



Farmland Working Group

Striving to protect food, families & farmland. Since 1999.

A TIME TO REFLECT ON FARMLAND CONSERVATION EFFORTS THROUGHOUT THE SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY

As we enter the holidays and come to the end of the year, it is a time for both reflection, thankfulness and hope for the future. I thought I would take this time to reflect on the farmland conservation efforts occurring not only in Stanislaus County but throughout the San Joaquin Valley.

Just one year ago, in the southern part of our region, the cities of Visalia and Fresno each voted to adopt similar, precedent-setting General Plan Updates. These general plans each had three structural similarities that were important:

1. Their spheres of influence were not expanded,
2. Farmland mitigation policies were required 1:1 agricultural conservation easement acquisitions when prime agricultural soils were converted to urban uses
3. Infill development policies were put in place requiring that 60% of the land within the city limits be developed before opening any farmland in the spheres of influence to annexation and development.

In addition, particularly at the City of Fresno, extraordinary public outreach and engagement informed neighborhoods, communities of faith, and immigrant groups of the importance of general plans with respect to their quality of life and future economic opportunities.

Recently, California's new climate policies began to be implemented throughout the state. One of these was SB 375, which set greenhouse gas reduction targets of 5% by 2020 and 10% by 2035 for the San Joaquin Valley. Since most of these emissions come from cars, the "sustainable community

strategies" designed to realize these standards were linked to Regional Transportation Plans for each county in the region.

Meanwhile, a cap-and-trade system was initiated in the state that will generate billions of dollars to be invested in programs to address climate change and its effects. In particular, two new state programs have been developed under this program – the Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities (AHSC) program and the Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation (SALC) program. The SALC program is one of the first programs in the world to address climate change by investing in farmers by conserving their farmland.

Finally, with Measure I in Modesto, the first urban limit line initiative was brought forward in the San Joaquin Valley. While the outcome of that initiative remains undetermined, its importance is undiminished. Urban limit lines, like Measure I, not only conserve high quality farmlands, but also hold promise to direct investment and development into the city's divested downtown center and existing commercial corridors.

Broadly, urban growth boundaries do not stop growth but only require a higher threshold of democracy – a 50% vote of a city's own residents – regarding critically important land use decisions that may affect property values, the vitality of existing

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Our Mission: To preserve the agricultural foundation of our region and promote smart growth in our urban communities through education, outreach and action.



WE ARE WATCHING...

Stanislaus County/Ceres

www.co.stanislaus.ca.us

www.ci.ceres.ca.us

Plans for a new bridge to connect Faith Home Road and Claus Road across the Tuolumne River has resurfaced. Over ten years ago the Stanislaus Council of Governments tried to advance the route but was met with a flurry of challenges, mostly from landowners along the Faith Home Road corridor.

What may be different now is the possibility that the City of Ceres could use Faith Home Road as an urban limit to win more support. The route would theoretically provide a more direct route for trucks and cars from Modesto, Riverbank, and Oakdale to south bound Fwy 99, and relieve some congestion on Mitchell Road in Ceres. Should Ceres want to place an urban limit along their east side they would want some form of agreement from Stanislaus County to prevent urbanization of the area. The City recently held a combined workshop with the City Council and Planning Commission about their General Plan (GP) update. General Plans are required by the state. The last City of Ceres GP was adopted in 1997. It has since been amended to redirect development westward.

City of Modesto

www.modestogov.com

The Modesto City Council (MCC) is taking a wait-and-see approach regarding a complaint filed by voter and former Council member Denny Jackman. The complaint to the California Secretary of State is that the City violated California Elections Code 9215 when it failed to print the text of Measure I for the November ballot. The code reads: (The Council must) (b) Submit the ordinance, without alteration, to the voters. Jackman contends that, without the text of the measure, voters were not provided complete information to understand what they were voting on.

The MCC appears to be holding their breath, in a strategy to see what the Secretary of State may require of them. In addition, what will proponents of Measure I do should no action be taken? Will a lawsuit get the desired results for another ballot? Then, another campaign needs more money. Why not avoid legal costs and outcomes and go back to the voters anew? Perhaps a new initiative will close one of the complaints by opponents of Measure I. They complained that I wasn't a very good urban limit because it was open to the farmland on the east side of the city. Perhaps a new initiative would restrict all development to the city's existing Sphere of Influence (SOI). Using

the SOI would serve to protect more prime farmland and water recharge area than does Measure I. The area between Salida and Kiernan Road is not within Modesto's SOI. Yet there is over 10,000 acres of under and undeveloped land with the SOI.

It has been rumored that a three story set of apartments is planned for the vacant lot just north of Vintage Faire Mall. The lot was previously planned for another shopping center, but failed to receive approval from the mall to connect for vehicle access with the mall. Instead, it looks like the mall will be a recipient of many more shoppers living just next door. FWG promotes residential uses for vacant lots within urban areas. Particularly those within walking distance of major commercial establishments.

City of Patterson

www.ci.patterson.ca.us/

Former Mayor David Keller in the Modesto Bee recently criticized a disconnect between the economic gains from recent development and Patterson's decaying historic downtown area. He says, "It goes beyond the city's burgeoning homeless population. In a quick count on the Saturday after Thanksgiving, I found 43 city streetlights out in Patterson's downtown district. Many areas in downtown Patterson are completely dark at night."

In the same online article Sean Harris claims: Patterson should have used the tens of thousands of dollars, it has "given" to subsidize the newly formed Patterson-Westley Chamber of Commerce, to address the homeless and lighting issues addressed in this letter. The Chamber of Commerce should not be subsidized by the city of Patterson, it should be funded by dues from local businesses.

