

Stewarding the land for future generations

By Laura Kirschmann

Growing up, every fall my family gathered in the orchards to pick walnuts. I would go to school with green-stained hands darkened by the husks – a mark of the season’s work. My grandmother, uncle, and father instilled in me a respect for the land. They tended the trees, knowing the importance of keeping the orchards healthy. Today, as I see those same trees aging and the land changing hands, I reflect on what it means to be a steward -- not just for one harvest and not just for a few acres of walnut trees but for the lasting connection between people and the land.

Caring for the land goes beyond simply protecting it. It’s about actively nurturing it so that future generations can enjoy its beauty, resources, and wildlife. At the San Benito Agricultural Land Trust (SBALT), stewardship is at the heart of everything we

do. It means rolling up our sleeves to restore habitats, remove invasive species, maintain trails, and ensure that conserved lands remain healthy and productive.

Of course, land stewardship has its challenges: funding, engaging the community, and managing access in a way that balances public enjoyment with conservation goals. Changing environmental conditions and limited staffing also make this work complex. One thing is certain -- effective stewardship is not done alone. It takes partnerships, collaboration, and a shared commitment to protecting the lands of San Benito County.

This is why we are thrilled to have initiated a conservation effort that recently completed the first step in permanently protecting the 586-acre San Antonio Ranch in San Juan Bautista. The Conservation Fund, with financial support from the Wildlife Conservation Network and Peninsula Open

and managing access in a way that balances public enjoyment with conservation goals. Changing environmental conditions and limited staffing



SBALT has initiated a conservation effort that recently completed the first step in permanently protecting the 586-acre San Antonio Ranch in San Juan Bautista.

Space Trust, acquired the ranch from its 100-year-long former owner, the Breen Family. Now, SBALT must raise the funds to acquire and steward this land. With our community’s generosity, we will succeed and, thereby, support our local ranchers, expand a critical wildlife corridor linking the Gabilan Range to the Santa Cruz Mountains, and take a step forward in preserving the

natural beauty of our county.

Are you interested in being part of this work? Visit sanbenitolandtrust.org to learn more about the lands we protect, donate toward long-term stewardship, or join us for our monthly Ranch Days to see stewardship in action. Every effort, big or small, makes a difference. Together, we can keep our landscapes thriving. ■