



FALL 2020

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PROTECTING THE FARMS THAT FEED YOUR FAMILY



# IT HAS BEEN ANYTHING BUT BUSINESS AS USUAL

By CFT Past President, Ron Freitas

Wow! What an event filled two years it has been. As I reflect on my two years as President of California Farmland Trust, several thoughts come to mind. First, neither the board nor I would have ever dreamed that we would be where we are today. In June of 2018, we were concentrating on our recent merger with the Brentwood Agricultural Land Trust (BALT) in Contra Costa county, "branding" our new name California Farmland Trust, expanding our reach further in the San Joaquin Valley to Madera and Fresno counties, renewing our Accreditation, and completing eighteen easement transactions totaling 1,533 acres, including our first three in Madera county. Additionally, the board appointed a Financial Planning Committee and embarked on a study of how we can plan for a more secure financial future. Business was humming right along at a brisk and rewarding pace.

Then, as we all know, along came March of 2020, and the COVID-19 pandemic which changed everything. For the first time in 12 years the office was closed, in-person board meetings were canceled, and everyone began to readjust and define a new normal. Our very capable and nimble staff was quickly able to transition to working from home. Quickly we were back in business and soon board and committee meetings were conducted via "Zoom". CFT had been issued a huge challenge, met it head-on, and adapted with new ways of conducting business.

As I write this months into this pandemic, it is very clear to me that the mission of the California Farmland Trust, the protection of the finest farmland in the world, is as important as it has ever been. This was very evident as I was shopping recently and walked past several depleted and empty shelves of food staples such as rice and beans and noticed in the meat and produce sections

that the variety of products offered was less than what I had come to expect. I hope that one of lessons society has learned through all of this is that our

domestic food production and processing is as essential as it has ever been. Locally grown fruits, vegetables, proteins and dairy products provide for our residents and are essential to both our security and economy. This speaks volumes to the importance of protecting the finest farmland in the world, for without the farmland there is no food.

As I leave the office of board president, I want to express my sincere thanks to the Board of Directors for their support during the past two years. Without their guidance, wisdom and dedication we would not have accomplished all that we have done. Lastly, I need to thank and commend our Executive Director Charlotte Mitchell and the team she has assembled, Chelsea Molina, Katie Otto and Aundriea Montzingo, for all of their hard work and dedication -- especially with the added challenges they have faced and are facing in this new way of conducting business. They saw the challenge, met it, and made it work for them and us.

In closing, I want to welcome our new President, Jon Harvey. I have no doubt CFT will continue to thrive under his leadership.



## OUR MISSION

Help Farmers Protect the Best Farmland in the World

## CURRENTLY SERVING

Sacramento, San Joaquin, Contra Costa, Stanislaus, Merced, and Madera counties



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Chelsea Molina  
Aundriea Montzingo  
Katie Otto

## ORANGE YOU GLAD WE HAVE FARMLAND

Thanks to our partners at Raley's, California Farmland Trust and California Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom (CFAITC) we are excited to share our latest collaboration - *Orange You Glad We Have Farmland!* The educational curriculum is intended to provide third to fifth grade elementary students with a hands-on activity to learn what percentage of land is available to grow the food that feeds the world.

While the effort was started in late 2019, the resource is particularly relevant right now given most schools are doing distance learning. The activity on the poster is something kids can do at home, or watch their teacher demonstrate in the classroom, while discussing the importance of protecting farmland – not to mention, it helps them understand fractions!

We want to thank CFT Growth and Education Committee Member, Monica Bianchi for her contributions to the project, including filming a demonstration of the activity with her daughter, which can be found on our website.

To download the poster, visit [www.cafarmtrust.org](http://www.cafarmtrust.org) and be on the lookout for more educational opportunities and resources surrounding the importance of protecting farmland with our *Orange You Glad We Have Farmland* curriculum.

**ORANGE**  
you glad we have  
**FARMLAND?**

**LEARNING WHERE OUR FOOD AND FIBER COMES FROM IS AN IMPORTANT LESSON IN LIFE.**

Learn how much land is used to grow food for the world's population

What percentage of the land do you think it takes to grow all of the food that we need to feed the world?

**IMAGINE THE EARTH AS AN ORANGE...**

- Approximately 75% of the earth is covered in water.
- 22% of the earth is deserts, swamps, mountains, polar regions, or land that is too rocky, wet, or hot to grow food.
- This 3% of the earth is acceptable for farming and represents what humans depend on for growing food.

