

THE
AG LAND TRUST

M A G A Z I N E

FALL
2025



- 2 ■ Urban Sprawl Threatens the Cornerstone of our Economy
- 3 ■ Cover Story: The Bi-Partisan Push to Preserve Farmlands
- 5 ■ In the Community





PRESERVING FARMLAND SINCE 1984

Our Mission Statement

It is the purpose of the Ag Land Trust to assist in the preservation and protection of all productive and important agricultural, open space and historical lands in Monterey County (and adjacent areas). Such action will contribute directly to the social, cultural, environmental and economic well being of the County while enhancing its unique character as a desirable place to live and work.



CONTENTS

FALL 2025 / THE **URBAN SPRAWL** ISSUE

- 2 FROM THE DESK OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**
Urban Sprawl Threatens the Cornerstone of our Economy
- 3 COVER STORY**
The Bi-Partisan Push to Preserve Farmlands
- 5 IN THE COMMUNITY**
What ALT has been up to in 2025
- 6 UPDATES**
Over 598 acres of New Easements
- 7 FROM THE PRESIDENT**
Heather Golden Jensen
- 8 DIRECTORS & STAFF**
Meet our Dedicated Board of Directors and Staff



ON THE COVER
Harvest time in
Castroville

URBAN SPRAWL THREATENS THE CORNERSTONE OF OUR ECONOMY



Marc Del Piero,
CEO & MANAGING DIRECTOR,
AG LAND TRUST

Every year, over 400 diverse agricultural commodities are produced on the prime and productive agricultural lands of our state. The irreplaceable richness of our soils, coupled with our rare Mediterranean climate, makes us very economically unique.

With the almost unbelievable productivity of California's agriculture industry, most national and international "observers" hold our farming industry in awe. **Yet, farming in our state faces a metastatic threat "from within" that places our unique status in international agriculture at great risk. That risk comes from urban sprawl and the resulting irreparable loss of our productive soils and farmlands.**

To be certain, prime and productive farmlands on the Central Coast are vulnerable to urban growth policies by cities which approve huge developments that pave over the very soils upon which agribusiness is completely dependent. Most cities in the Salinas Valley have failed to take any enforceable actions to protect our agricultural soils in their adopted General Plans or their zoning ordinances.

Since 2014, California cities and counties have been legally mandated (by a judicial decision) to mitigate for the loss of farmlands resulting from their sprawl developments. City councils rarely even acknowledge these legal obligations. And this is nowhere more apparent than in the massive urban developments that are taking place on the prime farmlands south of Salinas.

Cities of the Salinas Valley and their non-local developers are pushing forward huge urban developments that will permanently affect the quality of life of our current residents and greatly reduce the agriculturally producing farmlands that sustain the largest segment of our economy and the jobs that support our local families.

2025 FACTS: WHAT IS HAPPENING TO THE SALINAS VALLEY

(according to city records, Monterey County LAFCO records, and LandWatch reports)

1. The City of Salinas is working to build **8,508 more housing units**. 4,340 houses (West Area Specific Plan) + 3,911 (Central Area Specific Plan) + 257 (Ferrasci Business Park)
2. The City of Gonzales is pushing forward the development of **6,121 more housing units** (in the Sphere of Influence). 3,498 (approved by the City Council) + 2,623 (Puente Del Monte)
3. The City of Soledad is planning **2,392 more housing units**. (Miramonte), in their Sphere of Influence.

These massive developments will create **17,021 new houses** just between Salinas and Soledad. And add over 100,000 more traffic trips per day on our already congested highways and county roads.

CalTrans has no plans or money to widen CA. State Highway 101 to address the resulting traffic crisis. The Salinas Valley groundwater basin, upon which we are 100% dependent, is massively over drafted and none of the cities are mandating that their developers pay for any new water supply projects. Contrary to tired, old, and unkept politicians' promises, **most of the proposed houses will NOT be affordable to our current Monterey County residents, given our average local household incomes.** Their developers generally are building "commuter housing" for Silicon Valley employees who do not live here. And none of the cities have specified mandated mitigations for the massive loss of our farmlands and the on-farm jobs that they will destroy.

These are the reasons that the Ag Land Trust is working every day to preserve the farmlands of the Salad Bowl of the World...because once they are paved over and the out-of-town developers are gone, only our local taxpayers remain to pay the costs of urban sprawl, traffic jams, sewage system expansions, and water shortages.



