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Winter Bounty at the Moraga Farmers' Market

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Michael Finocchio with his kids and Fanny Wilson from Victorian Farmstead. Photo Andy Scheck

This small group of sisters bakes from scratch all week in their congregation and uses to proceeds of their sales to fund their soup kitchen, which serves 300 hot meals a day. "Our mission is to feed the poorest of the poor," says Sister Marie-Bénédicte with a recognizable French accent. "Besides opening our soup kitchen in the Tenderloin, we bring hot food to where the people are, under the bridges and on the streets."

A bit further down the aisle from where the sisters offer their excellent quiches, cookies, pies and cakes, Flora Guzman and her team sell the fish that her husband Daniel has caught, including halibut, sole, snapper, butter fish and sardines. The stand also sells salmon from Alaska or tuna from Hawaii. "We've been here for four or five years and it has been the best," says Guzman. "It's almost a two-hour drive to come here, but we don't care because the customers are good."

The Tching family from Fresno has been working at the Moraga Farmers' Market from the start, selling what their 20-acre farm produces. Moraga is one of only two

markets where they sell their seasonal crops. "Right now we harvest all the greens like bok choy, spinach, kale, broccoli and the rest of the cruciferous vegetables," says M. Tching. The double-sized stand also offers root vegetables like carrots or sweet potatoes, or vegetables that can be stored at low temperatures like onions or pumpkins. The Tchings say that they do not use any fertilizer on the farm but that it is too costly for them to get the organic label. The market has a wide variety of stands, both conventional and organic, and all local.

Next to Tching, Victorian Farmstead sells meats and eggs. "It is very hard to find pasture-raised pork," says Fanny Wilson. After reading about the small market vendor, she realized that what they were selling was exactly what she was looking for to feed her family and she decided to try it out, then quickly became a subscriber to get a discount on her purchases. The market stand has a wide variety of chicken, pork, beef and other meats. Eggs are less plentiful in winter since hens lay less then, so it's better to get there before 10:30 a.m. if you want a dozen.

Fruits are also plentiful in winter. For a month or so, Rainbow Orchard will be selling apples that have been kept in a cold cellar since harvest. Many stands offer oranges, tangerines, Satsuma, grapes and pears, and of course dried fruits and nuts that all come from their own farms.

At a table in the middle of the market, Marty Roach sat eating the chicken taco she just purchased. She brought her niece Laura, who was visiting from Grass Valley. "We do not have a winter farmers' market in Grass Valley," says Roach's niece. "I am so impressed, everything is so fresh; it is so interesting." Roach particularly likes the variety of what can be found: the bread, pastries, cheeses, flowers, the olive oil and honey, soap, as well as the prepared Afghani, Mexican or Chinese food.

"I can't see what could improve this market," she says.

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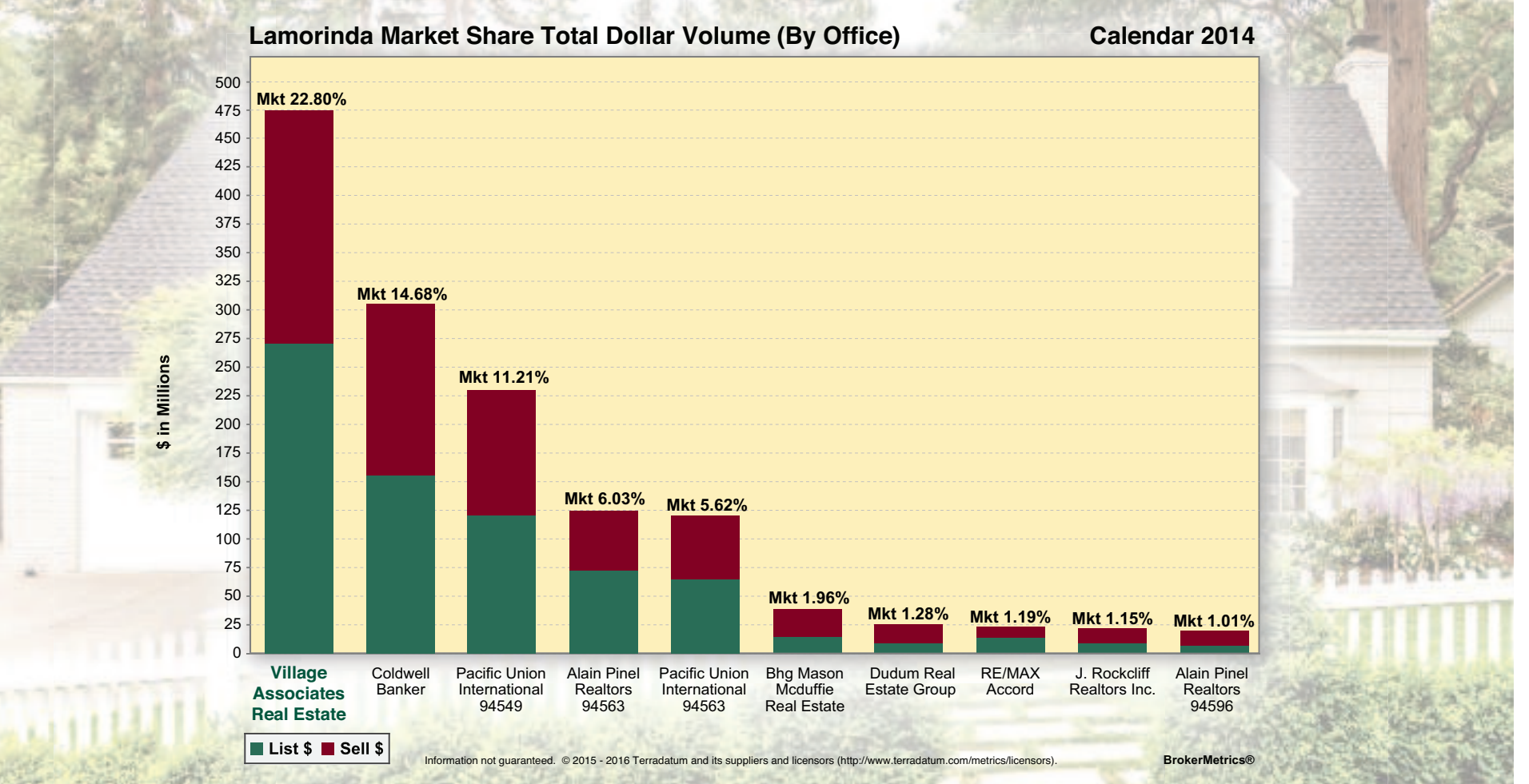


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