

Farmer advocates passion and curiosity

By **JULIA HOLLISTER**
For the Capital Press

Grant Brians, an organic farmer in San Benito County, Calif., started his agricultural career at an astonishingly early age.

"I started raising vegetables in the backyard in Los Angeles when I was 4 years old," he said. "I had a market-size garden by the time I was 11, thanks to a neighbor who wanted their lot to grow plants. When I was 14, I got a seed production contract, bought my first tractor and irrigation pipe and embarked on commercial agriculture."

He also worked for a grower who placed the young Brians with his Hispanic employees moving irrigation pipe and doing other tasks, thus allowing him to gain experience, some money and practice his Spanish language skills.

"I farm here in Hollister on six properties — about 280 acres," he said.

He raises a wide variety of crops.

"I tallied over 200 varieties when I looked at the last total," he said.

Heirloom Organic Gardens grows well over a dozen kinds of radishes alone,



CUESA

Grant Brians farms over 200 varieties in Hollister, Calif. His organic crops run the gamut from Polish golden radishes and baby leaf greens to wasabi.

ranging from Brians' own bred variety of Purple Dainkon to Polish Golden Radishes to Long Black Spanish Radishes.

The farm grows wasabi and many other mustards primarily as baby leaf greens and stinging nettles as a culinary and herbal green.

Unsurprisingly, the difficult crops vary season to season and year to year. Many of the wild crops (some describe them as weeds) are interestingly challenging to manage, he said.

Pests are always a problem and the ones that are most problematic vary by crop,



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location and year, he said.

(Fun fact: The oldest cultivated variety Heirloom Organic Gardens grows is the Golden Custard, a yellow scallop squash that dates back to the Middle Ages.)

Brians sells his crops to various markets, from farmers' markets to CSAs (Community Supported Agriculture) and delivery services, directly to restaurants and small markets, restaurant distributors and a brokerage.

Brians is passionate about food and farming and would advise anyone to go into it as a career.

"Despite the incredible challenges of farm-

ing, I would encourage anyone who finds their passion in farming to take whatever steps needed to proceed in the business," he said.

"My strongest advice is to find what it is that makes you passionate and find a way to make those items your business," he said. "This could be goats, lettuce, wine, mushrooms, animal feed or any number of other items. Be curious, seek out knowledge and experience and find ways to enjoy life other than pre-packaged entertainment."

His advice goes beyond farming.

"Talking to older people,

young people, reading, working and doing are all important parts of making your way in life and especially in farming. Life is hard, so be prepared, have faith, don't be afraid of mistakes, but correct them as fast as possible and forge forward with compassion," he said. "I know that as I have found and kept alive many vegetable varieties by producing their seed, that it is rewarding psychologically and also genetically. There are many crop varieties in grains and trees and fruits that are on the brink of loss, too, maybe a new farmer will take on their preservation and resurrection."

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