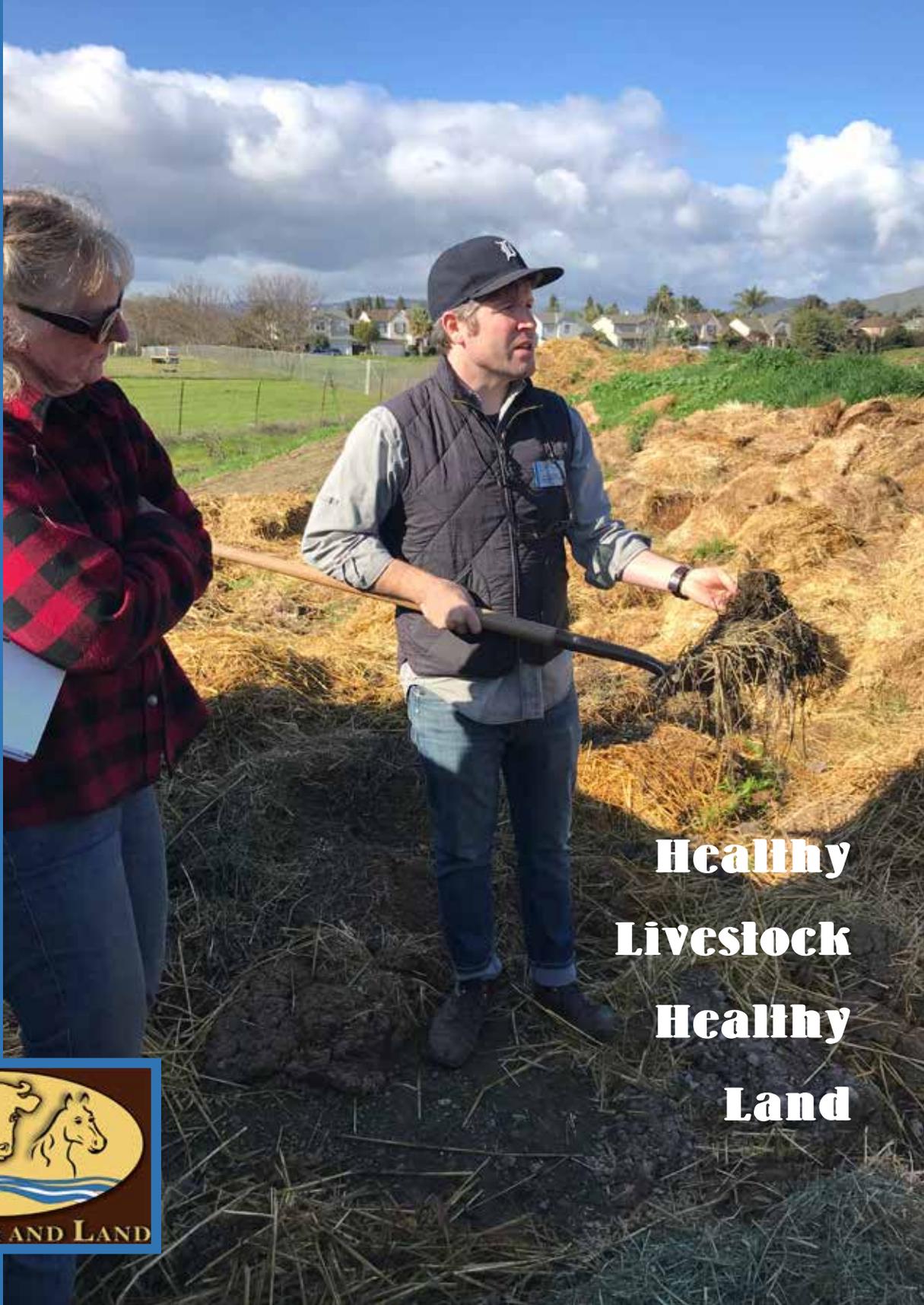




FROM THE HORSES MOUTH

a newsletter from Livestock and Land (February 2020)



**Healthy
Livestock
Healthy
Land**



Livestock and Land Grant Fund Wrap Up 2020

by Angie Gruys, Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County



On February 28, 2020 the Livestock and Land program, which is managed by local Resource Conservation Districts, concluded a four year grant funded by a US EPA Clean Water Grant through an agreement with the State Water Resource Control Board. The Livestock and Land program was started in Santa Cruz County by local conservation districts and NGO's as a way to work affect positive changes to water quality concerns from livestock facilities. This round of funding targeted small ranches in the Pajaro River Watershed where we work with landowners on a voluntary basis to help reduce the potential of sediments and fecal coliform from entering local waterways.