**3% Available Farmland**

**Knowing the importance of keeping farmland healthy by participating in recycling programs, water conservation, and not littering can help keep the land healthy to produce the food that feeds the world. We can all become custodians of the land by accepting the following challenges:**

- Learn the difference between lands that are good for farming and the type of lands that are good for shopping malls and homes.
- Practice caring for the land by conserving water, not littering, and recycling.
- Support the land by eating California grown foods.
- Learn about conservation easements that allow landowners to protect their farmland forever. When farmland is protected, we all benefit by having food to eat and natural resources, like wildlife, that farmland provides.

**HOW WILL WE CONTINUE TO GROW ENOUGH FOOD FOR THE GROWING POPULATION?**

Visit California Farmland Trust's website  
**CAFARMTRUST.ORG**

**Raley's**

**CALIFORNIA FARMLAND TRUST**

**Learn About Ag**

## SPONSOR SPOTLIGHT

### E.J. Gallo

In 1933, brothers Ernest and Julio Gallo set out on what would become a great adventure, when they founded the E. & J. Gallo Winery. From humble beginnings producing just 177,000 gallons of wine in Modesto, to over a dozen wineries selling over 100 brands in 90 countries, E. & J. Gallo Winery has always remained a family company with an unwavering commitment to quality.

From its inception, E. & J. Gallo Winery has sought to turn challenges into opportunities and change into growth. And it has succeeded remarkably well in that endeavor. In 1966, it became the largest US winery by sales volume. And in 1972, Ernest and Julio were featured on the cover of Time Magazine. The company continued to press forward, being named the Best American Wine Producer by the International Wine & Spirits Competition in 2000.



**E&J. Gallo Winery**

Through all the opportunities and growth, Gallo has remained at its heart a family company, committed to making a difference in the communities where its team lives, works, and plays. The company proudly proclaims: "As a family-owned company, we believe in the importance of preserving and enhancing the land for future generations to enjoy. Co-founders Ernest and Julio Gallo laid the foundation for our commitment to the environment in the 1930's and it is still evident today in how we manage all aspects of our business. Adhering to sustainable practices that are environmentally sound, economically feasible and socially equitable, we educate and inspire others to conserve and preserve." As part of its commitment to preserving the land, Gallo is proud to support many nonprofits – including the California Farmland Trust. Gallo has been a supporter of CFT since its inception.

## MONITORING — PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

*By Vicky Boyd*

Every year, a band of volunteers drives the countryside checking California Farmland Trust (CFT) easements, noting changes in cropping patterns and verifying that the ground remains in agriculture as intended.

“Known as monitors, they are an important part of maintaining the integrity of agricultural conservation easements (ACE) put into the California Farmland Trust,” said CFT Executive Director Charlotte Mitchell.

“Monitoring has been an institutional practice since the very beginning,” she said. “Since the former Central Valley Farmland Trust until today, we have visited our farms annually and this will be an ongoing effort forever.”

### MORE THAN A CENTURY OF EXPERIENCE

In Merced County, the team of Mike Tanner, Lonnie Hendricks and Bill Weir collectively have more than a century of agricultural experience in the region.

“Mike, Lonnie and Bill are a key team in carrying out the monitoring because of their long careers devoted to agriculture,” Mitchell said. “Since they are a retired county ag commissioner and farm advisors, we could not be luckier to have them volunteering for this important job. They understand crops, farming practices and the farmers. They provide a key and familiar face to the organization as they interact with our landowners.”

Tanner, who spent 40 years in the Merced County Agricultural Commissioners’ office before retiring as the ag commissioner, has long supported preserving prime farmland.

“I’m a big advocate of saving the best farmland because we can’t make any more,” he said. “I’m an advocate of putting homes on the poorer ground. Unfortunately, they’ve taken a lot of the good land and put it under concrete.”

Tanner still farms almonds on about 15 acres that were part of his family’s original homestead dating back to 1921, and he is surrounded by CFT easements.

“My grandfather had a dairy with 35-40 cows, which was a pretty good-sized dairy back then,” Tanner said. “He was always diversifying. He had almonds, grapes, of course alfalfa and pasture, corn for silage. I always tagged along with my grandfather as the oldest grandson in the family, so I had my hands in ag all my life.”



CFT BOARD MEMBER TOM ROGERS ASSISTS CONSERVATION DIRECTOR, CHELSEA MOLINA ON A MONITORING VISIT IN MADERA COUNTY.

Tanner also was a founding member of the Central Valley Farmland Trust Board of Directors after he retired from Merced County in 2003.

