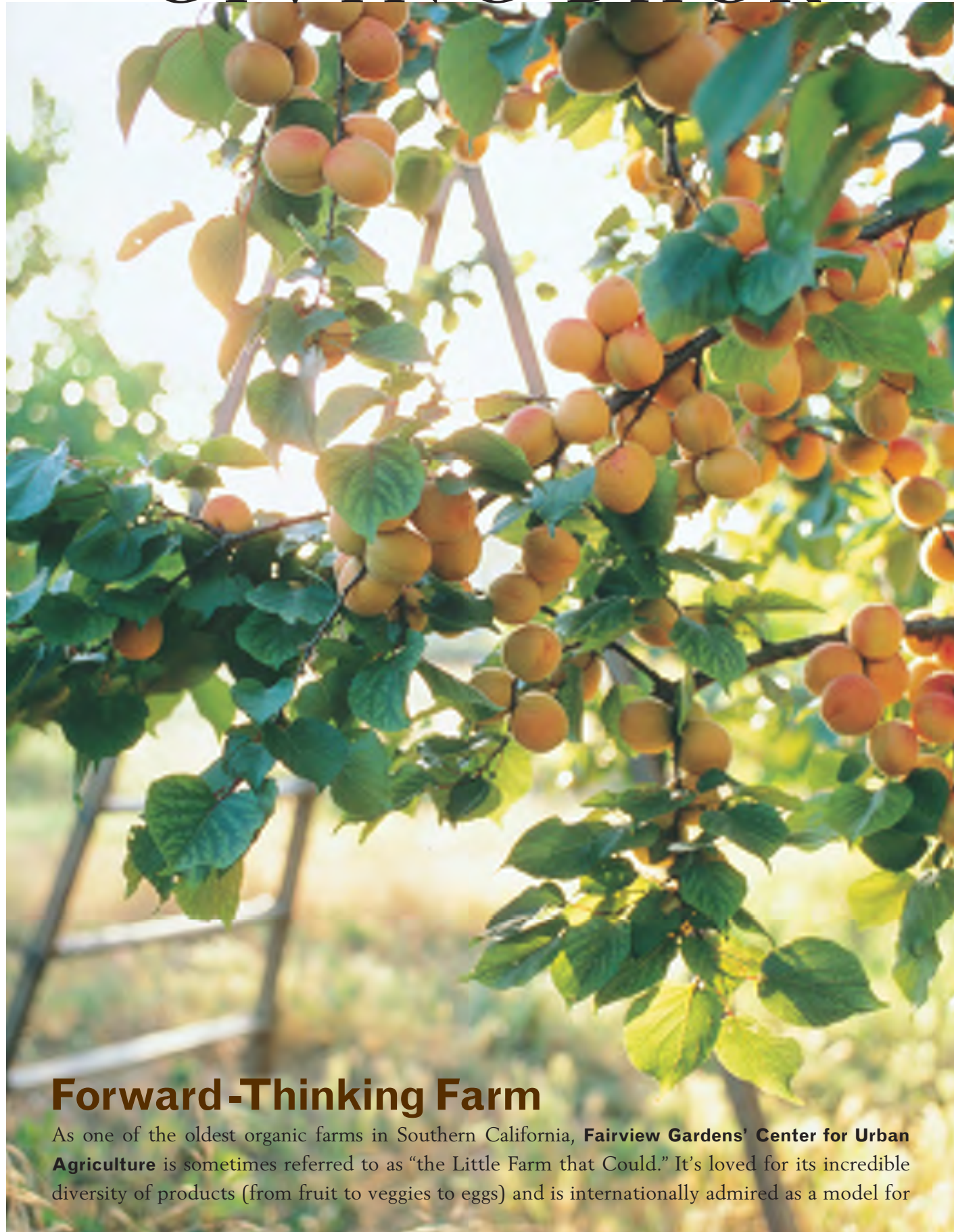


# GIVING BACK



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# GIVING BACK

small-scale food production in an urban setting. The 12 or so acres of fertile fields—located along Fairview Avenue in Goleta on what was once a Chumash settlement—have been in constant production since 1895. The farm, which has been organic since at least the mid-1970s, went nonprofit in 1997, becoming the Center for Urban Agriculture at Fairview Gardens. Education is an important part of the menu as well, with lessons in such areas as organic principles, culinary arts and sustainable living.

The produce stand, located directly on Fairview, is open year-round, seven days a week (except for holidays). The overflowing displays offer the best picks of the season, whether that be the farm's passion fruit, mandarins, French filet beans, Lacinato kale, fresh herbs, dandelion greens, five types of beets or seven kinds of squash. From the stand, it's easy to spot the farm in action. Last October, the beginnings of avocados were just hatching in the Cathedral Orchard—named for the enormous size of its avocado trees—while long rows of asparagus were poking their heads out of wet soil. Apple-tree boughs were heavily laden with fruit to be used in one of the Farmhouse Cooking Classes, where participants learn canning, preserving and how to make apple muffins.

While most of Goleta's once-productive fields have been paved over—and indeed the farm is surrounded on all sides by homes, shopping centers and suburban thoroughfares—the organization's founder and executive director, Michael Ableman, had the foresight to protect Fairview Gardens from urban sprawl. To prevent the land from being developed into housing, in the mid-'90s he turned the farm into an agricultural conservation easement—creating a land trust—and it will remain that way in perpetuity.

There's a comfort in such permanence. Fairview Gardens will always con-

tinue to nourish neighbors with fresh organic produce and sometimes annoy them with the cologne of compost and the early morning cacophony of chickens. The efforts to save the farm are chronicled in Ableman's book, *On Good Land: The Autobiography of an Urban Farm* (Chronicle, 1998), as well as in the video *Beyond Organic: The Vision of Fairview Gardens* (2000), a half-hour documentary narrated by Meryl Streep.

While appreciative of its national recognition, the center focuses most of its attention on building bridges with the local community. About 4,000 school kids trek through the farm each year. "We just had a junior high group come through here and they were amazed that carrots grow in the ground," says administrative director Matthew Logan. "Our main mission for school tours is to reconnect kids with where their food comes from and teach the benefits of farming without chemicals or pesticides."

The center's growing grounds are open to the public every day for self-guided tours, which highlight the farm's crops and techniques and include information on larger environmental issues such as biodiversity, soil erosion and pesticide use. Using reclaimed water and compost, rotating plantings, and turning under old crops (so that they add nutrients to the soil) are just a few of the techniques used to maintain the farm in the most environmentally friendly fashion.

After so many years of success, the little farm that could can't help but inspire others. "We grow food, and we make enough money to support the farm, pay our employees and put on educational events," says Logan. "You can farm wisely and make enough money to sustain yourself. The point is that it can be done."

—LESLIE DINABERG

**THE CENTER FOR URBAN AGRICULTURE AT FAIRVIEW GARDENS** 598 N. Fairview Ave., Goleta, 805-967-7369, fairviewgardens.org.

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