Through the course of the grant period, we provided outreach and educational workshops, trainings, tours, and one-on-one technical assistance. These events helped prepared

landowners to make voluntary changes on their properties to enhance water quality in local creeks, simplify chores, and improve animal health. **Three workshops, two tours and one technical training** were conducted, with a **total of 111 attendees**. Topics related to Best Management Practices (BMPs) for livestock facilities such as manure and mud management, understanding and planning for drainage, pasture management, winter preparedness, composting options and site planning. The RCD also visited 21 facilities and provided technical recommendations related to changes each facility could make to benefit their land and animals.

The program also provided over \$100,000 in cost-share grants to six facilities that implemented the recommended improvements. Landowners collectively contributed an equal dollar amount for the projects with both in-kind and cash match. On February 8, 2020 we conducted a tour of four of the facilities to highlight the various BMPs used to successfully manage manure and mud, several of which are highlighted in this newsletter.

If you are interested in finding out more about any of these latest projects, contact the Loma Prieta Resource Conservation District at info@lomaprietarc.org or the Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County at info@rcdsantacruz.org.

Resource Conservation Districts (RCDs) are independent, non-regulatory, special districts of California. Serving local communities through conservation projects funded mainly through grants and private contributions, RCDs are partners in local conservation and agriculture. RCDs help people to protect, conserve, and restore natural resources through education, technical assistance and collaboration with other organizations to achieve results within their districts on public and private land.



Helping Rescue Animals and the Environment

by Elizabeth Akers and Greg Louis, Red's Equines in Need Sanctuary



The Ausaymas Group hosts two non-profit rescues. Red's Equines in Need Sanctuary (REINS) and Rhodesian Ridgeback Rescue. Both groups have animals that have spent winters knee deep in mud which has been difficult for all. In the past 30 years of Ridgeback Rescue about 3000 Ridgebacks have been re-homed through rescue. Since their inception in 2014 REINS has re-homed 19 horses many of which had been severely abused. There are currently 12 horses who



are in the care of REINS. We have taken in numerous other rescue animals such as ostrich, emu, sheep, mini-donkeys, alpaca, goats, and a turkey.

Having so many animals on the property, the Livestock and Land program helped us create a management plan for the problems we faced through each winter and helped fund recommendations they made. This included collecting rainwater into four 5000 gallon tanks to lessen the "rivers" that were forming on our property from the water draining from the roofs. The collected water will be used during dry periods to irrigate the hedgerow of trees which helps stabilize the soil at the rear of the property that was eroding into the Pacheco Creek.

We also added a large manure bunker which is a great solution for disposing/handling the manure created by so many animals. It can be composted or easily removed by others with no damage to the environment or the river.

By keeping the property drier, it reduces the mud which were hindering some programs such as an annual low-cost gelding clinic, tours by various school groups and scout troops. We are very grateful to have been part of the Livestock and Land Program.



Grants Fund Upgrades at Gilroy High School FFA Farm

by Dana Wolfe, Gilroy High School FFA Boosters Club

The Gilroy High School FFA farm was recently enhanced thanks to help from the University of California Cooperative Extension and the Resource Conservation Districts (RCD). The FFA program teaches students leadership, public speaking, animal husbandry, environmental stewardship, financial responsibility and time management while building confidence.

The farm's cattle pens that were built over 50 years ago, were in desperate need of attention due to improper drainage which caused the dilapidation of the fencing. The RCD funded the purchase of gutters and downspouts to divert rainwater away from the cattle pens to ensure the preservation of the new fencing as well as keeping the





cattle on dryer ground. A solar composting system was funded by UCCE with a grant from Santa Clara Valley Water and an RCD grant. FFA members helped with the construction of the bins. Prior to the installation of the two bins for green and brown waste and the automated solar fan system, there was no way of processing animal waste at the farm. Now that the farm has the compost system in place, the waste can be turned into a valuable product.

