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## Land Trust Protects 124-acre Apple Orchard

The Land Trust of Santa Cruz County purchased an agricultural conservation easement on the 124-acre Amesti apple orchard in the Pajaro Valley Tuesday. While keeping the land in private ownership and on the tax rolls, the easement will forever preclude the land from being developed or subdivided.

Amesti Orchard borders the 75-acre Pista apple orchard, which the Land Trust purchased an easement on in 2011, creating a 200-acre block of protected farmland adjacent to the Watsonville City Limit.

The Amesti Orchard is owned by an investor account advised by UBS Asset Management (UBS), which Land Trust Project Director Dan Medeiros says made for a unique transactional experience.

“When we first talk with landowners about easements, there’s usually a hesitancy, a sort of disbelief that easements are good for business,” said Medeiros. “The landowner understood that conservation and business—are two sides of the same coin. We’re talking about sustainability on both fronts.”

The orchard remains leased to S. Martinelli & Company, a Watsonville-based company that produces juice and cider for national and international export. The Newtown Pippin apple variety grown on the property, and the adjacent Pista Orchard, is the “secret ingredient” to Martinelli’s apple cider. Proceeds from the easement sale should incrementally boost investment returns, while maintaining a local supply of apples for Martinelli.

The easement, which the Land Trust purchased for \$400,000, will enable the Amesti 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.

“We congratulate the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County and the landowners on the creation of these agricultural conservation easements,” said David Bunn, Director of the Department of Conservation. “We appreciate the work the Land Trust does to preserve the productive agricultural land and natural beauty of Santa Cruz County. We’re proud to have

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helped facilitate preserving this property and look forward to future work with central coast land trusts and landowners.”

Amesti was protected with \$200,000 from the Department of Conservation’s California Farmland Conservancy Program and \$200,000 from the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County’s Great Land & Trail Campaign, which aims to raise \$20 million by 2017, \$1.5 million of that for farmland protection.

The Land Trust protects an additional 2,250 acres of farmland in the Pajaro Valley, 1,750 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 and other projects in their campaign on their website: [www.LandTrustSantaCruz.org](http://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 13,650 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](http://www.landtrustsantacruz.org).

**About the Department of Conservation’s California Farmland Conservancy Program:** Since 1996, the CFCP has provided \$83 million in funding to permanently shield more than 57,000 acres of the state’s best and most vulnerable agricultural land from development. Landowners and trusts are encouraged to contact the Division of Land Resource Protection for information about the program and potential funding. For details, visit [www.conservation.gov/dlrp](http://www.conservation.gov/dlrp).