



TALTnews

Conserving the Texas heritage of agricultural lands, wildlife habitats, and natural resources.



CELEBRATING 10 YEARS

People with a passion for Texas land gathered near Victoria on March 9th to celebrate the Texas Agricultural Land Trust's first decade. Set amidst the waving coastal grasslands of the historic McFaddin Ranch, the festive tent blazed with stunning photographs of TALT's conservation easements and inspiring quotes from landowners that bespoke a love of the land that has fueled the organization's growth over the last ten years.

Guests gathered over cocktails under towering oak trees, and then moved into the tent for dinner. Afterwards, speakers highlighted significant milestones, accomplishments, and contributions over the past ten years.

"Tonight is an opportunity to celebrate where we have

been—and where we are going," CEO Blair Fitzsimons said as she kicked off the celebration. "Thanks to the combination of vision, hard work, and incredible support from many people we have come a long way in a relatively short time, but we've just gotten started."

Board President Clark Willingham reflected on the early days of the organization.

"As I think back on the last 10 years, I am simply amazed," he said. "We started out with a broad vision to protect Texas' valuable working lands. No one thought it would be easy, but I don't think any of us at that time truly understood what we were diving into."

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CEO'S LETTER

The Texas Ag Land Trust started with passion—and a leap of faith. In November of 2007, Steve Lewis, founding board president, and I sat down with Claytie and Modesta Williams at their kitchen table. While best known as oil patch entrepreneurs, the Williamses are ranchers with a strong commitment to conservation. They had been exploring conservation easements for two years when they caught wind of the Texas Ag Land Trust's pending creation.

People were just beginning to talk about the new land trust created by landowners for landowners to conserve working lands. The Williamses reached out to us before we had non-profit status. They believed in our mission. We believed in our mission. None of us knew what the process would entail, but we were confident that we would make it work.

We did. Six weeks later on December 31, after long hours in conference rooms, the Texas Ag Land Trust held its first two easements on 74,000 acres, and the Williamses had protected their land, and with it, their legacy in perpetuity. IRS notice of our non-profit status had arrived the week before.

Our experience with the Williamses proved to us that ranching, farming, and hunting families could use this tool called a conservation easement to pass their working lands down to the next generation. At the Texas Ag Land Trust, we committed to partnering with landowners to conserve the working lands that provide the state's water, wildlife, and other vital natural resources.

At the Texas Ag Land Trust, our commitment to the land is personal. Our board and staff members have raised our kids on working ranches, and infuse a passion for working lands conservation into our day-to-day tasks. Rooted in ranching, farming and hunting, our Board of Directors understand the importance of our work first-hand. They know Texas' working lands matter not just to the families who own them but also to our state's ecology and economy.

A decade is a blink of an eye in the face of perpetuity. While it's fun to look back on the early days, our focus is far into the future. To ensure that the Texas Ag Land Trust endures as surely as the land we are helping conserve, we have launched the Forever Texas Fund. Seeded with gifts from two generous donors, the Forever Texas Fund will provide for the Texas Ag Land Trust's sustainability. Please join these visionary pioneers and the Texas Ag Land Trust as we continue to work for working lands – forever.

All the best,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Blair".

Blair Fitzsimons, Chief Executive Officer
bfitzsimons@txaglandtrust.org

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POLICY UPDATES



US Senator John Cornyn, ever a champion for agriculture and our working lands, cordially hosted Blair and James for coffee at his Washington DC office during Ag Week.

With the current Farm Bill set to expire this September, House Agriculture Committee Chairman and Texas Congressman Mike Conaway has the unenviable task of developing a bill that will benefit agriculture, conservation, and our food security while adhering to the tight fiscal restraint mandated by the Trump Administration.

Along with the myriad commodity and conservation programs, within the Farm Bill is a little-known program designed to protect the long-term viability of the nation's food supply by preventing conversion of productive working lands to non-agricultural uses. The Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) program provides funding for land trusts to purchase conservation easements on agricultural lands.