### THE MERCED STEWARDSHIP TEAM

After serving on the CVFT board, Tanner joined the California Farmland Trust Transactions, Stewardship and Monitoring Committee -- known informally as the stewardship team -- at the request of CFT Secretary Maxwell Norton. Team members include Hendricks, a University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE) tree nut farm advisor who retired in 2001, and Weir, a UCCE agronomy farm advisor emeritus.

“We’re all so familiar with the county – we know where all of these ranches are,” said team leader Tanner. “When they were farm advisors, we always had such a great relationship.”



When Tanner and Norton asked him to join the team after retiring, Hendricks said he thought it would be a fun way to stay in touch with farmers he knew during his 41 years with Cooperative Extension.

“I figured this is just a chance for me to run around with them for a couple of days and see old farmers I’ve known for years,” Hendricks said. “We’ve really had such good luck with it. I don’t think there’s been any year where we’ve had a violation or had much of a question with anything because the people who are in the trust really want to conserve the farmland. Actually, the monitoring is very simple because everybody is on the same side.”

Weir, who spent 36 years with Cooperative Extension before retiring in 2002, still conducts research and consults to “stay busy in the field – that’s what I like to do.”

Having Tanner ask him to join the monitoring team was reason enough to become involved.



MONITORING VISITS OFTEN INVOLVED VOLUNTEERS WALKING THE PROPERTY. HERE, LONGTIME VOLUNTEER, MIKE TANNER IS OVERLOOKING AN EASEMENT PROPERTY THAT IS CURRENTLY GROWING BLACK-EYED BEANS.

\* UNFORTUNATELY, DUE TO THE RESTRICTIONS IN PLACE FROM COVID-19, NOT PICTURED ARE LONNIE HENDRICKS AND BILL WEIR.

“But I believe we need to keep land in ag, for sure,” said Weir, who grew up on a cotton and vegetable farm outside of San Antonio, Texas. “Some of the best soil in the county is put to other uses, and it makes one feel uncomfortable.”

## ADAPTING TO COVID-19

The three typically spend a couple days each spring checking the thirty-four easements in Merced County. This year because of the COVID-19 outbreak, CFT staff and Trust President Ron Freitas conducted the monitoring following the proper protocols of social distancing and wearing masks.

“In this unusual beginning to 2020 when the pandemic was in full force and there was so much unknown about its impacts, we made the decision to not have our volunteers do the monitoring and potentially be exposed to the virus,” Mitchell said. “With a lot of devoted staff time and some newer technology, we finished our monitoring and reporting right on time.”

Weir agreed with the decision but said, “I miss seeing all of those good folks.”

In years past, Tanner said they first notified each landowner of the day and time they would be checking the property in case someone wondered about an unknown vehicle driving around slowly.

Although some landowners are pretty hands off, Tanner said at least a few like to ride with the team and visit with them as they make their inspections.

As the monitors drive the perimeters of each property, they note any changes in crops, which are allowed under the easement, as well as affirming established buildings. Several easements also have building envelopes that include houses, barns or shops.

The monitors may stop, get out and walk parts of the property. In addition, they take photos to document what they’ve seen.

“The main things we don’t want to see is housing development on an easement property,” Tanner said. “We make sure there’s nothing developed on land outside of any designated building envelopes or farmstead areas. We make sure the intent of the easement is upheld and it’s still ag land.”

For each easement, they fill out a brief report that is forwarded to CFT for its records. The Trust also shares the report with the landowner who has the easement as well as the agencies or other entities that provided funding for that specific land parcel.

## MONITORING DURING A PANDEMIC

### Message from Conservation Director, Chelsea Molina

Our annual monitoring looked a little different this year, but fortunately, we were able to wrap up our last visits in late June, keeping to our normal schedule, reporting out to our funding partners. While we were able to complete a few monitoring visits prior to the 'shelter in place' ordinances due to COVID-19, we had to postpone over half of our visits. By limiting in-person engagement with landowners this year, monitoring visits were low risk tasks and we were able to keep working while allowing for social distancing.

Monitoring, performed annually, is integral to our procedures and our obligation to steward farmland in perpetuity. While we are required to monitor our agricultural conservation easements each year, it also provides us with an opportunity to connect with landowners and understand changes on the farmland overtime, i.e. new crops, landowner changes, etc. Through annual monitoring, it is easier to maintain and document changes and it ensures compliance of protecting the conservation values on the farmland.

