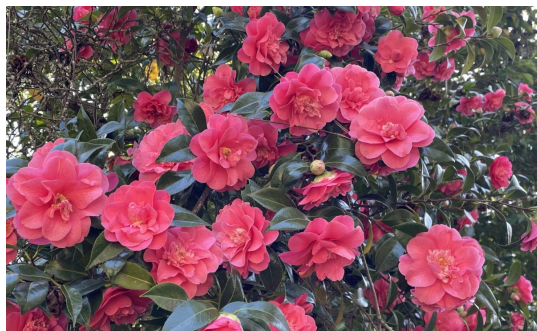




# Newsletter

June 2025



## Understanding Various "Sustainable" Farming Methods

Consider the three sustainable farming approaches—Certified Organic, Biodynamic, and Regenerative Agriculture—each with unique principles and practices aimed at promoting environmental sustainability and soil health.

### USDA Certified Organic

**Certified organic farming** focuses on avoiding synthetic chemicals, pesticides, and fertilizers. It emphasizes natural inputs, biodiversity, and soil health but has a more structured, regulated framework compared to other methods.



### Key Features of Certified Organic:

- Avoidance of synthetic chemicals: No synthetic pesticides, herbicides, or fertilizers.
- Soil fertility: Emphasis on organic matter, crop rotation, compost, and natural soil amendments.
- Biodiversity: Encourages biodiversity by rotating crops, planting cover crops, and maintaining healthy ecosystems.
- Regulations: To be certified organic, farms must adhere to strict national or regional standards (e.g., USDA Organic in the U.S.), and this certification is monitored through regular inspections.
- No GMOs: Genetically modified organisms (GMOs) are prohibited in organic farming.

While organic farming emphasizes environmental sustainability and health, it doesn't necessarily prioritize the regeneration of ecosystems or the carbon sequestration focus of regenerative farming.

### Biodynamic Agriculture



**Biodynamic farming** is a spiritual and holistic approach to agriculture that builds on organic principles but incorporates unique practices related to cosmic rhythms and the preparation of special composts. It was developed by philosopher Rudolf Steiner in the early 20th century.

### Key Features of Biodynamic Agriculture:

- Holistic approach: Views the farm as a self-sustaining ecosystem where plants, animals, and the environment work together harmoniously.
- Cosmic rhythms: Takes into account astrological and lunar cycles for planting, harvesting, and other farm activities. There's an emphasis on timing activities to align with celestial patterns.
- Biodynamic preparations: Involves the use of special compost and herbal preparations (e.g., manure fermented in cow horns) to improve soil health and plant vitality.
- Closed-loop system: Encourages a fully integrated farm where animals, crops, and soil interact in a way that the farm generates its own fertility and resources without needing outside inputs.
- Certification: Biodynamic farms can also be certified as organic, but they must

meet additional biodynamic standards, which are governed by organizations like Demeter.

## Regenerative Organic Certified (ROC)



Regenerative Organic Certified builds upon USDA organic standards and biodynamic practices by adding requirements for soil health, animal welfare, and social fairness. It's a certification process where farms are assessed against a set of criteria related to these three pillars.

It is particularly concerned with improving carbon sequestration and reversing environmental degradation caused by industrial farming. This approach is less about strict certification and more about holistic principles of sustainability and ecological restoration. It's more future-focused, emphasizing restoration rather than simply avoiding harm.

### Key Features of Regenerative Organic Certified:

- **Soil health:** The central goal is to restore and enhance soil fertility, microbial life, and carbon storage through practices like no-till farming, cover cropping, and composting.
- **Carbon sequestration:** Focuses on increasing soil organic matter and pulling carbon from the atmosphere into the soil, thus mitigating climate change.
- **Diversity and ecosystem restoration:** Encourages biodiversity not just within the crops but also in the broader ecosystem, including wildlife, pollinators, and native plants.
- **Holistic practices:** Emphasizes the integration of livestock with crops (e.g., rotational grazing) and other regenerative methods to mimic natural ecosystems.
- **Focus on continuous improvement:** Rather than simply maintaining organic standards, regenerative agriculture is about actively improving the land over time.
- **No standard certification:** While there are some emerging regenerative agriculture certifications (e.g., Regenerative Organic Certification), regenerative farming is often self-identified and is less regulated than organic or biodynamic farming.

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## Sonoma County North Calendar

*Mark your calendars, and look for an invitation with details about a month before each event.*

### June

**23** Slow Books: *Love, Loss, and What We Ate*, Padma Lakshmi

**25** Farm Tour: Knights Valley Wagyu at Ghost Donkey Ranch, Calistoga, 9:30 am

### July

**12** Annual Summer Picnic at Gradek Ranch, Healdsburg, 4 pm

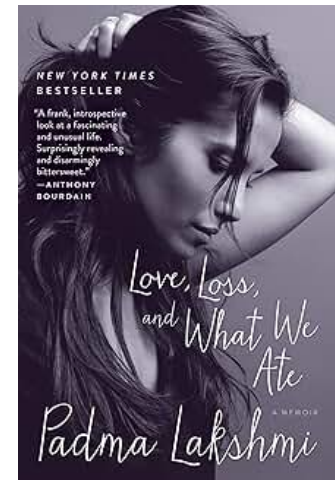
### August

**Please note that only members--and not their guests or family members--are eligible for the Slow Food Member ticket price.**

## Slow Books

***Love, Loss, and What We Ate: A Memoir***, by Padma Lakshmi.

Poignant and surprising, this memoir is Lakshmi's extraordinary account of her journey from her grandmother's kitchen in South India to the judges' table of *Top Chef* and beyond. A memoir rich with sensual prose and punctuated with evocative recipes, it is alive with the scents, tastes, and textures of a life that spans complex geographies--both internal and external.



