



SBALT Board Member Gretchen Lester, and SBALT Staff Lynn Overtree, Michael Panitchpakdi, and Laura Kirschmann at the 2025 CCLT Conference at Tenaya Lodge.

## SBALT NEWS

# Stewarding San Benito: A personal perspective

By Gretchen Lester,  
SBALT Board Member

When I look out my home windows or while driving around San Benito, I am constantly struck by the beauty of the land we inhabit. It is because of this beauty that I first got involved with the San Benito Agricultural Land Trust. I am a "new Californian," living here just over a decade, and I wanted to support organizations doing work close to my home. I joined the Public Relations Committee last August, and the executive board in November. While I do not have a background in land preservation, I do have an interest in promoting the agricultural and rural nature of our county. Through this volunteer position, I was able to attend the California Council of Land Trusts conference with SBALT's three staff members. The conference centered on how the water, land, and fire bring all of us together – the native peoples, the ranchers,

San Benito Agricultural



the farmers, and the public. I was inspired by those who work to create access to private lands, help protect lands for our future generations, and mitigate the increasing dangers we face from natural disasters.

Our land trusts are natural capital – assets that can help us be more resilient and help with disaster reduction. This requires stewardship of the land – perhaps through invasive species removal, rehabilitating natural habitats, and working with our Indigenous populations on cultural burns. We have an active board that promotes volunteerism and staff to help guide us with their expertise.

If you value the lands, rivers, and watersheds that we live amongst and have the time or resources to help support SBALT, I highly encourage you to get involved. It is heartening to see the work around our state that dedicated professionals are addressing, but even more so, it is amazing to hear stories of volunteers who come out because they love the land, finding that it connects us even more than we might understand. Projects like stabilizing and painting our iconic barn off Highway 156 are a reminder that we can come together to do amazing things, and together, we can tap into the many opportunities provided by our beautiful lands. Visit [www.sanbenitolandtrust.org](http://www.sanbenitolandtrust.org) to learn more. ■