

MALT preserves Tomales ranch for future generations of a pioneering farming family

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The Marin Agricultural Land Trust has paid \$1.4 million to preserve the 440-acre Stemple Creek Ranch near Tomales, a ranch that has been in the Poncia family since the early 1900s.

The purchase ensures that a fourth generation of the family will be able to ranch there.

"Without MALT, we would have been forced to sell the ranch or break it up to continue ranching," Loren Poncia, who oversees the ranch's operation with his wife, Lisa, and Loren's parents, Al and Cathie Poncia, said in a statement. "MALT gave us the ability to hold onto it and continue ranching."

The Poncias sell Stemple Creek grass-fed beef and lamb to grocery stores, butcher shops and individual buyers throughout the Bay Area.

With preservation, they will be free to carry on a farming heritage that began a century ago when Angelo "Pa Nono" Poncia bought the land after immigrating from Italy. Stemple Creek is part of the original 990-acre Poncia farm.

Marin's ranches face a high risk of conversion to estate development, threatening Marin's local food, wildlife and scenic rural landscape, according to MALT Executive Director Jamison Watts.

"Protecting this ranch was very important," he said in a statement. "The family has developed a sustainable business model that makes their products available to people year round. What they have done is create the next generation ranch that is both agriculturally viable and environmentally sustainable at the same time."

To preserve the ranch, MALT paid the \$1.4 million price of its agricultural conservation easement with money from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resource Conservation Service Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program, the California Department of Conservation and individual donors and family foundations.

"The Poncias are part of the backbone of agriculture's conservation community in Marin County," Charlette Epifanio, district conservationist for the Natural Resource Conservation Service in the area, said in a statement, noting that Al Poncia has been honored with the first national "NRCS Rancher of the Year" award for promoting water quality on West Marin ranches.

Formed in 1980 to preserve Marin farmland, MALT's conservation agreements have protected more than 46,000 acres on 72 family farms and ranches.