

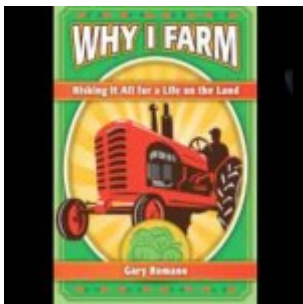
'Why I Farm' should be mandatory reading for anyone who eats produce

By Kathryn Reed

I want to throw out all the store bought produce in my refrigerator. I want to be less frustrated with my tomatoes and basil that are struggling this year and be more appreciative of how hard it is to grow good produce. I want to hug a farmer – but not just any farmer.

I want to start with Gary Romano and then all the other small farmers; especially the ones growing organic produce.

Reading Romano's book "Why I Farm: Risking It All for a Life on the Land" starts with a look at his family's roots in farming, their struggles and Romano's early days of digging in the soil.



Bona Fide Books in Meyers published the book this year.

And while Romano is only in his mid-50s, the evolution of the small farmer in his lifetime has almost been revolutionary. And not necessarily in a good way.

He points out how the government – at the state and federal levels – has allowed big corporate farms to dominate the food market. Those are the farms that get the subsidies. They are the ones with fewer regulations. They are the ones putting goods into grocery stores where there is no way for the

consumer to know what chemicals have been used to get them to look so perfect and taste so bland.

Raw, honest and authentic. That's what this book is. Romano doesn't hold back. He tells readers what he thinks the F in IRS Schedule F form really stands for.

Romano's Sierra Valley Farms is 65 acres in Beckwourth; which is north of Truckee. And it's certified organic.

He worries about the future of farming, the food supply and whether there will be a fourth generation Romano to take over this farm.

"Farmers should be able to pass on the farm to their children without the fear of the kids having to sell the family farm to pay the estate taxes," Romano writes.

While Romano gets a bit whiny toward the end of the book, it reads like a man who is desperate and clearly frustrated with the regulations, the lack of the public's understanding of where food comes from and the bleak outlook for the future.

Romano estimates "only 5 percent of Californians have access to local produce and products and buy directly from farmers."

He explains why it's important for people to know where their food comes from, why people should buy local produce, and what can be done so farmers like himself can continue to do what they do.

That was one of things I really liked about the book – it identifies problems, comes up with solutions and explains why the problems are problems and why they should be solved.

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Notes:

- Romano's second book, also to be published by Bona Fide

Books, will come out next year. It is titled "July and Winter: Farming and Gardening in the Sierra".

- "Why I Farm" is available online.
- Romano will give a talk and sign books Oct. 22 at 6pm at the South Lake Tahoe library, 1000 Rufus Allen Blvd.