

Nurture Malibu farm

Vital Zuman Farm in Malibu occupies a beautiful 6-acre parcel of land at the intersection of PCH and Heathercliff. Though it's been operating as a small family farm for decades, its future is now uncertain in these difficult economic times. Beyond its obvious importance as

a site of local food production at a time when farmland everywhere is in retreat, a small artisan farm like Vital Zuman always stands an educational opportunity waiting to happen for the benefit of the community it serves.

I say this as someone who did, and still does, this kind of work, and knows the great potential it holds for people of all ages, but especially school children. A number of years ago, with generous cooperation both from Alan Cunningham, farmer and owner of Vital Zuman, and from SMMUSD, I helped to create and run a school-to-farm program for young students to visit the farm, learn about food and agriculture, and engage in simple farming practices. I did this work while employed with the City of Santa Monica.

The program lasted about two years and was a great success. Third and fourth grade students from schools throughout the district came to the farm every week for a healthy experience in food awareness, nutrition and farming. Teachers confided in me that it was the best field trip of their career, and they hoped that it would continue. Sadly, it ran into budgetary concerns largely over the cost of transportation.

If Vital Zuman remains a farm, or can be maintained under some kind of conservation-based development plan, then the hope remains of resurrecting an educational program like this one for the mutual benefit of its owner, the land itself, young people and the entire community. I currently work as Education Supervisor for the Resource Conservation District of the Santa Monica Mountains, but I write this piece as a citizen who does not wish to see farmland, and the beautiful opportunity it represents for the community, slip away.

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