

Grants help farming operations, cut back on greenhouse gasses

By **Todd R. Hansen**



Farmer Emma Torbert leads a group of visitors through an orchard at The Collins Farm, outside of Davis, Friday, May 4, 2018. The Climate Smart Agriculture Tour also brought visitors to Brazelton Ranch, in Vacaville, to show how farms are reducing greenhouse gas emissions. (Robinson Kuntz/Daily Republic)

VACAVILLE — A four-generation farming family in Vacaville is using a conservation easement to reunite a piece of a farming homestead that dates back more than 100 years.



Watering agricultural fields at The Collins Farm, outside of Davis, Friday, May 4, 2018. The Climate Smart Agriculture Tour also brought visitors to Brazelton Ranch, in Vacaville, to show how farms are reducing greenhouse gas emissions. (Robinson Kuntz/Daily Republic)

“We are really excited for that. We intend to stay on farming and that will help us,” said Jean Brazelton, the matriarch of the Vacaville family who has qualified for a grant through the Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation

Program to purchase about 280 acres.

The property being purchased is owned by another branch of the family, but had been put up for sale.

The easement grant, about \$2 million, will allow the family to buy it and reunify the full 2,200 acres that was once under a single title held by John McNight Brazelton, who was Jean Brazelton’s father-in-law.

The Solano Land Trust is helping to orchestrate the deal. It will receive an easement endowment when the deal is secured. The land will then stay in agriculture or other non-urban uses in perpetuity.

Federal funding will be used to supplement the purchase. The family has been told that funding source looks promising.

A tour of the property was conducted Friday as part of a two-stop Climate Smart Agriculture Farm Tour.

One of the goals of the Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program, or SALCP, is to support the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions associated with urban sprawl and rural ranchette development by protecting agricultural lands.

The Brazeltons grow prunes through a contract with Sunsweet, and also a variety of other fruit, such as peaches, apricots, nectarines, mandarins and some specialty fruit for its own produce stand operation on Gates Canyon Road.

“The prunes are the only mechanical harvest,” said Hutson Brazelton, a third-generation farmer. “The rest is all hand-picked.”

The first stop on the tour was at The Collins Farm just outside Davis.

Rich Collins took a group around his farming operation to show a variety of irrigation options, but mostly to explain how his efforts to better manage the soil have benefited his tomato crop.

He said that decades of farming the land, particularly in areas where row crops are grown, have left the soil “dead.”

Collins said by changing soil management practices to support the soil year-round with cover crops and other methods, the earth can come back to life.

The techniques also help to keep water on the fields, whether irrigation or rain, and what is not used is recharged into the groundwater pool rather than running off into drainage ditches.

The farm has benefitted from the state-funded Water Efficiency & Enhancement Program, or SWEEP, and the Healthy Soils Program.

Since 2014, SWEEP has invested \$67.5 million into 606 projects in 33 counties, according to material provided by the California Climate & Agriculture Network, which organized the tour.

“What we are trying to do today is expose you to farming practices that help the climate,” Renata Brillinger, executive director of CalCAN, told the gathering.

Healthy Soil, launched in 2017, has awarded \$5 million in grants to 86 projects on farms and ranches in 31 counties.

Ema Torbert, who runs Cloverleaf Farms with her two partners, leases ground from Collins and has benefitted from the subsidy programs to improve her operation, which produces organic fruit and hedgerows for other farms.

SWEEP and Healthy Soil also have a goal of cutting back on greenhouse emissions by reducing energy use and lessening carbon influences from the farming operations.

The SWEEP projects, CalCAN reports, have eliminated 303,310 metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions over 10 years, while Healthy Soils has eliminated 117,600 metric tons over the same period of time.



Farmer Rich Collins shows a group of visitors the use of cover crops at The Collins Farm, outside of Davis, Friday, May 4, 2018. The Climate Smart Agriculture Tour also brought visitors to Brazelton Ranch, in Vacaville, to show how farms are reducing greenhouse gas emissions. (Robinson Kuntz/Daily Republic)



Farmer Rich Collins shows a group of visitors the use of cover crops at The Collins Farm, outside of Davis, Friday, May 4, 2018. The Climate Smart Agriculture Tour also brought visitors to Brazelton Ranch, in Vacaville, to show how farms are reducing greenhouse gas emissions. (Robinson Kuntz/Daily Republic)



A group of visitors walk through an orchard at The Collins Farm, outside of Davis, Friday, May 4, 2018. The Climate Smart Agriculture Tour also brought visitors to Brazelton Ranch, in Vacaville, to show how farms are reducing greenhouse gas emissions. (Robinson Kuntz/Daily Republic)