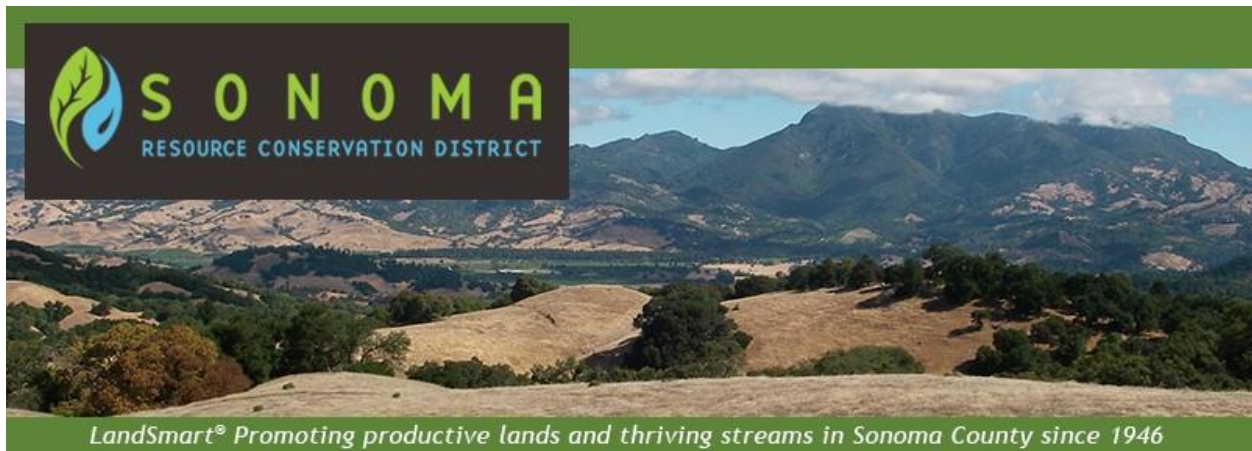


Reflections and Affirmations

As 2015 came to a close and we reflected on the year's accomplishments, the Sonoma, Gold Ridge and Marin RCDs are proud to have been a part of raising awareness of soil health locally. Driven by the International Community, 2015 Year of Soils gave us an opportunity to share the conservation work of our landowners and land managers in Sonoma and Marin Counties, as well as providing avenues to share cutting edge science on the complex soil systems below our feet. However, we now have the responsibility to continue to shed light on this important resource for the benefit of agricultural productivity and the communities who rely on them. The Sonoma RCD is celebrating 70 years, Marin RCD 57 years and Gold Ridge RCD 75 years of soil and water conservation in 2016. We look forward to furthering the natural resource goals of our districts and supporting landowners in stewarding these lands for years to come.

Exploring Careers in Agriculture and Resource Management

The Sonoma RCD's longest standing youth education program, FARMS Leadership, for high school students county wide spent the day working and learning at the SRJC's Shone Farm in Healdsburg in early December. The group of twenty-five youth learned about soil health fundamentals, farming practices and crop management, harvested winter greens for local food banks, and spent part of the afternoon listening to courses and degrees offered. Students gleaned valuable career information and had the opportunity to also give to their local community. Approximately 92 percent of FARMS Leadership graduates said that the program changed their attitudes about food and agriculture, while 56 percent now have a career involving agriculture or the environmental sciences. This program is offered in twelve other counties around the state and was founded by the Center for Land-Based Learning based in Winters over twenty years ago. Thank you to the Santa Rosa Junior College and Shone Farm for your continued support of this special program.



Youth Explore Soils and Agricultural Heritage of Sonoma County

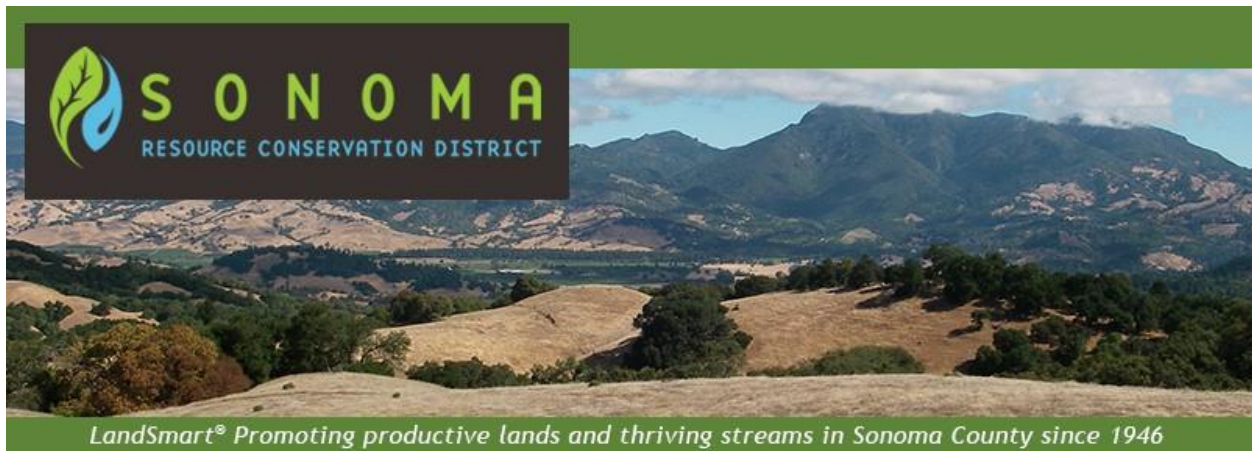
The Sonoma RCD in partnership with the Gold Ridge RCD and the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District developed the new TEAM (Teaching Environmental and Agricultural Memories) Conservation program learning site for elementary youth. The Sonoma RCD has just completed its first string of field trips to the historic Crane Melon Barn and Farm in Santa Rosa.

The Sonoma RCD is proud to announce this development as the newest youth education program under LandSmart®. October 2015 marked the unveiling of a series of unique field trips designed to inspire and encourage a connection with, and an appreciation for, natural resource conservation and local agriculture.

“These trips present an invaluable experience to young minds as we invite them to engage with our diverse agricultural landscape, the farmers, and soils that are the fabric of the dynamic community we reside,” said Christine Kuehn, RCD Program Coordinator. Highlighting soil health and soil science education students explored: various soil types, observed organic matter and nutrient cycling, examined soil water holding capacity, and particle size. Most significantly these students walked away with a better understanding of the importance of soil not only to agriculture, but to our community as a whole.

The RCD is offering a handful of these trips annually during melon harvest season at the Crane Family property, protected forever with a conservation easement from the Ag and Open Space District. Sorrel Allen, Agricultural and Open Space District Community Engagement Specialist, said, “It’s wonderful to watch this Crane farm field trip bring words like conservation and agriculture to life. The farm becomes a real life classroom, where students dig into the soil, taste the delicious heirloom Crane Melon, meet the farmers, and act out the nearly 160 years of Crane family farming history.”

The Crane Family has farmed within the upper headwaters of the Laguna de Santa Rosa since the mid-1800s. The famous Original Crane Melon’s legacy began in 1920 on the rich adobe clay soils of southern Santa Rosa. The Crane Family’s dedication to support this program and our students is a special partnership and one the RCD is grateful.



Landowners and farmers, Rick and Cindy Crane said, “We feel it is so important to teach children where their food comes from, especially the food that is grown here in Sonoma County. We believe this opportunity was beneficial for the children to see firsthand a working farm and what it produces. Hopefully, the public will learn how important our agricultural land and identity is in Sonoma County.”

Funding for this program is made possible by the voters of Sonoma County who fund the Agricultural and Open Space District's work with a quarter cent sales tax.