

## Baumann: Locally grown organic produce contributes to economy in many ways

Contributed by D. Baumann  
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On April 7 Santa Rosa Press Democrat published an article about Lake County (<http://www.pressdemocrat.com/article/20090407/LIFESTYLE/904079870>) that is well worth reading. Lake County has been the butt of other area's jokes for many years. Residents can be cheered to see public perception shifting in such dramatic positive ways, because a change in perception leads to other changes. "How others see us" has a direct effect on tourism and investment dollars. While no one is prospering in today's dire economy, articles like this one plant seeds for future positive growth.

As per the above-mentioned article, old jokes are being replaced by awestruck hyperbole describing uniquely beautiful scenery, picturesque towns, wineries, hotels and eateries, wholesome locally grown food, and a healthy outdoor lifestyle. All of which translates into potential for a more prosperous future here. Prosperity that is based on the unique assets we already have.

Prosperity that could elude us, if we go the route of becoming just another "Generica, USA," our towns' streets crowded with the same familiar national-chain retail signs that you find everywhere, our agricultural products no different than those of Corporate/Industrial farm products that dominate the Central Valley.

What made this article resonate so strongly for me is that, as a newbie (since 2006), my first impressions of Lake County were "Wow! Wow!" and "WOWWWWW!" How could I have been previously unaware of the existence of this gorgeous area? And it was affordable! Although raised in Northern California, I went to college and started a career down south, where I remained a renter for 25 years because anything worth buying was beyond my price range. Here in Lake County, I was blown away by the abundance of gorgeous properties available for less than the cost of a one-bedroom condo elsewhere.

After moving here, it took me awhile to realize that the magic I saw in this place did not seem so obvious to many of the current residents. I heard jokes about the single-wide lifestyle, meth labs, pot farms and even swimming pools empty of water but full of old beer cans. People with no sarcastic intent speak longingly of a desire for more fast food outlets and big box stores. An elementary study of retail economics explains why going that route would further destroy the local economy, but it is hard to explain to people who are desperate for something, for anything, that there really are alternatives that are worse than nothing. Articles like this one show the positive potential of the prosperity that is already hovering on the horizon, if we make better choices in shaping our county's future.

No place is without challenges. But jeepers-creepers! We're miles ahead of other areas, just on the basis of our natural resources.

Some intelligent planning, some prudent avoidance of mistakes that other areas have made, and we are well on our way to being the Tuscany of the west coast. An attractive place for companies to re-locate, where costs are low but the beauty of the surrounding area can help attract and retain high-tech employees seeking a cleaner environment to raise their children closer to nature. A "must-go" destination for tourists with a yen for beautiful, unique places, organic food and wine, and a healthy outdoor lifestyle (of which there are only a million or so, in the nearby Bay Area alone). Prosperity based on sustainable lifestyles and protecting our natural assets is REAL prosperity, one that will can sustain future generations indefinitely.

And farmers can be very much a part of that new prosperity, which has already begun to be defined as revolving around fresh, wholesome locally grown food.

Viva Lake County!

D. Baumann lives in Upper Lake.