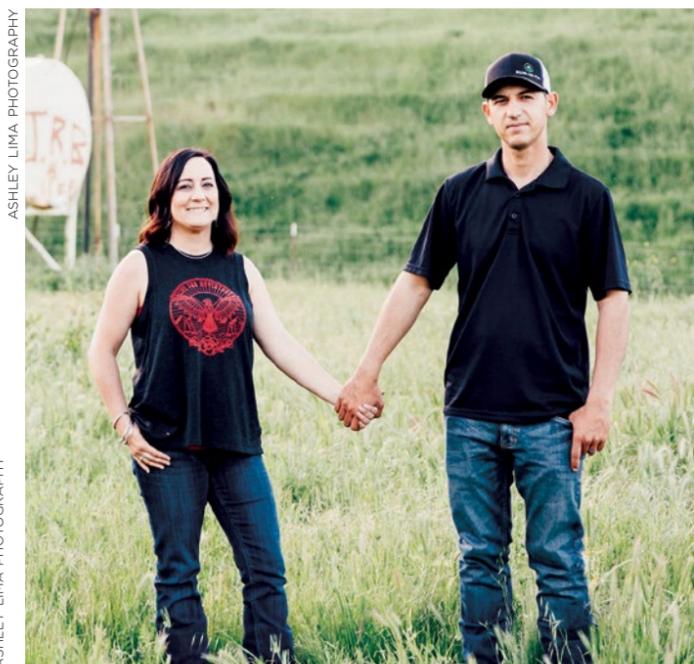


# AMERICAN FARMLAND

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## California Dreamin'

Farmers like Rosie Silva are beating the odds to help sustain California agriculture and their ranching way of life.

When Rosie Silva was growing up, all she wanted was to be a rancher like her parents and grandparents. Her family has long tended cattle in California's Central Valley, one of the most productive agricultural regions in the world.

"My family's heritage when they came to California was in farming," she says. "My husband and I both have a passion for it."

Rosie and her husband Michael both fell in love with farming at a young age, but it's hard to compete with commercial and housing developments for rangeland. "We were never encouraged to be in agriculture, because where we live the land is being developed every day,"

she says. "We have pastures surrounded on all sides by warehouses."

The economics of farming can also be challenging. Rosie's parents gifted her a Holstein heifer when she graduated from California Polytechnic State University, and she began building a herd, raising dairy heifers.

Then the bottom fell out of the dairy industry. Dairy farmers around the country are struggling after years of low milk prices. "All around us family dairies are going out of business," Rosie says. "My husband and I could see the outlook wasn't great."

Rosie and Michael adapted by transitioning their Silva Ranch in San Joaquin County into

a direct-sale beef operation. "I've always had a passion for caring for cattle," she says. "The old way of operating wasn't economically sustainable. Now we sell directly to local families."

Part of Rosie's direct-beef business involves educating customers about farms and agriculture. "My goal is for consumers to know the truth about agriculture and show them that 97 percent of farms are family farms," she says.

Scrolling one day on Instagram, Rosie learned about a women's learning circle hosted by American Farmland Trust's California

**CALIFORNIA**, continued on page 4

## SUPPORTING FARMING IN THE GOLDEN STATE

By Kara Heckert, California Director

As a native of northern California, raised in the Napa Valley—the granddaughter of a Nebraska corn and dairy farmer—I've worked at the intersection of conservation and agriculture in California for nearly 20 years.

Here in the nation's largest agricultural state, American Farmland Trust works on some of the most critical issues facing agriculture, including climate change, dwindling water supply, farmland loss, and access to land for the next generation of farmers and ranchers. We recently doubled our staff and established a number of innovative new programs. Some of our top priorities:

**Climate Adaptation.** Our California office is on the frontlines of helping agriculture adapt to a changing climate.

The impacts of climate change are already being felt through higher temperatures, droughts, fires, floods, and an increase in natural disasters. Our Farmers Combat Climate Change initiative protects the most resilient farmland while increasing the adoption of climate-smart agricultural practices.

**Water Resources.** In California, water supply is a major issue accelerated by the recently passed Sustainable Groundwater Management Act. Building on decades of work, our San Joaquin Land and Water Strategy prioritizes protection of the most valuable farmland with the most reliable future water supplies.

**Underserved and Next Generation Farmers.** The Census of Agriculture shows that California's primary farm producers are on average 61.2 years old while

27 percent are beginning farmers with less than 10 years of experience. Our new Farms for a New Generation initiative works with partners to deliver training and resources to the diverse communities representing the future of California agriculture.



Kara Heckert

Please join us in supporting the nation's cornucopia, which produces over a third of the vegetables and nearly two-thirds of the fruits and nuts in the United States on over 70,000 working farms. Learn more at [farmland.org/California](http://farmland.org/California).

