

BY Francesca Dalleo

LAND TRUST ACCREDITATION
COMMISSION 
An independent program of the Land Trust Alliance

HOW ACCREDITATION *Pays You Back*

How do you quantify better stewardship records, improved board and staff relationships or a stronger land trust community? While some benefits of accreditation aren't easily measured, many land trusts find that investing in accreditation pays them back.

Accredited land trusts doubled their operating budgets from 2005–2015, according to a recent report on accreditation's impact.* Accredited land trusts also had, on average, 55% more financial supporters and attracted three times more volunteers.

For California's Marin Agricultural Land Trust, being accredited and talking about it with policymakers and funders has certainly paid off. MALT benefits from both county and statewide funding

programs that require accreditation. Director of Conservation Jeff Stump explains that, for MALT, accreditation gives the policymakers drafting these funding programs—and the public voting on them—confidence in the organization's stewardship of both the funds and the land.

Stump says, "We talk a lot with our partners about the improvements we've made through the accreditation process," and how that helps MALT protect healthy food, diverse natural resources and farming as a way of life.

As part of Marin County's farmland protection program, organizations applying for easement funding must be accredited by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission. MALT has received \$14 million in grant funding through the program since it began in 2012 and brought in almost \$15 million in matching funds. This has translated into helping a dozen farm families protect more than 7,000 acres of valued farmland.


MALT is also helping to address climate change by finishing up one of its first projects through California's Sustainable Agricultural Land Conservation Program (supported by the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund), where accredited land trusts are automatically eligible to hold easements. Additionally, MALT has saved \$6,300 on TerraFirma fees over seven years through the

accreditation discount of the conservation defense insurance program.

Other land trusts across the country benefit from similar agency programs, such as in Colorado, with its expedited path to certification for accredited land trusts. Erik Glenn, executive director of Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust, says that "expediting the state certification process every year has resulted in significant savings in staff time."

Glenn appreciates that his land trust's funders consider accreditation in their decision-making process.

He estimates that as an accredited land trust, CCALT averages eight to 12 deals a year. Given the current regulatory and funding environment in Colorado, he speculates that if it was not accredited it would only do one to two deals each year. As for its TerraFirma discount, over the past five years CCALT has saved over \$18,000 by being accredited.

Glenn says CCALT is also pleased with the new federal Farm Bill, which allows accredited land trusts to be recognized as certified entities if they meet certain criteria. Having the special consideration for accredited land trusts means "a significant reduction in time and a greater certainty in determining when closing will occur," he explains. While the final Farm Bill rules are still being written, they will "undoubtedly save time, energy and money" for land trusts, landowners and other partners—which means saving more land at a lower cost. 

FRANCESCA DALLEO IS A COMMUNICATIONS AND OUTREACH CONSULTANT TO THE LAND TRUST ACCREDITATION COMMISSION.



Marin Agricultural Land Trust benefits from both county and statewide funding programs that require accreditation.

COURTESY OF MICHAEL WOOLSEY

*DOWNLOAD "AN IMPACT EVALUATION OF THE LAND TRUST ACCREDITATION PROGRAM'S FIRST 10 YEARS" AT WWW.LANDTRUSTACCREDITATION.ORG/ABOUT/IMPACT-EVALUATION.