



Michael Reeves and Sara Steiner working with local landowner, Dave Brigantino, on conservation of Soap Lake Ranch. Above right: An SBALT members' dinner at the Morris' home in 2002.

SBALT NEWS

San Benito Agricultural Land Trust celebrates 30 years

By Emily Renzel, Board Secretary

On November 8, 1993, Paul Hain, Mark Gibson, Richard Smith, Mike Cullinan, Elliot Swank, Chuck Doglione, Mary Paxton, Mike Novo, Franz Schneider, Bill Tiffany, Matt Escover, and Joe Morris assembled to found the San Benito Agricultural Land Trust. They were farmers, ranchers, local business owners, and San Benito County residents concerned about the continuity of local food production, our rural lifestyle, floodplains, wildlife, financial security, community health, and many other issues that remain priorities for SBALT today. Their number one concern was the preservation of irreplaceable agricultural lands in San Benito County.

The Brandenburg Easement on 68 acres of prime agricultural soils was a mitigation project for San Juan Oaks Golf Club and SBALT's first acquisition in 1997. On November 12, 2004, then President Paul Hain, on behalf of SBALT, received the deed to 522 acres of grazing and open space lands surrounding the Rancho Larios housing development in San Juan Bautista – the first property for SBALT to own in fee title.

Over the years, SBALT has accepted conservation easements on 5 other properties – Cook Ranch, Wilkinson Ranch, Soap Lake Ranch, Silva Ranch, and Foster Ranch. In September 2021, with our partner The Trust for Public Land, SBALT completed acquisition of the 540-acre Nyland Property



adjoining our Rancho Larios property on the south side of Highway 156 in San Juan Bautista.

Several other projects are in progress, and by the end of 2023, SBALT will have protected more than 7,000 acres of agricultural land in San Benito County.

For the first 25 years of SBALT's existence, it was an all-volunteer organization. In 2018, two part-time contract staff were hired. Since then, it has been on an upward trajectory, with heightened activity and the achievement of national land trust accreditation in 2022.

All of this is thanks to the hard work and vision of the original 12 who founded the organization and those who followed in their footsteps. Happy 30th birthday, SBALT!

For more information and invitations to SBALT's 30th Anniversary celebrations throughout the year, visit www.sanbenitolandtrust.org. Follow us on Facebook and Instagram @sanbenitolandtrust. ■



SBALT booth at the fair in 2005.