## FROM THE PRESIDENT

# Lessons from Italy

In May, I was fortunate to travel with a group of American Farmland Trust members on an unforgettable trip to Tenuta di Spannocchia, a 1,100-acre farm in the hills of Tuscany, Italy.

The working organic farm produces wine from its own vineyards, olive oil from its own groves, and vegetables from its gardens, while also raising rare heritage-breed farm animals. It's an incredibly beautiful place, two miles up a dirt road to the stone villa and farmhouses dating back to the 1500s, with views of the verdant green countryside all around.

Since the 1990s, Spannocchia has served as a model of sustainable agriculture, passionately advanced by the Italian-American family that owns it—longtime American Farmland Trust members.

Our group was there for a week to learn more about farming while unplugging from technology, soaking up the exquisite scenery, and enjoying authentic Tuscan farm-to-table meals. *I'd argue that there's no place in the world with better food than Italy!*

For a week, we talked farming, both at Spannocchia and at nearby farms. It's

always fascinating to see how farmers adapt to different situations and see how different crops and livestock are raised.

You might wonder what Italy can teach us about the issues facing American farmers. The answer is a lot. Spannocchia showcases a form of agriculture based on community, respect for tradition, and an exceptionally high level of environmental stewardship. There are many similarities to American farms, but also some differences—from which we can learn.

As part of the trip, our group participated in a special one-day colloquium, co-sponsored by American Farmland Trust and Spannocchia, which focused on the topic of agriculture and climate change. The agenda included presentations by three internationally-known scientists, including American Farmland Trust's own Jennifer Moore-Kucera, our climate initiative director, who talked about the importance of soil health to climate resilience.

There were also presentations by Italian farmers, who described their climate-smart practices, and remarks by Ambassador Kip Tom, U.S. Representative to the United

Nations Agencies for Food and Agriculture, who is based in Rome.

I explained in the symposium's opening remarks that the climate crisis is the issue of our day, and farming can be a big part of the solution. The day's discussion identified some of the strategies that are helping combat climate change, including restorative farming practices that absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

We must begin to manage our working landscapes in ways that address the inter-related challenges of food security and climate change. To tackle this critical challenge, we need to gain lessons from others.

We learned a lot in Italy—while having a super time. American Farmland Trust plans to organize something similar in 2020. Consider joining us!

  
John Piotti  
President & CEO  
American Farmland Trust



American Farmland Trust President John Piotti and Climate Director Jennifer Moore-Kucera traveled with a group of American Farmland Trust supporters to Tuscany, Italy, in May to learn about the country's farms and climate-smart agricultural practices. The group toured a biodynamic winery, learned about pasture-raised heritage pigs and diversified vegetable gardening, and took a classic Tuscan cooking class.



# Around the Country

Congresswoman Chellie Pingree from **MAINE** unveiled a five-point plan to support farmers in the fight against climate change at a press conference on Bumbleroot Organic Farm outside Portland. Environmental and agricultural advocates spoke at the event, including American Farmland Trust's New England director Nathan L'Etoile. Pingree is working in Congress to make sure farmers are included in the policy debate about mitigating climate change.



Last year, American Farmland Trust launched a **NATIONWIDE** network of Land Access Trainers who support beginning farmers and ranchers in their communities. Recently, our first group of Land Access Trainers were certified to deliver our curriculum to teach beginning farmers and ranchers how to find and acquire land while gaining the financial skills to make informed land access decisions.

Our Farmland Information Center has been busy analyzing new data from the latest Census of Agriculture. Conducted every five years, the **NATIONAL** census contains millions of points of information about America's farms and ranches and the people who operate them. The number of farms, as well as the amount of land in farms, has decreased since the last Census in 2012. At the same time, there continue to be more large and small operations and fewer middle-sized farms. The average age of farmers and ranchers continues to rise.



Hannah Clark, American Farmland Trust's Pacific Northwest director, spoke about the tools and techniques to preserve and protect farmland in the Pacific Northwest during a regionwide forum on Farmland and Open Space Preservation held by Stafford Hamlet in Clackamas County, **OREGON**. Watch at <https://youtu.be/gBbwCrzUNhw>.

The **ILLINOIS** Department of Agriculture is adopting a crop insurance reward program for cover crops developed by a coalition of agricultural, environmental, and conservation organizations, including American Farmland Trust. *Fall Covers for Spring Savings: Crop Insurance Reward Pilot Program* will help farmers meet the goals of the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy and make them eligible for a reward when they plant cover crops.



USDA NRCS/RON NICHOLS



American Farmland Trust's **CALIFORNIA** office supported climate-smart agriculture by hosting two new Women for the Land learning circles, which provided women landowners with conservation resources and networks, and by advocating for enhancements to the Healthy Soils Program and funding for natural and working lands programs in California's state budget.