Before heading into the field for monitoring, we review the background of the property which entails reading over the previous year's monitoring reports, refamiliarizing with the Baseline Documentation Report and terms of the conservation easement, as well as studying maps of the property to ensure you're oriented and know what to keep an eye out for prior to arriving. We reach out the landowners prior to our visit to let them know we will be doing the monitoring and in normal years, invite them to join, if interested. We notify landowners of the visit date and time through our Pre-Monitoring Questionnaire, which is then sent back to us. When the landowners are unable to join for the visit, like this year, the questionnaire provides us with additional farm information or any new changes.

The task of stewarding 16,643 acres of farmland, covering 75 properties, would be impractical without eyes and feet on the ground. Our experienced and trained volunteer Stewardship Team helps us fulfill our responsibility of maintaining our farmland's conservation values and maintain on the ground connections with our landowners. We appreciate our landowner's and volunteer's patience and flexibility this year and look forward to meeting with them again next year and getting our volunteers back in the field, utilizing our new technology for monitoring. You can learn more about our volunteer's role in the monitoring process in this Legacy issue, and if you are interested in becoming involved, please don't hesitate to reach out.



## LANDSCAPE - DATA MANAGEMENT TOOL

This year CFT adopted the use of Landscape, a data management system for land conservation projects. The software makes easement management and the task of monitoring easier to manage; monitoring reports can be completed in the field, during a visit all from a cell phone. "As we faced so much uncertainty early on this year, it is was a great time to have Landscape at our fingertips during monitoring visits. We were able to dive into learning how to use the software and was able to put it to work in the field, tracking our monitoring route at each easement, filling out our questionnaire and uploading pictures while onsite. The amount of information at our fingertips has been extremely valuable and it has eliminated significant data entry time back at the office. We're able to provide reports to our easement holders and funders in a much more efficient and timely manner," shared Chelsea Molina, CFT's Conservation Director

*Land conservation software*  
**LANDSCAPE**



## 20,000 ACRES BY 2020

“Set a goal so big, that you can’t achieve it, until you grow into the person who can”

Back in 2014, California Farmland Trust set a bold goal of permanently protecting 20,000 acres of farmland, by the year 2020. Without a doubt, a great and worthy goal important to all of our future. We are proud to share of the progress that’s been made since that time. To date, 16,708 of productive agricultural lands have been permanently protected, there are numerous easements projects that were awarded in 2019, but won’t close until 2021, and the list of prospective easement holders continues to grow. We are so close, but the reality is we will not hit our goal this year. While it’s disappointing, in recent months staff and board members have often asked the bigger question – what are we doing to position ourselves to grow and reach the goal, and ensure we are protecting as much farmland as we can.



After all, a goal is supposed to stretch, force you to grow and frankly challenge you. 20,000 acres by 2020 did all of those things and CFT is better for it.

CFT examined our sustainability as a nonprofit, but more importantly, as a land trust that has an obligation to ensure our easements stay in agriculture forever. As stakeholders that value and appreciate the nutritious food that our farms produce, that is not an obligation we took lightly. As a result, CFT sought consultation to ensure our financial model would sustain basic operating needs of a land trust in perpetuity. Going through that exercise, asking the tough questions and diving into research was an exercise that gave staff and board members a better handle on our nonprofits finances as well as knowing there are buckets that need to be filled and we need to find partners to help fill them. We

**“WE HAVE SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASED OUR EASEMENT GRANT EFFORTS... IN 2019, CFT WAS AWARDED \$3.5 MILLION TO AID IN THE PERMANENT PROTECTION OF FARMLAND.”**

are well-positioned to survive the storm, but protecting farmland isn’t about surviving, it’s about thriving, and actively pursuing the permanent protection of farmland throughout California. We are currently working on strategies to fill those buckets and ensure they thrive.

In addition, we have significantly increased our easement grant efforts and guess what, it’s working. In 2019, CFT was awarded \$3.5 million to aid in the permanent protection of farmland. The landscape of grant funding is certainly changing, and we are refocusing our efforts to ensure our farmland focused applications remain relevant.

Staff and governance have grown as well. CFT is up to four fulltime staff members all with extensive agriculture, nonprofit and technical expertise. In addition, our Board and Trustee Council have added members who continue to diversify and strengthen, an already well-established and respected core.

There are many other changes, CFT has incurred in recent years all of which point toward positive strategic growth for the organization. So while we may not have achieved our goal, we are growing into an organization that will! We are grateful to our board, committee and Trustee Council members as well as donors, sponsors, landowners and friends who have shaped and influenced CFT to create goals we will grow to achieve!



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### Legacy



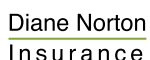
### Visionary



### Heritage



### Guardian



97% of every dollar donated goes directly to farmland conservation.  
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