Together with other members of the Partnership of Rangeland Trusts (PORT), Blair Fitzsimons and James Oliver have been working with Chairman Mike Conaway and the House Ag Committee, as well as with the Senate Ag Committee and National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), to hammer out changes that will enable the program to work better for agricultural producers. Top priority is to remove a matching fund requirement whereby a land trust must contribute cash from a non-



Blair and James visit with US Congressman Henry Cuellar about the importance of our agricultural lands in Texas, and the need for reforms to the 2018 Farm Bill to enable land trusts to more effectively keep working families on the land.

federal source other than the landowner. With so few sources of conservation funding in Texas, this requirement disqualifies many viable land conservation projects that would help protect the state's valuable agricultural lands.

We will continue to work hard for these and other changes to the ALE Program in the 2018 Farm Bill, but we need your help! For a full list of our recommended changes, visit www.txaglandtrust.org. Please contact your US Representative and Senator to ask for their support! Talking points and a sample letter are on the website.



Texas Congressman Mike Conaway meets with Blair and Lori Olsen from the Texas Land Trust Council to discuss the importance of Texas' working lands.

10 YEAR ANNIVERSARY



CELEBRATION



MISSION

To conserve the Texas heritage of agricultural lands, natural resources, and wildlife habitats.

GOVERNING PRINCIPLES

STEWARDSHIP

requires stewards.

Keeping productive rural lands in private hands and under private management is the best way to conserve Texas' natural resources.

FOCUS

only on private lands.

TALT refuses to acquire conservation easements that will end up in public hands or that involve condemnation.

HELP

landowners protect their lands.

TALT does not own fee title to any properties.

TRUST

the landowner to manage.

TALT does not interfere with day-to-day management decisions.

RESPECT

landowners' rights.

The donation of an agricultural conservation easement does not require the landowner to provide public access, nor does TALT require it.

HELP US



#SAVETXAGLANDS!

Please use the enclosed envelope to send your support today or donate online at www.txaglandtrust.org/support

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to Julie & Bob McCan and Sue Cannon for hosting our Anniversary Celebration at their beloved ranch, and to Atzenhoffer Chevrolet, Uhl, Fitzsimons, Jewett & Burton, PLLC, Wells Fargo Private Bank, and all of our generous sponsors for their support!

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS cont...

“What I know now is that our success has been about people. Our founding partners—Texas & Southwestern Cattle Raisers, Texas Farm Bureau, and Texas Wildlife Association—gave us instant credibility with landowners. Thanks to our incredible staff and a hard working board, in ten short years we have established our place in Texas as THE landowner’s land trust.”

Each of the easements held by the Texas Ag Land Trust represent a critical stepping stone in the development of this young organization, but none more so than the first two, donated by Clayton and Modesta Williams of Midland. Well-known in ranching and business circles, the couple closed conservation easements on more than 70,000 acres in far West Texas just days after the fledgling organization received its 501(c)3 status.

“As we were discussing the easement, Claytie said something that stuck with me all these years,” Steve Lewis, TALT’s founding board president, said in his remarks. “Claytie said, ‘This conservation easement will leave a mark on Texas. This working ranch will let people know we were here.’”

This commitment to keeping working lands working forever is the impetus behind the Forever Texas Fund, a permanent endowment to support the day-to-day operations of TALT. Steve Lewis and Joseph Fitzsimons are leading the effort to raise \$10 million.

“Easements last forever and so should TALT,” Lewis said, announcing the fund’s launch and lead gifts from Joseph Fitzsimons and Ruthie Russell.

Russell, who donated a conservation easement on Sycamore Canyon Ranch on the Devil’s River, told the audience that working with the Texas Ag Land Trust gave her peace of mind.

“I lived my whole life in a panic, afraid that I was going to lose the ranches that I was blessed enough to inherit,” Russell said.

Then Russell met Blair Fitzsimons, who shared the Ag Land Trust’s philosophy of working lands conservation. It ignited in Russell a desire to memorialize her love of the land through a conservation easement.

Before turning the evening over to the auctioneer, Blair Fitzsimons told the audience that this love of the land is the foundation of the Texas Ag Land Trust’s growth. Thanks to landowners like Ruthie Russell, TALT today is the largest land trust in Texas and the 11th largest in the nation.

“Everything we’ve done—and everything we hope to do—can be traced to the passion of our landowner partners,” Fitzsimons said. “Together we put our boots on the ground every day so that working lands keep working in Texas forever.”



“This conservation easement will leave a mark on Texas. This working ranch will let people know we were here.”

