

Silva Ranch agricultural conservation easement in the San Juan Valley



SBALT REPORT

Annual easement monitoring with SBALT

By Lynn Overtree

Lettuce was just planted, each perfectly spaced from the next, with rich, dark soil between the rows. I am grateful knowing that this land will produce food "forever" because it is protected by an agricultural conservation easement.

A conservation easement, like a road or utility easement, conveys rights of the land to a third party. The landowner sells or donates their right to develop the land and retains all other property ownership rights. This means that farm and ranch owners continue to run their agricultural businesses on the land as before. The recipient of the development right is a nonprofit



or government entity. When the land is sold, the easement remains with the land.

I am a conservation land manager, and I conduct the annual monitoring for San Benito Agricultural Land Trust (SBALT), the nonprofit conservation easement holder for this property. By visiting each farm or ranch once a year to confirm that the easement agreement is honored, easement holders ensure the legal integrity of this tool. This is also my opportunity to connect with the landowner and to appreciate their commitment to agriculture.

And annual monitoring gives me the chance to observe up close the other benefits these working lands provide to our community: open space, watershed health, and habitat for wildflowers, birds, and other wildlife. Next, I'm off to check on a rangeland conservation easement. I hope to see the cattle again this year -- and perhaps that golden eagle which makes the ranch its home. ■

Learn more about SBALT at www.sanbenitolandtrust.org.



Lynn Overtree monitoring an SBALT conservation easement in the San Juan Valley. Below: Cattle on the Wilkinson Ranch conservation easement in Panoche.



Wildflowers on grazing land protected by an SBALT easement

