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SUMMER LIKE YOU MEAN IT

THE FIRST SEED

Reconnecting to our food through regenerative agriculture

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“...Steve and his team at White Buffalo Land Trust have spent the last two years laying the foundation for the proliferation of *regenerative agriculture* at their 12-acre farm in Summerland.”

Since its inception in 1850, Santa Barbara County has maintained a rich agricultural history. Familiar landmarks such as the Presidio and the Mission were once surrounded by pasturelands where cattle, horses, and sheep grazed. Today, Santa Barbara’s ag industry remains significant to the local economy and boasts a 12th overall ranking in terms of production value across the state.

As the granddaughter of a third-generation cattle rancher, I can tell you with confidence: the cost of producing the country’s food is not cheap. Yet, the true cost may soon be irreversible—scientists have revealed that the region is warming at double the rate of the continental United States, topsoil may be obsolete before the end of the century, and biodiversity in the region continues to decline.

To put it lightly, something’s gotta give.

Luckily, there’s a way to reverse these crises. Steve Finkel, founder of White Buffalo Land Trust, explains it relies on bringing our 21st century minds to an age-old tradition. As the first organization to bring regenerative agriculture to the County of Santa Barbara, Steve and his team at White Buffalo Land Trust have spent the last two years laying the foundation for the proliferation of regenerative agriculture at their 12-acre farm in Summerland.

Based on a set of global principles, regional practices, and local techniques, regenerative ag is aimed at producing positive ecological, food system, and community outcomes. All three of which share a common objective—creating greater resiliency in the beautiful and biodiverse community we call home.

While the concept of regenerative agriculture is not new, the idea that we can increase the nutritional density of our food and replenish the world’s diminishing topsoil,

while also capturing carbon from the atmosphere, somehow feels revolutionary.

Jesse Smith, the Director of Land Stewardship, explains to me that in a thriving natural ecosystem such as a forest, jungle, or prairie, the health of the soil is maintained by the contributions from different plant and animal species, which also help to recycle the soil’s nutrients. However, when diverse ecosystems are replaced by a single species (or mono-crop) the organic content of the soil diminishes and, as a result, must be enriched with fertilization.

Unfortunately, the latter model has led to undesirable outcomes. The most significant of which is that if nothing changes, we will be out of topsoil in the next sixty years. However, thanks to proponents of regenerative agriculture, all hope is not lost. We still have the chance to regenerate the earth’s topsoil and reconnect with our food source. The closer we can get farm systems to mimic natural ecosystems, the better.

WBLT has been leading the charge towards sustainable food systems in Santa Barbara for the past few years and they now have the opportunity to employ these principles on a large scale with the acquisition of Jalama Canyon Ranch. Positioned at the epicenter of some of the largest contiguous ranches in the county, and sharing a boundary with the Jack and Laura Dangermond Preserve, the one thousand acre parcel is ripe for transition.

The goal of Jalama Ranch is to create a thriving model of a sustainable food system while advancing the science and research behind this type of agriculture with the hopes of proliferating these concepts beyond ranch borders. The Land Trust is seeking the support of the community in their campaign for Jalama Canyon Ranch. As a local example of regenerative techniques at scale, Jalama Canyon can act as the first seedling in what could become a luscious landscape of regenerative agriculture in the region as a whole. * whitebuffalolandtrust.org