THE BI-PARTISAN PUSH TO PRESERVE FARMLANDS

The Bi-Partisan Push to Preserve Farmlands: The Ag Land Trust is a non-partisan, IRS Section 501c3 non-profit organization that was established over 40 years ago. Our Board consists of individuals from various different backgrounds who are collectively committed to helping farmers and preserving our agricultural industry. We were founded to try to save the Salinas and Pajaro Valleys from the metastatic urban sprawl by cities that has decimated California's original, massively productive agricultural regions.

In the 1950's, the state's most economically productive agricultural county was Los Angeles. In the 1960's through the 1980's, it was the Orange County/San Diego County region and Santa Clara County. From the 1990's through the 2000's (even during the Great Recession), uncontrolled urban development and poorly planned subdivisions paved over massive acreages of prime farmlands in San Joaquin, Sacramento, Stanislaus, and Riverside Counties.

Despite all this so-called "progress", California's historically unmatched agriculture industry, its' tremendously innovative farmers and the thousands of on-farm jobs that they have created, and the singular natural resource upon which our collective food supply depends (our state's productive farmlands) have all been treated by politicians and bureaucrats as if they were simply expendable...hard-working people and irreplaceable resources just waiting to be sacrificed on the "altar of urban sprawl".

But, remarkably, the massive loss of California's, and our nation's, agricultural production capacity has finally been recognized. It appears that the era of benign neglect of our agriculture industry by elected officials may be ending. On both the state and national levels, major political changes are now taking place that are significantly elevating the protection and preservation of our nation's farmlands.

On July 8, 2025, President Trump's U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke L. Rollins along with U.S. Secretary of War Pete Hegseth, and U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem announced the next pillar



of their “Make Agriculture Great Again” initiative: **USDA’s National Farm Security Action Plan.**

This historic plan elevates American agriculture as a key element of our nation’s national security, addressing urgent threats from foreign adversaries (who are buying up our farmlands) and strengthening the resilience of our nation’s food and agricultural systems. Moreover, the Administration has renewed its emphasis AND FUNDING of the Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) Program. REPI is the bi-partisan funding program, administered by the Department of War which provides grant funds to non-profit farmland conservation organizations to purchase agricultural lands and farmland conservation easements adjacent to military reservations, thereby protecting our military training missions and permanently protecting farmlands from urbanization and foreign acquisition.

Ag Land Trust has received (and continues to receive) millions of dollars from the federal REPI program that we deliver directly to American farmland owners who are participants in this hugely successful ag land protection program. Through REPI funding we have protected over 20,000 acres and helped our ranchers to remain successful with these grant funds.

Additionally, in Sacramento on September 19, 2025, Governor Newsom extended a signature state program (Cap-and-Invest) aimed at controlling air pollution emissions through the preservation of farmlands and limitations on urban sprawl through 2045. Originally authored by State Senator John Laird and signed into law by Governor Schwarzenegger, the “cap-and-trade” charges on major pollution producers are re-invested to boost carbon removal/air quality protection projects. One of the most important state programs funded by this legislation is the Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation (SALC) Program that provides the Ag Land Trust with millions of dollars in grant funds with which we purchase farmland conservation easements from willing farmers and landowners on the Central Coast. Thousands of acres of prime farmlands in the Salinas and Pajaro Valleys have been and will be protected from the urban sprawl of cities with these grant funds that the Ag Land Trust delivers directly to our local landowners.

After 40 years, the Ag Land Trust has protected over 50,000 acres of agricultural lands from urban sprawl. But, the need to protect and preserve our region’s irreplaceable farmlands will not diminish, even with these visionary programs. This is why the Ag Land Trust continues to work every day to help preserve our agribusiness industry and the quality of life that we value on the Central Coast.





AG LAND TRUST IN THE COMMUNITY

Ag Land Trust Activities in 2025



1



2



3



4



5



6



7

Photo 1: Camille and Marty Polson - BB & BBQ
Photo 2: Congressman Jimmy Panetta, Marc Del Piero, Slavic American Cultural Organization
Photo 3: Lea and Aaron Johnson, Duda Farm Fresh Foods Mascot, Adriana Frias, Lisa Dobbins
Photo 4: Rodeo President Steve Davis, Duda Farm Fresh Foods Mascot, Aaron Johnson
Photo 5: ALT Sponsors the Salinas Rodeo 2025, Photo: Kelsey Floyd
Photo 6: Aaron Johnson, Gracie and Wyatt Meiggs, David Gill
Photo 7: Susan and David Gill - BB & BBQ





