

# Creating Balance Between Wild and Cultivated Land



Tom Broz, on his farm (Live Earth Farm).

STORY BY **SAM EARNSHAW**

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF **LIVE EARTH FARM**

*After years of farming, working, walking and observing the land, one gradually develops a "knowledge of place" and a bond to the landscape. No matter how many times I walk the same path or work the same field, I am always discovering something new, whether it's airflow and temperature variations, differences in drainage and soil types, areas where water seeps and should be left undisturbed, or subtle changes in the vegetation depending on the direction the landscape is facing (exposure to sun).*

*The longer I farm, the more I recognize that land stewardship is a lifelong learning process, one that requires balancing the many diverse relationships between the cultivated and non-cultivated environments*

*around us. In the last few years we have been very fortunate to work closely with Sam Earnshaw from Community Alliance with Family Farmers, and Jo Ann Baumgartner, director of Wild Farm Alliance, both of whom bring passion, experience and that necessary understanding of how wilderness and farming are mutually supportive. In this article, Sam describes the collaborative projects we've engaged in here on the farm, and reflects on the importance of the work we are doing. If farmers everywhere could have inspiring mentors like Sam and Jo Ann, I've no doubt that the role of farmers as land stewards would receive a more deserving recognition in society.*

- Tom Broz, Live Earth Farm

When you visit Live Earth Farm, you will notice native shrubs, trees and grasses growing in profusion within and around the fields of the crops.

These outgrowths of vegetation are all part of Tom and Constance's vision for a farm that incorporates all of the benefits and values of nature. In more formal terms, they can be called "conservation plantings" and they provide what is known as "ecosystem services." These services include pollination, pest predation, soil stabilization, and weed replacement, among others. That all sounds very scientific -- in fact, nature and biology are at the heart of Live Earth Farm.

In 2007, Tom and Constance began talking with Jo Ann Baumgartner from the Wild Farm Alliance and Sam Earnshaw from CAFF about habitat restoration.

Tom and Constance wanted to increase the farm's biodiversity so that it would not simply be all crops. They were also concerned about areas that were formerly farmed - areas very steep and prone to serious soil erosion. Some of the land management resource options include hedgerows, grassy filter strips and waterways and willow plantings.

Hedgerows can have multiple functions: they serve as habitat for beneficial insects, pollinators and other wildlife; provide erosion protection and

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weed control; serve as windbreaks; stabilize waterways; reduce non-point source water pollution and groundwater pollution; increase surface water infiltration; buffer pesticide drift, noise, odors and dust; act as living fences and boundary lines; increase biodiversity; and provide an aesthetic benefit.

Diversity in hedgerow species, especially when using natives, assures a range of attributes, such as multiple kinds of insects and wildlife attracted, positive effects to soil and water resources, and success of individual plants under site-specific climatic and other environmental conditions.

Grassed filter strips and waterways hold the soil, prevent erosion gullies from forming and provide cover for insects, spiders and other small wildlife. Willow plantings on the steepest slopes help to anchor soils in place with their network of extensive roots.

So, with much input from Tom and Sam, Wild Farm Alliance applied for and received a restoration grant from the Wildlife Conservation Board to design and implement conservation plantings on many areas of Live Earth Farm.

Tom and the team developed and are constantly refining an overall restoration plan for the whole farm, and together, with help from the Live Earth interns and farm workers, many areas are being planted to trees, shrubs and grasses. These plantings are increasing the biodiversity of the farm: bird life, beneficial insects,

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pollinators, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, the whole range of biological life of a Central Coast mixed evergreen forest and grassland ecosystem with a functioning farm throughout.

The diversity of activities, educational projects, people, crops and events happening at Live Earth Farm is truly inspiring. This diversity carries over into every part of the farm and its activities. The farm is an embodiment of how nature and agriculture can coexist in a healthy and productive way.

*This article also appeared in the Live Earth Farm (Com)Post Newsletter. For more information please visit <http://www.liveearthfarm.net/>.* 🌱