PROFILE | HIGH-LONESOME HAPPY COVE

“THAT is why we did it. These kids should always know this land is here for them. We couldn’t take the chance that it would someday not be a part of our lives.”



A PASSION FOR CONSERVATION: CLAYTIE AND MODESTA WILLIAMS by Lorie A. Woodward

As veteran wildcatters, Clayton and Modesta Williams, of Midland, routinely took leaps of faith.

“The Texas Ag Land Trust was in its formative stages when Claytie and Modesta approached us about holding the conservation easement on their ranches, High Lonesome and Happy Cove,” CEO Blair Fitzsimons said. “They wanted to protect their treasured Trans-Pecos ranches from development and fragmentation, and pass them down to their children.”

Known for their business acumen and innovative land stewardship, the couple had done their research—and were swayed by the Texas Ag Land Trust’s unique mission to conserve working lands. Claytie was first and foremost a rancher, and he wanted a land trust who understood ranching. The Texas Ag Land Trust’s mission fit his vision.

“Of all the things I have done in my life,” he said recently, “the thing I enjoy most is owning land. I enjoy improving the land. I focus on improving the grasses first, then I focus on the cattle.”

The couple, who married in 1965, spent the early days of their marriage dreaming about owning a ranch as they drove through the Trans-Pecos. Even then, they shared a passion for agriculture. Reared near Fort Stockton, Claytie had started his own farming operation when he was just 16. Modesta spent childhood days with her grandfather, Tom Good, on the ranch he homesteaded north of Big Spring. There, she learned about “the grasses and the animals and wildlife.”

In the 1970s, they bought the High Lonesome and Happy Cove ranches, hard-used properties in Jeff Davis and Brewster counties that totaled more than 70,000 acres. Claytie appreciated

the fragility of West Texas, once noting, “...it took 65 million years for the soil to accumulate, but it doesn’t take many years to ruin it.”

Together, the Williamses implemented conservation practices ranging from rotational livestock grazing to water distribution in order to enhance the native grasslands and habitat. Their goal was to make it productive for cattle and wildlife, such as antelope, mule deer, scaled quail, and myriad others.

Their conservation ethic ran deep. In a 2008 interview with the *Alpine Avalanche*, Claytie said, “God put me on this earth to leave things better than I found them. It is my responsibility to be a good steward of Texas land and resources so that the next generation of Texans can enjoy them as much as I have.”

But the couple wanted to go further than implementing good conservation practices. They wanted to ensure that the ranches endured intact, that future generations would not chop them up into pieces. In particular, they wanted to minimize the debilitating effect of estate taxes. They chose to protect the two ranches with conservation easements.

But the most important reason was family. While reminiscing recently why – ten years ago – they chose to enact a conservation easement, Modesta pointed to a photograph of her daughter’s family horseback at Happy Cove. “THAT is why we did it. These kids should always know this land is here for them. We couldn’t take the chance that it would someday not be a part of our lives.”



P.O. Box 6152 San Antonio, TX 78209

Texas Ag Land Trust mourns the loss of long-time board member and friend, Julie Kelleher Stacy.

Julie Stacy passed away peacefully on Thursday, April 12, 2018, after a long, hard-fought battle with metastatic breast cancer.

Julie's affection for rural Texas was cultivated in the rugged expanse of Brewster County and the limestone hills of Kendall County. Julie had a gentle, kind demeanor, and was a staunch supporter of Texas Ag Land Trust and our mission to conserve Texas' working lands. Her passion for land conservation was personal, as evidenced by an email she sent Blair Fitzsimons after the organization successfully closed the 17,000 acre Decie Ranch easement near Marathon, a special place for her family. She was so proud, she said, to have had a role in protecting that little piece of Texas - forever.

Julie will be deeply, deeply missed.

- Our thoughts and prayers go out to the Stacy and Kelleher families during this difficult time -

UPCOMING EVENTS

Sustainable Rangeland Symposium

Hosted by the National Ranching Heritage Center

June 7-8 Lubbock

Texas Wildlife Association's WildLife 2018

Visit us at Booth #416

July 12-15 San Antonio

Saving Family Lands Seminar

Hosted by the Texas Agricultural Land Trust

October 11 Kingsville

Visit txaglandtrust.org/news for more information.