

# Interview: CDFA Healthy Soils Program

## CDFA Grant Recipient Belinda Xu



*Belinda Xu was a recipient of the CDFA Healthy Soils Program in 2018. She has now implemented compost and cover crops three years in a row. Because of challenging weather conditions, the 3000' hedgerow is a work in progress.*

*Belinda was a doctor of medicine in China. When coming to the US, she decided not to continue working as a doctor. But she still wanted to work with people and explore life, now in the form of plants and soil. She has established several preschools in LA and the farm in Campo is providing the school's food program with fresh produce, chicken and eggs.*



**The RCD provides technical assistance to producers, such as Belinda, who are applying for CDFA grants to help them fund and implement carbon farming practices.**

**Contact us for more information**

**You, and every farmer I know, work very hard. When things don't work out, you keep trying new things and ways to adapt to the climate. What motivates you to keep going?**

My main motivation is that I want to offer healthy organic food for the children in my schools. This drives me to keep exploring and experimenting with what can grow here. When many of the plants in the hedgerow did not survive, I found that some of the same species grew around my farm. So I collected seeds from these plants and I am in the process of planting them out. I thought these plants would be better adapted to the local weather conditions, and so far it seems to be working well.

**You have owned this farm now for 4 years - what are the biggest challenges?**

The weather and the cost of pumping water! We have high winds, and extreme temperatures. The summers are very hot, but the last frost was in June this year. We have well water here, and I have some solar panels and windmills to subsidize the electricity bill. But water is a finite resource, and I don't want to waste it, so I need to be as efficient as possible. The increase of organic matter in my soil is helping me use less water.

**How did you learn about the CDFA Healthy Soils Program, and what was your motivation to apply?**

In 2017 I went to a workshop organized by CDFA on farm business planning. There I got a chance to get to know the RCD by talking to some of the staff. A while later I received an email with information on the grant and that RCD staff would help me with the application. When I bought this farm, there was almost no organic matter in the soil, so I knew I needed to add more, and this program would help me do so.

**What changes have you seen over the last three years? The results from the soil analysis suggests that there has been a significant increase in organic matter in the soil. How does this translate into other observations of improved soil health?**

I am very excited about the improvements I see. The color of the soil has changed. Before it was almost yellow, and the texture was very sandy. Now it is much darker and it feels more loamy. The most remarkable change I have observed is the way the soil holds water. Before we would water it and, and after just 1 - 2 hours all the water was gone. But now, after 2 days only the top two inches were dry!

**What about farming gives you the most joy?**

I have been a doctor, and that is about life. Now I am a farmer, and that is also about life. I am just interested in and curious about how things grow and stay healthy.

**Now that the program and the funding has ended - do you plan to continue these practices?**

Even if the program is ending, I will not stop using these practices. The changes I have seen in the soil are too valuable.