AG LAND TRUST UPDATE



OUR NEWEST CONSERVATION
EASEMENTS TOTAL OVER

598

Salinas Valley acres

By the time that this edition of the Ag Land Trust Magazine arrives, ALT will have completed the purchase of three more agricultural land conservation easements totalling over 598 acres here in the Salinas Valley. The owners of the Wimer Ranch (north of Gonzales), the Francioni Ranch (east of Chualar), and the beautiful Boggiatto Ranch (just south of Castroville) have all guaranteed the preservation of ownership of their farms for their heirs. They have all voluntarily sold only their development rights for fair market value to ALT, and all three of the ranches will continue to be farmed, producing some of the finest vegetables in the world while significantly reducing the threat of urban sprawl in the Salinas Valley.

If you and your family want to be remembered for **saving open spaces and protecting farmland**

Like this



Instead of allowing this...



or this...



Stop by the office today!

We work with landowners to protect their lands from development, to provide capital funding, to preserve their estates, and to prevent unchecked expansion of cities onto ag land.



Our Agricultural Lands are the Largest Driver of our Local Economy!



PRESERVING OUR AGRICULTURAL HERITAGE

“As our communities grow and urban development expands, preserving productive agricultural lands has **never been more critical.**”



Our home on the Central Coast of California is the location of some of the most fertile and irreplaceable farmland in the country. From row crops to vineyards, orchards and grazing lands, this region’s agricultural landscape not only feeds our local communities and

the world, but also supports our state’s economy and global food systems.

As our communities grow and urban development expands, preserving productive agricultural lands has never been more critical. You can drive down city roads and see where once fertile productive farmlands were. They are now covered by concrete and structures, forever changing our landscape and our agricultural productivity. We must be very thoughtful about where urban development takes place. This requires city and county planners, planning agencies and commissions, elected officials, developers, and nonprofits coming together to plan for the economic future of the Salinas Valley’s agribusiness industries.

Ag Land Trust, as a nonprofit farmland protection organization, plays a vital role in this mission, partnering with landowners, farmers, and ranchers to preserve vital agricultural lands from urban sprawl.

Our team of employees, essential specialists, and board members have paved the way for success by preserving over 50,000 acres so far. And we will continue this important mission.

This effort is ensuring that future generations can continue to grow food, steward the land, and sustain our rural economies. Through conservation easements and long-term land management, we help maintain the integrity of our agricultural landscapes while supporting local food systems, biodiversity, and open space. By safeguarding these lands, we not only honor our agricultural heritage... we secure our future. These agricultural protection easements prevent developer speculation and farmlands from being sold off for urban sprawl, ensuring that our iconic landscapes of Monterey and San Luis Obispo Counties remain in agricultural production for generations to come.

With Ag Land Trust leadership and your support, we can ensure that the Central Coast remains a vibrant hub for sustainable farming, local food production, and wildlife habitat. Your involvement can make a lasting impact—helping to keep our fields, vineyards, and ranches not only as scenic treasures but as productive, working lands that feed our future.

Together, we can protect the land that sustains us.

Heather Golden Jensen
PRESIDENT, AG LAND TRUST



MEET OUR DIRECTORS & STAFF



Marc Del Piero, CEO & Managing Director

Our CEO/Managing Director was our Founding President in 1984. A former county Supervisor, an attorney, and a past member of the State Water Resources Control Board, his family has farmed in Monterey and Santa Cruz Counties for four generations.



David Gill, Vice-President

Our Vice-President is the co-owner of Rio Farms. A South County resident, he oversees farming on over 14,500 acres in the Salinas Valley.



Anker Fano

Director Fano, a native of Monterey County, is the President and CEO of Pacific Valley Bank. He regularly provides detailed financial assistance and business banking services to the largest agri-business firms in Central California.



Heather Golden Jensen, President

Our Board President is the principal owner of Golden Ag Assistance, LLC. She holds a California Real Estate license and has provide detailed technical consulting to hundreds of ag clients in Central California.



Louis Frizzell, Treasurer

Our Board Treasurer has been a licensed CPA for over four decades and provides financial planning services to numerous major farming concerns and landowners.



Aaron Johnson

Our Past Board President is the Senior Attorney and Shareholder at Aaron Johnson and Associates, Attorneys-at-Law. He specializes in land use, agricultural business law, complex real property transactions, and family law.





MEET OUR DIRECTORS & STAFF



Laurence London, Secretary

Our Board Secretary is an independent ag consultant and the owner of Fitotec Consulting, LLC.

