

Monterey County
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FoodBites: In support of small farms

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In the 1930s, there were close to 7 million farms in the United States. At last count that number is down below 2million, with corporate-owned farms providing most of the food we eat.

The decline of the small, family-owned farm has been well-documented, but Monterey County has seen a significant uptick in small operations, thanks in large part to the Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association, a nonprofit farm business incubator in Salinas.

Serving a primarily Latino population, ALBA's work is grounded in the belief that "in order for limited-resource and aspiring farmers to gain a foothold within California's highly competitive farm sector, they must have access to information, operating capital and opportunities to access land."

From 1997 to 2002, the number of Latino farmers in the county increased 70percent, according to the United States Department of Agriculture's Census of Agriculture. The growth has resulted in 264 Latino-operated farms in Monterey County (meanwhile, the overall number of farms in the county dropped from 1,395 to 1,216 over the same period). Despite the overall loss of farms, Latino farmers are gaining ground — literally — in an industry strengthened through the decades by that group's back-breaking labor.

To help continue to support its training program, ALBA is holding a benefit dinner on Sunday, Aug. 22, called Bridging Opportunity: Local Chefs and Beginning Organic Farmers. The event is from 5-8 p.m. at the

Monterey Peninsula Country Club in Pebble Beach.

The venue is indeed a long way from the fields of Salinas, but the dinner itself will be sourced entirely with local foods. Beginning farmers from ALBA will provide fresh ingredients for all courses, with all meats and vegetables grown or raised within 40 miles of the kitchen. Think of these appetizers: braised leek, Hain Ranch walnuts and bleu cheese canapé; and line-caught pacific tuna-avocado tartare in black sesame cone with red radish crème fraïaut;che. How about an entree of line-caught, fennel-dusted halibut with artichoke-chèvre custard and Roma tomato-citrus confit, or Potted Farmstead Paicines Ranch beef with stewed pipérade?

This isn't your ordinary benefit. Look for farm-fresh, organic ingredients, local wines, sustainable seafood and gourmet preparations from the unique collaboration of host chef Colin Moody (Monterey Peninsula Country Club) with Jeffrey Anderson, William Bennett, Dory Ford and Estevan Jimenez.

Cost is \$125. Tickets may be purchased through Brown Paper Tickets online at www.brownpapertickets.com/event/118406 or by calling 758-1469. Or visit www.albafarmers.org.