USDA/MISHAWN RICH

American Farmland Trust submitted written testimony to the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee's bipartisan hearing on climate change and agriculture in May. Our testimony discussed farming's one-of-a-kind

ability to help mitigate climate change. We are grateful to the legislators who organized this critical **NATIONAL** hearing. Watch at [www.agriculture.senate.gov/hearings/climate-change-and-the-agriculture-sector](http://www.agriculture.senate.gov/hearings/climate-change-and-the-agriculture-sector).

Caroline Wade joined American Farmland Trust as the new **MID-ATLANTIC** regional director to provide strategic leadership for our Mid-Atlantic programs, with a focus on Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. A Maryland native, Caroline previously served as Illinois director of agriculture at The Nature Conservancy, where she led the state agriculture program strategy for the Illinois chapter.



JERRY & MARCY MONKMAN/ECOPHOTOGRAPHY.COM/ALAMY

American Farmland Trust helped to bring the prestigious Leopold Conservation Award® program to **NEW ENGLAND**. The award recognizes agricultural landowners who inspire with their dedication to ethical land, water, and wildlife habitat management. The recipient receives national recognition and a \$10,000 award presented by the Sand County Foundation, American Farmland Trust, and New England Forestry Foundation. Nominate yourself or another landowner at [sandcountyfoundation.org/our-work/leopold-conservation-award-program](http://sandcountyfoundation.org/our-work/leopold-conservation-award-program).



In school districts across **NEW YORK**, American Farmland Trust helped to initiate taste tests of New York state-grown Concord grape juice as part of the collaborative Grape-to-School Pilot Program. Developed in partnership with New York state, Grape-to-School builds on existing initiatives to help schools purchase greater amounts of foods grown by New York farmers.



# Become a **PERENNIAL PARTNER** Today

You **CAN** make a difference and help ensure that America has ample, affordable, and productive farmland for generations to come. Making a monthly gift to American Farmland Trust is a quick, easy, and effective way to help save the land that sustains us. Join a special group of supporters we rely on as the backbone of our mission.

Call (202) 331-7300 or go to [farmland.org/perennial](http://farmland.org/perennial) to sign up.



## Leaving a Farm Legacy

Owners of farmland or ranchland face many questions about the future. Who will someday take care of the land? Will it still be farmed?

Jennifer McComas, who inherited her family's 560-acre Kentucky farm, found answers through American Farmland Trust's Farm Legacy Program.

Jennifer, 71, reached out to American Farmland Trust about her family's farm overlooking the Cumberland River, a beautiful property with fields, hollows, and a big pond. Her great-grandfather purchased the hay, corn, and cattle farm in the early 1900s.

"My mother was born on the farm. I spent my young years there," Jennifer says. "I was all over the farm as a child. I rode horses and that was important to me."

Jennifer transferred her farm to American Farmland Trust to help save it from development. "There's tremendous pressure on land here," she says. "I think protecting the farm was the most important thing to do. Development is not the answer."

American Farmland Trust will protect the land and is working with the two brothers who currently farm it. "Giving a family farm or ranch to the Farm Legacy Program ensures

the land's long-term protection while supporting American Farmland Trust's mission," says Jerry Cosgrove, farm legacy director.

Jennifer says she has no qualms about her gift to American Farmland Trust. "That farm was the best thing I ever had," she says. "I know I've done what's right—to allow the farm to continue being a working farm. I think it's so important for our environment and the future. The trees and plants are needed to absorb carbon and prevent flooding."

Jennifer hopes to be a model for other American Farmland Trust members who own agricultural land. "Don't hesitate to think about preserving your farmland," she says. "There's not going to be more of it made."

**i** To learn more about the Farm Legacy Program and conservation options for farmland and ranchland, please contact Jerry Cosgrove, Farm Legacy Director, at (518) 281-5074 or [jcosgrove@farmland.org](mailto:jcosgrove@farmland.org).



*Jennifer McComas*



*Jennifer McComas donated her family's beautiful Kentucky farm to American Farmland Trust.*

### CALIFORNIA, continued from page 1

office to help women landowners learn about conservation and develop their businesses.

"In American Farmland Trust's 35 years in the San Joaquin Valley, we've developed an understanding of the many challenges facing agriculture," says Kara Heckert, American Farmland Trust's California director. "Women landowners are an important part of our diverse farming landscape and are among a group of underserved farmers and landowners we are working to support."

At the learning circle, Rosie networked

with other landowners and learned more about the programs available to help farmers thrive. "I'm glad I went," Rosie says. "We have been working with the Natural Resources Conservation Service on conservation planning since then. The circles are a great way to get connected to others in the community."

For Rosie, it's all about trying to sustain California agriculture and the ranching life her family loves. "We could sell everything and go ranch in another state," she says. "But this is where we have our connections. We have a lot of family here. We're just trying to find resources, so we can stay and do what we love."

**American Farmland Trust**

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