



📷 Photos by Rio De La Vista Congressman John Salazar and the Salazar family have been avid supporters of ranchland conservation in Colorado since the early 1990s.

CONEJOS COUNTY — The Colorado Cattlemen’s Agriculture Land Trust (CCALT) has announced the successful conservation of the 500-acre Rancho la Luz property outside of Manassa.

This historic Conejos County ranch has been in agricultural production since the early 1800s, and with the aid of a conservation easement, it will remain undeveloped into the future. This project was made possible through a cooperative partnership between CCALT, Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO), the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Services, and Rancho la Luz landowners John and Mary Lou Salazar.

Congressman John Salazar and the Salazar family have been avid supporters of ranchland conservation in Colorado since the early 1990s. As a fifth-generation seed-potato farmer in the San Luis Valley, John has always been intimately connected to working lands, rural communities and the rich cultural heritage of these landscapes. John’s belief in ranchland conservation came full circle in the conservation of Rancho la Luz, his own family’s property.

In the 1860s, a large portion of Rancho la Luz was settled and inhabited by Felipe Cantu, John Salazar’s great-grandfather. Over time, the property was divided up and sold as the family faced economic pressures and hardships. In 2000, John and his wife, Mary Lou, began buying back portions of the historic ranch, with the ultimate goal of conserving the property for future generations.

Today, John and Mary Lou are thrilled that the ranch and its associated water rights will remain in agricultural production and intact forever. Like many properties in the Valley, some of the water rights on Rancho la Luz were established as far back as 1857, with ditches that were originally dug by John's ancestors.

Rancho la Luz is made up of several river bottom parcels nestled close to the San Luis Hills along the San Antonio and the Conejos Rivers. Named Rancho la Luz after John's wife, Maria de la Luz, Rancho la Luz is defined by its natural beauty and abundant habitat for deer, elk and many other native species. Rancho la Luz is visible from the Los Caminos Antiguos Scenic and Historic Byway.

The Salazars utilize the property for grazing and to raise certified organic hay that is sold to dairies in Colorado, New Mexico and Texas.

"It has been an honor to work with John, Mary Lou, and their family on this important conservation project. The Salazar family's commitment to Colorado and leadership in the San Luis Valley has brought attention to the important resources – natural and cultural – of this unique part of the state. Conserving Rancho la Luz builds on the conservation tradition of the Salazar family and many other farming and ranching families of the San Luis Valley who have committed to conserving their farms and ranches for the benefit of future generations of Coloradans," said Erik Glenn, CCALT executive director.

"To have the opportunity to permanently conserve a portion of my great-grandfather's ranch is humbling. This ranch means so much to our family and we are blessed to honor my great-grandfather's legacy while at the same time creating opportunities for future generations of the Salazar family to continue our connection with the land and the San Luis Valley," said John Salazar.

"Helping to conserve Rancho la Luz through our Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) means helping Colorado maintain a tradition of agriculture in an area that is home to some of the State's oldest ranches," says Randy Randall, NRCS acting state conservationist in Colorado. "In addition, riparian areas in the active channels of the Conejos and San Antonio rivers will benefit from this easement. Through ACEP, NRCS provides financial and technical assistance to help conserve agricultural lands and wetlands and their related benefits. The Salazar Family's Rancho la Luz property exemplifies the purpose of the ACEP program."

The Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust (CCALT) is a nonprofit land conservation organization whose mission is to "...conserve Colorado's western heritage and working landscapes for the benefit of future generations."