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COM's organic farm earns 'Project of the Year' honors *National Corps Network honors partnership with CCNB*

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The rain-soaked fields in the College of Marin Organic Farm and Garden at the Indian Valley Campus are receiving national attention for the unique and visionary opportunity they provide to the Conservation Corps North Bay members tilling the ground.

Operating for less than a year, the 5.8-acre farm project has been selected by Washington D.C.-based Corps Network as a Project of the Year for its outstanding accomplishments in the category of Pathways to Achievement – Post-Secondary, Training and Credentialing Partnerships. The award honors Corps projects that succeed in creating career ladders for corps members through effective partnerships with community colleges. Selected projects serve as models for the country. The farm is one of six projects chosen from 143 across the country. The award will be presented this week at a ceremony on Capitol Hill in Washington D.C.

"It's very cutting edge to have this kind of relationship between a corps and a college," said Marilee Eckert who serves as executive director of Conservation Corps North Bay.

Not only does the farm provide the first sustainable agriculture education and training center of its kind in the region, it serves as a path for high risk populations who manage daily operations at the farm.

"They come to us to turn their life around," Eckert said. "We were having trouble getting our corps members from high school started in higher education, and now we have a path to do that."

The project was spearheaded by the college in collaboration with the CCNB and UC Cooperative Extension. It is designed to provide the education and training resources for a skilled, entrepreneurial workforce in the emerging fields of organic agriculture and sustainable local food systems.

CCNB has been able to expand its programs that serve post high students who are interested in pursuing a college education and/or receiving a specialized certificate in Sustainable Horticulture. Corps members receive work study for their fieldwork at the farm while attending College of Marin and are eligible to earn about \$10,000 in AmeriCorps scholarships.

In August 2009, eight corps members were chosen to participate in the inaugural program and in the spring semester, CCNB expects to enroll 12 corps members.

Inaugural farm and agriculture classes have been well received and College of Marin is creating a certificate in Sustainable Horticulture program with curriculum that is aligned with Agriculture & Environmental Sciences degree programs offered at the UC Davis and UC Santa Cruz campuses.

"The backbone of this project is it's a teaching farm," said Nanda Schorske, dean of Workforce Development, College and Community Partnerships at College of Marin.

California and especially the San Francisco Bay Area is home to a fast-growing, widely supported movement to establish sustainable local food systems that provide healthful food for all, strengthen local economies, support small-scale farms, and encourage sustainable food and agricultural entrepreneurship and green job creation.

The program has received enormous support from community partners. In addition to hoop houses, compost, seeds, olive trees, oyster shells, hundreds of tools, the donation of grading services, community partners have stepped forward with matching funds from the outset. The first industry-driven workforce development program of its kind within the California Community College system, the venture has drawn financial commitments from more than 26 industry partners.