



Spring calf, Gabilan Ranch. Photo by Jeffrey Mundell.

CONSERVATION

Ranchers use cattle to achieve healthy rangelands

Editor's Note: This is the second in a series of articles looking at the various parts of the local cattle industry.

By Karminder Brown

Driving along the back roads and highways of San Benito County in the spring, it's hard not to notice the green hills, blooming buckeye trees, and calves frolicking beside their mothers. These pastoral scenes are not only pretty to look at, but also provide ecological benefits to the land and income for the County's ranching community.

Cowherds owned by the rancher – known in the industry as “cow-calf operations” -- are one of the key aspects of the beef industry in the United States and comprise approximately one-third of the cattle on San Benito County ranches. Several of the San Benito Agricultural Land Trust (SBALT)'s conservation properties support cow-calf operations.

In addition to fertilizing and turning the soil, cow-calf operations allow land managers to have control over the animals' diet and graz-

ing practices to meet specific goals. For example, a cow-calf herd that is certified organic brings a premium price to the rancher, providing an economic incentive to manage the cattle using no artificial supplements or pesticides on the land.

According to SBALT Board member and Gabilan Cattle Company owner, Michael Reeves, their cow-calf operation

enables them to manage for biodiversity. Ranch manager Jeffrey Mundell explains, “We use herd effect, and the trample action of hooves, to push back the oats, which allows other plants to establish.”

There were an estimated 47,000 head of cattle in 2017 in San Benito County, according to the latest crop report.* Roughly 15,000 of those were cows and calves, bringing in an estimated \$16M of revenue to County businesses. Visit www.sanbenitolandtrust.org to help protect our healthy rangelands. ■

*Source: <http://cosb.us/wp-content/uploads/2017-San-Benito-County-Crop-Report.pdf>

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Above left: Cow-calf pair, Gabilan Ranch, San Juan Bautista. Photo by Jeffrey Mundell. Above right: Lupines blooming in pasture, Gabilan Ranch. Photo by Karminder Brown.