



[Home](#)

[Who We Are](#)

[Protected Lands](#)

[Info for Landowners](#)

[Events & Merchandise](#)

[For Volunteers & Teachers](#)

[Become a Member](#)

[Links](#)

Agricultural Easements

The Land Trust holds conservation easements to protect agricultural land, natural resources and the scenic beauty of a dozen ranches and farms in north and south Santa Barbara County.

Our easements make sure the land is kept open for agricultural use, and prevent it from being converted for residential or commercial development.

Each easement is negotiated with the landowner. Some easements are purchased by the Land Trust. Others are donated, qualifying the owner for federal and state tax incentives. The Land Trust works with ranch and farm owners to prepare qualifying easements, and we are then responsible for annual monitoring to ensure that easements are followed by the current and future owners of the land.

Agricultural easements generally do not provide for public access, although some ranch and farm owners allow Land Trust Events such as ranch or farm tours for our members and invited guests to better understand agriculture in our county.

Rancho Dos Vistas, Gaviota (1,406 acres)

At the top of Refugio Pass and just west of former President Reagan's "Western White House," Rancho Dos Vistas is now governed by a conservation easement that allows only three home sites, and sets aside ninety percent of the land for wildlife habitat. The Land Trust helped landowner Cima del Mundo secure a state income tax credit for donating this easement, under the Natural Heritage Preservation Tax Credit Act sponsored by Senator Jack O'Connell. Cima del Mundo also donated a 2.5 mile trail easement that connects two sections of federal land in Los Padres National Forest. Some day Rancho Dos Vistas' trails may connect to the Arroyo Hondo Preserve and to Refugio Road, allowing a "coast-to-crest" public trail route that is isolated from other agricultural and private home sites.

La Paloma Ranch, Gaviota (750 acres)

Eric Hvolbøll's great-grandparents purchased La Paloma Ranch in 1866, and his mother has lived her entire life there. Over the decades, the ranch in Venadito Canyon has been a sheep and cattle operation, and farmed for walnuts, tomatoes, lima beans, and most recently avocados. Their love of the land led the Hvolbølls to sell a conservation easement on the ranch in 2002.



The Land Trust arranged grant funding from the State Coastal Conservancy, County of Santa Barbara and State Resources Agency to have this land permanently restricted to agriculture. The family retained the right to build three family homes and two employee dwellings, but gave up the right to further subdivide or develop the property except for agricultural use. Ecologically valuable communities of coastal sage scrub, chaparral and riparian habitat are protected under the easement as well.

El Capitan Ranch, Gaviota (650 acres)

The national conservation group The Trust for Public Land (TPL) recently completed fundraising to acquire 2,500 acres on the El Capitan Ranch, to become part of the El Capitan State Park. In a related transaction, our local Land Trust now holds conservation easements on the remaining 650 acres of El Capitan Ranch. These easements provide for continued operation of the private El Capitan Campground and the existing equestrian training ranch. Outside of these already developed areas, only two new homes may be built, and the land is otherwise restricted for agricultural use.

Freeman Ranch, Gaviota (660 acres)

The first conservation easement the Land Trust bought from a Gaviota rancher, the Freeman Ranch is the scenic backdrop to Refugio State Beach. The Freemans may use the land for any kind of agriculture, and may build homes necessary for family and employee use in areas outside the view of the public beach.



Important natural resource features on the ranch, including a large vernal pond, a 30 acre oak woodland, and one mile of Refugio Creek, are guarded through agricultural management practices the Freemans agreed to follow. This purchase was supported by grants from the California Farmland Conservancy Program, California Coastal Conservancy, State Resources Agency, the County Coastal Resource Enhancement Fund, and two private foundations.

Rancho Las Cruces, Gaviota (900 acres)

On one of the larger private ranches in the county, owners Jonathan & Nancy Kittle granted a conservation easement on 900 acres of upper watershed land to The Nature Conservancy in 1973. The easement, which protects the oak woodland, chaparral, grassland, small streams and springs on this part of Rancho Las Cruces, was transferred to the Land Trust for Santa Barbara County in 1984. Rancher Louise Hanson purchased the property with the conservation easement in the 1980's. The easement permits the landowner to pasture and graze livestock, and to build and maintain water-related improvements.