The composting also has the potential to become a Supervised Agricultural Experience project that could provide the compost material to the surrounding community. Both projects are instrumental in ensuring the longevity of the FFA farm for current and future generations of students.



Burke Ranch Conservation Grazing Plan

by Tashana Burke, Burke Ranch



In 2013, after never owning anything larger than a dog, my husband Sean and I purchased a 58 acre family cattle ranch operation in Morgan Hill, California, and aptly named it Burke Ranch. The ranch produces beef cattle on a small scale, running between 15 to 28 head annually. With rolling hills and two valleys full of oak trees and wildlife the land offers a beautiful setting. We fell in love with the features of this property being so close into town and yet so far away. Our three elementary aged kids are loving the ranch life and we are finding the hard work rewarding.

While it was historically grazed, the majority of the property had no fencing or the fencing was more than 75 years old

and its dilapidated condition was no longer capable of keeping the cows in. This left the cattle confined to the mostly flat 10 acres on the front of the property that had existing infrastructure. Because eight acres is used to grow hay for the ranch six months out of the year, we have even less space for the herd. This high concentration of cows in a very small area has created a lot of problems and prevented the ranch from operating effectively. When 15 to 25 cows live in only two acres during the rainy season, we saw a direct impact on the ground. The muck created during the rains made it almost impossible to operate, feed and get around those two acres during the winter months, which is also calving season. As the hillside sheds the rain and the water runs through the muck, it also created an issue with storm water runoff that leaves the property. Another concern on the ranch was increased fire risk in the uplands area due to lack of vegetation management.

Last year we were fortunate to attend a Livestock and Land workshop that helped us understand different concepts for better managing our land. With both financial and technical assistance from the Resource Conservation District, who runs the Livestock and Land program, and our local USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service office



we were able to put into place a plan to benefit our cattle, improve the efficiency of our operation, and protect the environment. We strategically installed new cattle fencing using a combination of t-posts and used oil pipe to create three separate areas. This allows us to graze a much larger portion of the property, let portions of the land to rest, practice rotational grazing, and to facilitate separating cattle such as bulls or replacement heifers. The fence also incorporated environmentally friendly options such as smooth wire bottoms to allow safe passage for wildlife.

The benefits of this new fence are extremely tangible with improvements to our own water source as well as impacts on downstream water. It will help us financially by not having to buy as much hay annually and instead having the cows rely on the land more for feed. Finally, the cows will now be able to graze on a significant amount of the property using a planned grazing regime that will benefit the land and also reduce the fire risk. We look forward to continuing the learning process, to living in harmony with our beautiful land and giving our family and cows the best life we can.



Monkey Tail Ranch Makes the Most Out of Manure

by Elise Lalor, Money Tail Ranch



My husband and I moved to our ranch in Hollister in 2010. We run a small non-profit, Monkey Tail Ranch that focuses on serving adults and children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, post traumatic stress and anxiety issues. Services include personalized service dog training, recreational horse therapy, gardening, and family overnight visits in the setting of our beautiful home. Our service dogs are each custom trained for the persons they will aid. They are raised, socialized and trained to help overcome the unique challenges their handlers face. We rely completely on donations to allow us to provide respite, family camps, and service dogs.

Along with the dogs, the ranch has eight horses and two donkeys that act as guardians for our four goats. When we first moved to the ranch, we struggled with a lot of mud and manure throughout the entire property. I first went to a Livestock and Land workshop in Gilroy in 2017 and learned a lot about how to better manage manure, drainage and mud and started putting simple plans into practice right away. I used the “slow it, spread it, sink it!” mantra from the workshop to figure out ways to deal with the drainage. Slow the

rainwater runoff down by directing it someplace it can spread out on the landscape so that it can sink back into the ground. The presentations gave us many ideas in small bite sized pieces to help the ranch be able to survive the summer and winter. Each year we made more and more small changes, using the network of like-minded individuals at local ranches and the tools we got through the program. We received a grant from the Livestock and Land program to build compost bins on the property so we have a place to store manure and turn it into something valuable that we can use on the property in our gardens and landscaping. We are thrilled with the results we have seen! And the extra time we save on maintenance allows us more time to spend time doing what we love and helping others.





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