

Schmidt Cousins Ranch

27700 Airline Hwy.
Paicines, CA 95043

The Schmidt Cousins actually own three ranches: Bear Valley, Horse Valley, and the Peterson. The ownership group consists of 6 cousins and their families. The Stan Schmidt Family consists of 3 members, and the Jef Schmidt Family consists of 3 members. The ranches are all rented by the Peterson Land and Cattle Company which is a business run by the Jef Schmidt children and their spouses, and they run cows and calves.

When the first round of CSP money was presented to me (Kathy Schmidt Spencer) by Athena Pratt (NRCS), I looked at all the requirements and tried to find something on the list that would appeal to the ownership group. My husband, Joe, was interested in the wildlife ramps for troughs, and he designed and installed them. I did a yearly grazing plan and twice a year took grass clippings to measure residual dry matter.

My cousin, Rick Schmidt, was interested in the oak grove restoration and basically took charge of the plantings. Most of the family helped him plant the groves. His sister, Janis, took control of the watering. We did three groves; two are in Horse Valley, and they were planted in the first two years. This one here at Bear Valley was planted in the third year. We really learned a lot from the first two plantings.

Rick got interested in oaks because of research done on a plot of land here on Bear Valley in the 1980's. The research was done by NRCS and University of California at Davis. They just planted acorns in the plot. In the 1990's Rick went to a 3 day conference on the subject and met a lot of folks doing habitat restoration (down in Reedly, California) and met Doug McCreary. A friend of his was doing habitat restoration on the Russian River, and Rick took a 2 day course with him up in Santa Rosa.

We got our tree shelters from Tubex USA, Inc. in Verona, VA. The cost of the shipping was about 1/3 of the cost, but that's all we had at the time. The 5 ft. tree shelters were \$3.46 a shelter and came in 3 different diameters. We bought 450 tree mats 3'x 3' costing \$.85. They were plastic and a disaster. They got out in the fields, and I had calves chewing on them. It was a mess. I found burlap later to use, but we never needed to worry about the weeds. We turned in the cows, and they took care of it.

Our 1st planting in Horse Valley was approximately 1 acre on 2-11-2010, and we planted 2 – 3 acorns in 27 tree shelters. This amounts to an oak every 20-30 feet or so. Each oak tree planting has 2 T-bars to stabilize the tree shelter.

Rick had grown some *Nassella Pulchra* (Purple Needle Grass) at home, and they were about 3-4 years old in 1 gallon pots. We planted all of the plants that Rick had (approximately 30 of them), and we seeded other areas. Rick had been in contact with the botanist at Pinnacles National Monument, and he recommended the following genus/species of native grasses:

Muhlenbergia rigens (deer grass)
Danthonia Californica
Melica californica
Melica imperfecta (prefers shade)

Poa secunda
Nassella pulchra (doesn't like roots getting too wet)
Nassella lepida
Elymus glaucus

Rick found a couple of vendors (eg., Larners seeds, Hedgerow Farms) and is trying to determine whether he can get bulk purchase of this seed.

Our 2nd planting was 1-15-2011 in another area in Horse Valley about 1.9 acres. Due to pressure from NRCS we built two electric fences around each plot. One plot we got up and running and the other we never finished. Electric fencing can be a disaster in our area. When the ground dries up, you do not have an electric fence. My nephew had horses in both fields, and they went through the electric fence but did not seem to destroy the tree shelters.

In December of 2011, Rick and his family and Janis replanted both original plots with acorns.

Our 3rd planting was in Bear Valley on 2-4-2012. Rick dug trenches along where we planned to plant, and Joe used the augur on our tractor and dug 1' deep holes in which to put the acorns. Both were great plans since they acted like basins to hold water. We set up 110 sets of T-posts for acorns. Rick rented a T-post pounder to put in the T-posts.



← This picture shows you what you should and shouldn't do. Don't use zip ties and black plastic mats. Do make a trench and dig a hole for your acorns.

In 2013, we were told we had to replant Bear Valley, but we could use native plants along with acorns. I contacted the native nursery at Moss Landing, and he sent me a list of native plants he thought would work in our area. I did everything by email, www.elkhornnursery.com.

He recommended Big leaf maple, California incense cedar, Elizabeth bush anemone, Wild lilac (ceanothus), California fuchsia, Toyon, Lewis' mock orange, sticky monkey flower, chaparral currant, and Coulteri's matilija poppy. The family gave their input, and we also bought Yarrow, Buckeye, Point Reyes bearberry, silverbush lupine, scarlet monkey flower, California gooseberry, California rose, blue elderberry and black sage. We ordered 128 plants mainly in 1 gallon (cost \$12.00) and a few in 5 gallons (cost \$20.00). We picked the plants up in our gooseneck. The use of the gooseneck worked out good because it was covered.

The day after we picked up the plants, we got the family together and planted them in Bear Valley. Janis ended up taking a few of the plants to Horse Valley to plant.

We have cattle in the Bear Valley oak pasture from June until October. We have never fenced this grove off. Young cows, who have had at least one calf, are in this field to calf so they can be watched. As soon as a cow has 2-3 calves unassisted, we move them to the other ranch. The first calf heifers are kept closer to the corrals. I am out here at least twice a day from July to September and have never seen a cow eat an oak tree that is in a tree shelter. They will rub against them and push them over, and I am sure that if I was not out there to pick up the shelter, they would eat the young oak. We have learned some critical things. First, do not use twine or zip ties to tie the tree shelter on a T-post. Both disintegrate in the sun. Only tie the tree shelter to one post and use baling wire. Plant about 3 times more oaks than what you want, and you need to plan on replanting. Our star here at Bear Valley is oak #57. That tree was planted the first year we planted in Bear Valley in 2012.

The netting they gave us to put over the top to keep out birds was plastic and disintegrated in the sun. Birds will try to get in the tree shelters for some reason. Our neighbor, Lisa Smith, has done some testing of using different wire for the tops of the tree shelters. We found that we only had trouble with birds the first year of our planting. We haven't found a dead bird in the shelter for some time now. I had no idea what that means. Janis and I would go through the grove at least twice a year and remove the tree shelters in which the plant or tree were dead. Maybe that helped with the bird problem.

You need to gather acorns in the fall and try to pick trees near where you want to plant. Refrigerate the acorns and plant them out the end of December to the first of February depending on the rain. Before you plant the acorns put them in a bucket of water and any acorns that float, throw away.

Before Athena left, she came and looked at our oak groves. She now believed us when we told her we didn't need to plant 100 trees. Just plant 30 trees to start, keep replanting every year for a couple of years and maybe you will end up with five. These are valley oaks, and they will get big.

If you want to ask any questions you can phone me at 831-389-4320 or email me at ksspencer48@gmail.com. My address is 27000 Airline Hwy., Paicines, CA 95043.