He has been licensed as a Pest Control Advisor, a Certified Crop Advisor, and served as an adjunct Professor of Ag Innovation at Hartnell College.



Robert Roach

Director Roach served county farmers for 31 years. He was the Assistant Agricultural Commissioner for Monterey County. He holds a Bachelor's and a Master's degree, and is an expert in pesticide and plant quarantine issues and farmland protection.



Mike Novo

Director Novo holds a degree in Geography and served as the Director of Planning for Monterey County for over a decade. He was responsible for ALL land use decisions within the 3,771 square miles of the unincorporated area of Monterey County.



Tom AmRhein

A lifetime resident of the Pajaro Valley, Mr. AmRhein spent 40 years in the strawberry industry and was President of the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau. He retired as Vice-President of Naturipe Berry Growers, Inc., the oldest Strawberry marketing organization in California.



Richard Nutter

Our Past Board President, is famous throughout California after his 27-year tenure as Monterey County's Agricultural Commissioner. He is recognized as an expert on farmland protection issues, pesticide/fertilizer regulations, and statewide ag policies.



Camille Polson, Director of Finance and Property Management

Director of Finance and a native to the Salinas Valley, she has worked for Ag Land Trust since 2017. Camille is a proud Mom to a new son, and enjoys travelling with her family.



Madison Creech

Our newest employee, Madison Creech is our Administrative Analyst. A recent CSUMB grad, Madison was our student intern and now brings remarkable map making skills to ALT.



MEET OUR BOARD MEMBER

Robert "Bob" Roach

ALT Board of Directors Member Robert "Bob" Roach began work for the Monterey County Agricultural Commissioner in 1987 as an Agricultural Inspector. He has dedicated his life to serving the needs of Monterey County's farmers and agri-business professionals. His commitment to the protection of our agricultural resources on the Central Coast has been widely recognized in the industry.

During the course of his remarkable and successful career, Bob became responsible for Monterey County's programs of pesticide use enforcement, plant quarantine, and F&V standardization. He distinguished himself during his service when he was responsible for the Monterey County Certified Organic and Weights and Measures program. Bob actually served as the county's interim Agricultural Commissioner for a period of time. He retired in 2018 as the Chief Assistant Agricultural Commissioner of Monterey County. He subsequently served for three years as the first Executive Director of the Monterey County Cannabis Industry Association.

Director Roach obtained his Bachelor of Science in Environmental Science from Stockton State University in New Jersey and later received his Executive Master's Degree in Public Administration from Golden Gate University.

Before coming to work for the County of Monterey, Bob worked in the private sector as the manager of a wholesale tropical foliage and garden plant nursery, and as a manager of a vineyard. Bob also was a grower for a landscape tree farm and served as the owner of a landscape maintenance and pest control business in Northern California. Bob also played a major role in establishing the county's farmland protection policies in the Monterey County General Plan.

Bob has broad knowledge of Monterey County agriculture and extensive experience with county land use issues and policies related to agriculture. His commitment to the preservation of agriculture on the Central Coast is unmatched.



Presorted Standard
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 164
Salinas, CA

AG LAND TRUST
P.O. BOX 1731
SALINAS, CA 93902

831-422-5868

www.AgLandTrust.org

-PUBLIC NOTICE-

STAKEHOLDER NOTIFICATION

The land trust accreditation program recognizes land conservation organizations that meet national quality standards for protecting important natural places and working lands forever. Ag Land Trust is pleased to announce it is applying for accreditation. A public comment period is now open.

The Land Trust Accreditation Commission, an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance, conducts an extensive review of each applicant's policies and programs. After 40 years of successful farmland conservation projects protecting over 50,000 acres, the Ag Land Trust's continuing pursuit of professional excellence now includes our goal of accreditation by the Land Trust Alliance Commission.

The Commission invites public input and accepts signed, written comments on pending applications. Comments must relate to how Ag Land Trust complies with national quality standards. These standards address the ethical and technical operation of a land trust. For the full list of standards see **www.landtrustaccreditation.org**.

To learn more about the accreditation program and to submit a comment, visit www.landtrustaccreditation.org, or email your comment to info@landtrustaccreditation.org. Comments may also be mailed to the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, Attn: Public Comments, 36 Phila Street, Suite 2, Saratoga Springs, NY 12866.



**LEARN MORE
OR DONATE
TODAY BY
SCANNING
OUR
QR CODE**