## Spotlight on Chef Liza Hinman, The Spinster Sisters



### A Slow Food Sanctuary in Santa Rosa

Local gem **The Spinster Sisters** isn't just a restaurant—it's a living, evolving embodiment of Slow Food values in Sonoma County. At its helm is Chef Liza Hinman, whose commitment to creativity, sustainability, and interdependence has quietly transformed her corner of the city into a model of what a more thoughtful, equitable food system could look like.

When asked what keeps her motivated after many years in the famously harrowing restaurant business, Hinman shared her enthusiasm “to highlight the best of the food itself. If it's asparagus, it's grilled and seasoned. We don't do eight different things to it before it lands on your plate because it's perfect as it is.” Local ingredients allowed to speak for themselves—fresh and flavorful—are at the heart of the Slow Food movement and the cuisine at The Spinster Sisters, and one reason the restaurant earned a Slow Food Snail of Approval.

Echoing the nearby fields where she sources her locally grown produce, Hinman's team also operates like an ecosystem: “There's no 'I do this. You do that.' We are all a piece of this organism that goes through this creative cycle every night together.” The restaurant pools tips, shares responsibilities, and centers education. But Hinman's focus goes beyond staff mentorship, she explains: “We want to bring guests into the conversation about where their food comes from—they are a part of the model of growing, harvesting, and preparing beautiful food because they support every link in the chain to exist.”

That conversation extends beyond the walls of the restaurant. Hinman is part of a grassroots network of local chefs and restaurateurs who collaborate and support each

other. She also works with organizations like Snail Award-winning **FEED Sonoma**, a nonprofit working to connect small farms to buyers, helping to sustain local agriculture at a time when large-scale systems threaten small farmers' viability.

But doing things the Slow Food way—and taking a systemic view—is not easy. “I sometimes have the worrying sense that a restaurant like ours is of a dying breed,” Hinman admits. “As a restaurant, we have to decide that there’s value in the experience beyond just the profit piece.” Hinman hopes that Sonoma County’s community of intentional eaters will continue to participate in the work of her team and others like it. Hinman shares that, as costs increase, the current economic climate is the toughest she’s seen for food businesses—even as a veteran of the industry.

Despite the challenges her business faces, as a mom and a chef, Hinman empathizes deeply with working families struggling to keep food on the table. “Funding [from **the USDA's Local Food Purchase Act program** and others] is being cut from the programs that we had in place to buy quality food from small farms for schools and food banks. I would love for more people to reach out to our local officials and beyond to urge the powers that be to fight to preserve funding to get hungry families quality food.”

Whether speaking about civic engagement or the local restaurant scene, Hinman’s call to action is clear: participate in the businesses and conversations that are important to you. If you’re a foodie, use your voice to fight for good, clean, and fair food for all. Support places like The Spinster Sisters. “It doesn’t have to be a break-the-bank experience,” she says. “Even just a beer and an appetizer at the bar makes a difference.” And more than that—talk about it. “We’ve never been big on advertising,” she says. “Word of mouth matters. If you had a great experience, tell someone.”

Hinman and her team are creating something extraordinary—and doing it with empathy. “It’s a business, but it’s also a work of art, a creative endeavor,” she says. “The creative satisfaction outweighs the challenges.”

So pull up a chair. Order the grilled asparagus. Join the conversation. And be part of a food system that values more than the bottom line.

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## Snail of Approval

### New Snails!

We have been busy here at Snail of Approval, with eight new awardees in the last couple of months. Besides our restaurants, farmers and producers we have three new Snails in our new Supporting Organization category: a local grocery store and two farmers markets. *(click on links below for more information)*

Shop your local food system! You can see a full list of businesses who are making a difference in Sonoma County on our [webpage](#).

# VALLEY

# VALLEY SWIM CLUB

487 1st St W, Sonoma

18709 Arnold Dr, Sonoma



Healdsburg & Marin farmers markets



Order online and Olivers & Pacific Markets



Popup in Santa Rosa and beyond



115 E 2nd St, Cloverdale



Luther Burbank Center parking lot, Wednesday & Saturday mornings



N Cloverdale Blvd, Cloverdale, Sunday mornings

## Membership

[Join or Renew](#)

### Welcome New Members!

Diana Blakeley  
Claudia Grebe  
Karie Kelder  
Virginia Matthews  
Margaret Torres Nelson  
Cynthia Newcomb  
Else Schmidt  
Robert Uleman and Gen Zonich



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