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Land Trust Protects 48-acre Apple Orchard

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The Land Trust of Santa Cruz County last week finalized the purchase of an agricultural conservation easement on the 48-acre Pista apple orchard in the Pajaro Valley. While keeping the land in private ownership and on the tax rolls, the easement will forever preclude the land from being developed or subdivided.

Pista Orchard sits between a 75-acre apple orchard, also owned by the Pista family, on which the Land Trust purchased an easement on in 2011, and the 124-acre Amesti Orchard, which the Land Trust protected last year. The project creates a 247-acre block of protected farmland adjacent to the Watsonville City Limit.

“Pista Orchard sits along the busy Freedom Boulevard corridor, an area with a lot of development pressure,” says Land Trust Project Director Dan Medeiros. “We worked with the Pista family to protect their 75-acre parcel in 2011. The family has been farming apples in the Pajaro Valley since 1919 and is committed to conserving farmland there.”

The Newtown Pippin apple variety, grown on the property and the adjacent orchards, is the “secret ingredient” to Martinelli’s apple cider.

The easement, which the Land Trust purchased for \$215,000, will enable the Pista Orchard to remain in agricultural use in perpetuity by preventing any use that would impair its agricultural values. It will prevent the property from being developed, now and into the future, says Medeiros.

Pista Orchard was protected with \$120,000 from the Strategic Growth Council’s Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program administered by the Department of Conservation and \$95,000 from the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County’s opportunity fund.

“The goals of the SALC program are to twofold – to conserve agricultural land and, by doing that, reduce our carbon footprint. Both are very important, so we’re very pleased

to have a role in that and wish to congratulate all the parties involved in bringing this easement to fruition,” DOC Director David Bunn said.

The Land Trust protects an additional 2,375 acres of farmland in the Pajaro Valley, 1,875 through conservation easements. The Land Trust also owns and manages the 500-acre Watsonville Slough Farm west of Highway 1, near Pajaro Valley High School.

Find out more about the Land Trust’s farmland protection goals on their website: www.LandTrustSantaCruz.org.

About the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County: The Land Trust was formed in 1978 by local residents concerned about protecting the lands that make Santa Cruz County special. Since then, the conservation non-profit has protected more than 13,700 acres through acquisition, conservation easements and partnerships. The Trust protects both working lands, like farms and timberland, and natural lands with high conservation value – thus protecting water supplies, wildlife habitats, and open space. For more information, visit www.landtrustsantacruz.org.

About the Strategic Growth Council’s Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program: The Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program (SALC Program) is administered by the Department of Conservation and is part of California Climate Investments, a statewide program that puts billions of Cap-and-Trade dollars to work reducing GHG emissions, strengthening the economy, and improving public health and the environment – particularly in disadvantaged communities. The Cap-and-Trade program also creates a financial incentive for industries to invest in clean technologies and develop innovative ways to reduce pollution. California Climate Investments projects include affordable housing, renewable energy, public transportation, zero-emission vehicles, environmental restoration, more sustainable agriculture, recycling, and much more. At least 35 percent of these investments are located within and benefit residents of disadvantaged communities, low-income communities, and low-income households across California. For more information, visit the California Climate Investments website at: www.caclimateinvestments.ca.gov.