City of Riverbank

www.riverbank.org/

A number of projects are moving forward that were left undone when the recession hit. Most notable are the homes being built at Oakdale Rd and Novi Drive in the Crossroads neighborhood. The Crossroads Shopping Center is also the new home for an AT&T store with Panda Express, Dickey's BBQ and Five Guys, on the way. There is also lots of activity in the northeast area of the City known as Bruinville, including the Diamond Bar West project which will have 58 low density homes and an affordable housing development that is being built by Pacific West. Construction on the addition of IMAX at the Galaxy Theater is also proceeding for an opening in the first quarter of 2016.

Local Farmers Markets End a BOUNTIFUL SEASON



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neighborhoods, and the conservation of resources including farmland and groundwater recharge areas.

It has become clear over the last few years that farmland conservation in a rural agricultural region like the San Joaquin Valley is linked to how cities grow and where public investments are made.

Recent citizen advocacy over general plans, sustainable community strategies and urban limit lines holds hope that the future long term economic development – both agricultural and urban – of the San Joaquin Valley will save farmland and grow cities.

Dan O'Connell, PhD
San Joaquin Valley Program Manager
American Farmland Trust

Stanislaus Sustainable Communities Coalition Equitable Transportation Expenditure Plan

The Stanislaus Sustainable Communities Coalition recommends to both the Management and Finance Committee as well as the Stan COG Policy Board to commit to an equitable transportation expenditure plan for the proposed half cent sales tax as follows:

- 1/3 for New Road Construction
- 1/3 for Road Rehabilitation (Repairs)
- 1/3 for Alternative Modes of Transportation (Transit)

• **Self-Help Counties:** As of 2013, 81% of CA population lives in 20 self-help counties, which include San Joaquin, Fresno, Madera & Tulare (<http://www.selfhelpcounties.org/>).

• **Air Quality:** Pollution in the central valley is a reality and driving contributes to the poor air quality. If a transportation network were in place to promote shorter commutes, increase access to daily needs, and make public transit more convenient, this would improve air quality and reduce the burden of diseases (i.e., asthma, heart disease, etc.).

• **Fiscal responsibility:** We need to secure local funding (matching funds) to access projects for alternative modes of transportation which will secure the future of our cities and county.

• **Pedestrian Safety:** Pedestrian safety is also an issue within Stanislaus County. Residents often cannot walk or bike due to lack of safe routes.

• **Public Health:** The recent epidemic of obesity and poor health related to lack of physical activity can be partially addressed by creating communities that are safer, with more options for active transportation and safe routes to school. Our county needs to prioritize investing in active transportation projects, finding ways to access more of the state and federal funding for Active Transportation projects.

• **Alternative Modes of Transportation:** Many people have little option but to drive long distances to work or school. Seniors, youth, and others who don't drive may be stranded at home. This expenditure plan can give people more choices and give our seniors and teenagers the freedom to get around independently.

• **Household Transportation Expenses:** After housing, transportation is most households' largest expense. By building neighborhoods that offer additional options such as walking, biking, and public transit, residents of Stanislaus County can save both time and money that would otherwise be spent on commuting.

• **Walkable Communities:** The housing market is shifting towards a demand for more walkable neighborhoods. Some neighborhoods built in the past have no sidewalks and are relatively far from jobs, shops, and transportation options. Many people now want different choices. Buyers now want to live in places where they CAN walk to a corner store if they want to, and where they are NOT forced to drive long distances to get to work.

• **Public Safety:** More pedestrians = "eyes on the street" which also improves public safety.

Stanislaus Council of Governments: 2015 Voter Survey

- The survey revealed a very solid base of voter support for a transportation sales tax measure. Support for the measure in the November 2016 election was 63.5% on the uninformed test and 64.0% on the informed test for November 2016.



Message from the Secretary
*Modesto has plenty of room to grow
 without imperiling our finest land*

Saying it's OK to pave over our best farmland west of Highway 99 because we have more acres of farm-

land than we had 20 years ago is terribly misleading. The rich and permeable soils of Wood Colony cannot be compared to the 40,000 acres of farmland in the hills of eastern Stanislaus County, which can never grow the variety of crops grown on the valley floor.

Those hill orchards are completely reliant on groundwater – drawn from the same aquifer the city of Modesto depends on for municipal water. As those thirsty orchards slowly deplete our aquifer; the permeable soils of Wood Colony replenish it. This land is within Modesto Irrigation District,

meaning the captured snowmelt irrigates the crops then percolates through layers of soil and rock into the aquifer.

The Modesto City Council should do everything within its power to protect irrigated farmland in a major recharge area; it is truly a national treasure. The city can develop land within its borders. There's enough land for 20 years of growth in Modesto's current General Plan. If Modesto continues to expand, it will never have enough police, firefighters and municipal workers. Protect our finite resources and stop the sprawl.

Jeani Ferrari, Farmland Working Group
 Advocacy Committee, Turlock

-Excerpt from The Modesto Bee, October 29, 2015

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Married Sept. 19, 2015

**Araceli Villanueva
 and Chance Carrico**



Married Nov. 7, 2015

from the FWG Board

It's that time of year... to show your appreciation for all our good work!

The Farmland Working Group Board is a volunteer advocacy group, we have NO PAID STAFF.

Please take a moment to renew your membership, become a member or/and support our important work with an end-of-year donation.

YOUR SUPPORT KEEPS US GOING!

Please enjoy the enclosed decals
 My Job Depends on Ag
 No Farms No Food

Farmland Working Group

P. O. Box 948 Turlock, CA 95381 (209) 343-4174



HAPPY
HOLIDAYS
from the
USA



www.farmlandworkinggroup.org

It's time to renew your membership!

Planning Commissioners
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