

Bolinas ranch cuts preservation deal with MALT

Mark Prado, Marin Independent Journal, 11-28-14

One of California's oldest certified organic farms will remain free from development in perpetuity after the Marin Agricultural Land Trust completed a deal for development rights.

The agreement, which was announced earlier this week, involves the 239-acre Paradise Valley Ranch in Bolinas. The agreement ensures a more secure future for Bolinas' organic farming community, endangered fish and wildlife in the area, and the Martinelli family, which has owned the ranch since the 1940s.

Fresh Run Farm is located on the ranch and grows more than 40 varieties of organic produce for Bay Area restaurants, including Quince and Chez Panisse. In addition, family member Susan Martinelli grows organic fruit and makes jams and preserves, which she sells under the Creekside Gardens label in local markets.

"Paradise Valley Ranch has some of Marin's best soil and an amazing array of biodiversity," Peter Martinelli said. "For years I have dreamed of preserving the property. Now that this dream has come true."

Martinelli and his family approached MALT in 2010 about selling development rights on his family's land. MALT pays property owners for the development rights to their land and then saves the land for agriculture. The restriction stays with the land when it is passed on by inheritance or sale.

MALT members and Bolinas residents donated more than \$1 million toward the project. The California Wildlife Conservation Board provided a \$1.5 million grant, the first grant from the organization in support of a MALT purchase. The Martinellis themselves donated more than half of the value of the easement to MALT in honor of their grandparents Jordan and Genevieve Martinelli.

More than half of the property remains as riparian and woodland habitat, supporting the northern spotted owl and the California red-legged frog among other native plants and animals.

The farm is irrigated with water drawn from Pine Gulch Creek, which flows year-round through Paradise Valley Ranch on its way to the Bolinas Lagoon. This stream is one of the few in Marin that still support coho salmon and steelhead trout. The Martinellis and the operators of two neighboring organic farms are collaborating with the Marin Resource Conservation District, the National Park Service and other agencies to engineer a water storage project that will allow enough water for fish and the produce the farms grow.

"The Martinelli family and MALT played critical roles in finalizing the Pine Gulch Creek Watershed Enhancement Project by providing the necessary easement to ensure the development of the project and, ultimately, the protection of endangered coho salmon in Pine Gulch Creek," said Nancy Scolari, executive director of the Marin Resource Conservation District.