



# Honey, I'm Home!

*Marshall's Farm creates a honey of a treat in American Canyon*

By Jim Brumm

In the business office at Marshall's Farm nearly everything is black and yellow. Desks, floors, walls, everything. Stuffed honey bees adorn the shelves alongside Winnie the Pooh dolls, honeycombs, cartoons of bees, photos of bees. There's even a bottle of something called "buzz juice."

Welcome to Marshall's Farm and the Flying Bee Ranch, makers of fine, natural honeys from all over the Bay Area. Well, okay, the bees actually *make* the honey, but under Spencer and Helene Marshall's careful husbandry, those bees produce honeys

of unparalleled variety, color and flavor.

Spencer and Helene met in 1990 and married in 1996. Helene, an artist and former potter, used to work craft shows all over the country. "I never thought I'd marry a farmer," she said, laughing. Bees *were* in her past, however. As a student at U.C. Berkeley she helped maintain three beehives.

Spencer was raised in Oregon where his grandmother raised bees as a hobby while he was growing up. As an adult he began keeping bees as a hobby, hoping someday to parlay it into a business.

Helene tells of how when they met she drew on her limited experience with bees and asked him if he was using "Italians or Caucasians" (types of bees). "He was shocked to meet a woman who knew something about bees," she said.

At the time Spencer had about 100 hives and 10,000 pounds of honey in drums that he had

harvested over time. Helene likes to joke that, "I must have been hard of hearing. I though he told me he had lots of *money!*"

Shortly after that, Helene went to sell her pottery at a craft show, and put out some of Spencer's honey on the same table. The honey sold well each time she presented it. "That was the start of our venture," she said.

Helena used her artistic talents to design a label for Spencer for his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. "We needed a label — an identity, to be in business," she said.

According to Helene, their two talents combine beautifully to make and market honey. "He was born to raise bees," she said. "and I love to sell and market things."

Eventually they realized that they needed a larger place from which to run their honey business. A realtor (named Buzz, no kidding) found them their current place in American Canyon and that's where they've been ever since. A group of honey-colored buildings dot the property. They even have a retail tasting room, not unlike a winery, where visitors may purchase gifts and taste as many as twenty different varieties of honey.



Helene Marshall shows a honeycomb

Continued



Spencer Marshall demonstrates the “uncapper” which breaks open the honeycomb

Despite managing over 600 bee hives, their American Canyon property is not swarming with bees. In fact, you have to look for them in a few hives out back. Why? Because nearly all the hives are maintained off-site. From Marin to Sonoma, from St. Helena to Lucas Valley, the Marshall’s hives are spread out over the entire Bay Area in



over one hundred locations. And *that*, according to the Marshalls, is what makes their honey business unique.

“Each type of flower will produce a distinctly unique honey,” said Helene. “Honey from Marin is completely different from honey made in

Napa Valley.”

Having hives spread over so far an area makes for more work for Spencer, who must visit each hive periodically all year round to harvest the honey.

But for Spencer, visiting those hives is a labor of love. “I know the different personalities of the hives,” he said.

“This one is more aggressive, this one is a better honey producer. In this country we have a mix of different races of bees from all over the world. You get all these cross-breeds. All hives have different characteristics.”

The hives are not located in any special place. They’re placed in ordinary peoples’ yards. “The people who have our hives don’t have to do anything,” said Helene. “They just enjoy it. It’s a win-win situation. We pay them in honey – honey made from their own yards and the blossoms around their home.”

Much of Marshall’s Farm honey is certified organic or is made from blossoms in certified organic gardens, such as the garden at the Culinary Institute of America in St. Helena.

The result is a dizzying variety of sweet, unsullied honeys, each with its own unique flavor and color. A honey tasting at Marshall’s Farm is a savory tour of the Bay Area’s blossoms and microclimates, painstakingly produced a drop at a time by

Spencer and his millions of winged helpers.

They have lavender honey, pumpkin blossom honey, wild blackberry honey, star thistle honey, Napa wildflower honey . . . the list goes on and on. The Marshalls have given them great names as well: *Jailbreak honey* (made from bees that visit San Quentin Prison in their travels), *Roll me over in the Clover*, *Bzzzzerkeley honey* (all made from hives in Berkeley), *San Francisco City Limits Blend*, *Marin Mix*, *Petals Luma Honey* (from Petaluma), and finally, honey from the Marshall’s Farm home town, American Canyon, called *Honey, I’m Home!*

Honey not only tastes good, but it can help with a problem many of us face here in the Napa Valley – allergies. According to some allergists, eating a tablespoon of honey made from the pollens in your home area can work as a homeopathic remedy and help you build up an immunity to those pollens.

Marshall’s Farm is open seven days a week and drop-ins are welcome. Spencer and Helene invite you to give them a buzz, or just buzz on in, take a tour and taste their wares.

*Marshall’s Farm is located at 159 Lombard Road (Just off Napa Junction Road) in American Canyon. You can reach them at 707-556-8088 or “The Free-Bee Phone” at 1-800-624-4637. Visit their website at [www.marshallshoney.com](http://www.marshallshoney.com) where you will find recipes, bee and honey facts and a lot more.*