



Lettuce on SBALT's Brandenburg conservation easement.

SBALT NEWS

What is soil quality, and why should we care?

By Paul Hain

More than just “dirt,” soil is the combination of minerals, clay, and sand in various ratios that hold water and nutrients while allowing for oxygen to enter the rooting zone of plants. Healthy, productive soils are also alive with bacteria, fungi, and other forms of life that facilitate the transfer and breakdown of nutrients and food for plants.

On the Central Coast we are blessed with a great combination of climate and soils that

San Benito Agricultural



support a wide range of agricultural operations growing a cornucopia of crops that not only feed us locally, but also the nation

and the world. Part of the San Benito Agricultural Land Trust's (SBALT) mission is to conserve regionally significant lands for agricultural production. We recognize that even though we are surrounded by a seemingly endless supply of farmland, our high quality soils are a finite resource and worthy of conservation.



Healthy, productive soils are alive with bacteria.

I was fortunate to study Crop Science at Cal Poly - San Luis Obispo a few years ago, and we learned that soil quality is the starting point for good agricultural production. The quantity and quality of irrigation water is important as well.

We must ask ourselves -- is it important to support domestic food production? Issues do not exist within bubbles either, so let's not forget that water policy and labor issues related to agriculture and the environment also impact our ability to produce food on the Central Coast.

Locally, SBALT works with landowners to preserve productive farm and ranch soils in our beautiful county that produce a stunning variety of vegetables, fruit, nuts, and meat. This is a great time of year to look around as you walk, cycle, or drive through the countryside to appreciate the diversity of crops that San Benito's high quality soils support.

We invite you to join us in our efforts to protect more of these vital soils. Learn more about your local land trust at www.sanbenitolandtrust.org. Subscribe to our mailing list to receive invitations to monthly hikes at our protected properties (not normally open to the public). And remember, it's not just “dirt”! ■