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Going Organic

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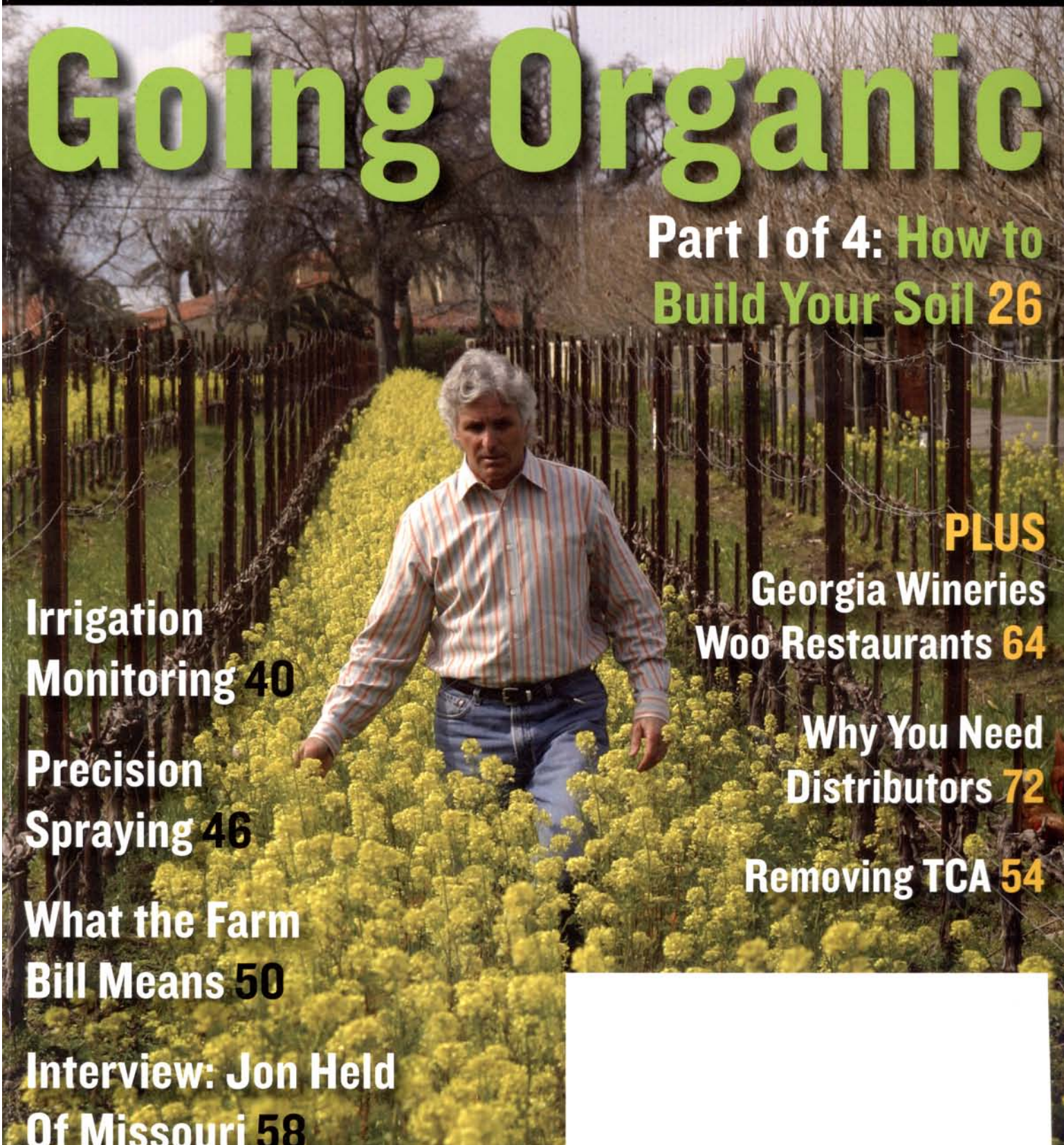
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RICHARD BAKER

Jacqueline Madlem plants with Paco, Pamela and Crystal Arrowsmith.

Vineyard Grows Veggies to Feed Hungry

Paso Robles, Calif.—A local vineyard is teaming with the international Urban Farming organization to create Vineyards Growing Veggies.

The new program is taking root in a 1-acre plot at Steinbeck Vineyards & Winery.

On May 31, about 30 volunteers began planting seeds and seedlings donated by local nurseries and farm suppliers. A first harvest of organically grown produce was expected within two months, according to Cindy Steinbeck Newkirk, whose family has farmed the land since 1943. Newkirk had been gardening the plot herself and donating much of the produce, but she said some food went to waste. Now, with volunteers to tend and distribute the crops, and cooperation from local nonprofits, all the food will go to feed hungry mouths.

Steinbeck Vineyards is donating irrigation water and lending necessary farming implement. Newkirk got involved six months ago, inspired by Kathy Kelly. Kelly, who produces the Winery Music Awards, had met Urban Farming founder Taja Sevelle last summer, and started brainstorming on ways to collaborate. Since then, the project has grown to include Backyard Harvest, which harvests and distributes locally grown food, and the San Luis Obispo County Food Bank, which will deliver to those in need.

Kelly reported that the plot at Steinbeck will yield 6-7 tons of food per season: about 1 pound of fresh, organic produce for each of 12,000 people. Paso's climate permits three crop rotations every year. Once the first plantings are finished bearing after 10 to 12 weeks, fall crops will go in; during the winter, potatoes will be grown.

"Volunteers get as much food as they can use," Newkirk said. "The remaining produce is delivered to shelters." Kelly and Newkirk are hopeful that Vineyards Growing Veggies at Steinbeck will be the first of similar efforts throughout the world. "We want it to go international," Newkirk said. For more information, e-mail Kelly at kathy@winerymusicawards.com or visit urbanfarming.org.

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 Learn more: Search keyword "veggies."

—Jane Firstenfeld

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