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LAND TRUST PROTECTS HISTORIC SILLIMAN RANCH
160-Acre Family Farm in Pajaro Valley

The Land Trust of Santa Cruz County together with the Martinelli and Silliman families have protected the Silliman Ranch on Highway 129 from development. Under the agreement signed the week before Thanksgiving, the Land Trust purchased the development rights to the 160-acre ranch, ensuring that it will remain farmland in perpetuity.

John Martinelli said the deal reflects the family’s six generation heritage and commitment to farming in the Pajaro Valley. "My great great grandfather was one of the pioneers of agriculture in the valley," he said. "By removing the development option, we're saying, this land is great farmland and it's going to stay that way forever."

Land Trust Executive Director Stephen Slade hailed the partnership with the Martinelli and Silliman families. Slade said, "It's a vote of confidence in the Land Trust and in the future of agriculture in the Pajaro Valley, from some of the people who started farming in the valley."

Funding for the easement acquisition came from private donations to the Land Trust's farmland protection program. During the past 10 years, the Land Trust has spent $7.3 million buying development rights to farmland. The Land Trust has protective easements on 18 ranches totaling 2,000 acres.

The Trust also owns a 500-acre ranch west of Highway 1 and a 400-acre forest in Corralitos. The Trust leases 250 acres to growers on its Watsonville Slough Farm and logs parts of its forest every seven years. "We're working lands people," Slade said.
The family has owned the property since 1852 and actively farmed the land until the mid-1960s when third generation owner Floyd Silliman, who lived his entire life on the ranch, suffered a heart attack and retired to ride his beloved horses and spend time with his grandchildren. Since then, the Sakata and Dobler families have leased the ranch to farm row crops.

John Martinelli said “a primary reason the family acted at this time was to assure that my grandfather’s wish, to keep the ranch in the family and preserve the fertile farm ground, would be a commitment that future generations would honor, even though they did not have the good fortune of knowing his grandpa and how much he loved his ranch.”