

Farmland Working Group Awards Scholarships

Farmland Working Group began our High School Scholarship Program in 2005 with a single scholarship awarded to a graduating senior at Ceres High School. In 2006, FWG sent scholarship applications to every public high school in Stanislaus County. We were pleased to receive ten applications from seniors at Ceres High School, Beyer and Johannson high schools, both in Modesto.



The scholarship requirement was that the student write an essay about the need to mitigate for the loss of farmland in the Central Valley of California. All students wrote compelling essays on the topic. The Scholarship Committee selected three winning essays. The recipients of the \$200 scholarships were: Elizabeth Allison from Beyer High School and Lance Azevedo and Theresa Melton from Ceres High School.



If you would like more information or would like to receive an application for 2007, please contact us at P.O. Box 948, Turlock, CA 95381. The deadline for the 2007 High School Scholarship is April 30, 2007.

WE ARE WATCHING...

Stanislaus County

City of Riverbank

To get information or send your ideas or comments to the City for the General Plan Update email: genplanupdate@riverbank.org or visit: www.riverbank.org

City of Modesto

Consideration of next area to develop may start early in 2007 for November vote. Sphere of Influence expansion may be on table. Modesto requires a citizen advisory vote before expansion of sewer service.

November 2006 Elections

Have a say about growth by choosing leaders who call for smart growth principles and better cities, not just bigger cities. These cities hold elections this year:

Waterford, Turlock, Newman, Oakdale, Riverbank, Hughson, Patterson

Ceres and Modesto elections are in odd numbered years.

Merced County

City of Merced

General Plan proposal doubles 117 year old city in 20 year plan. One proposed plan of 43,591 acres super-sizes Merced. Public involvement is sought. For more information go to: planningweb@cityofmerced.org

UC Merced

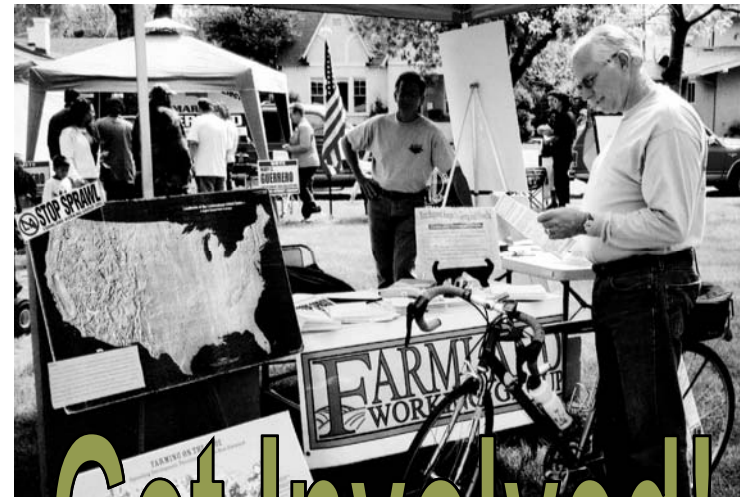
U.S. Corps of Engineers is concerned with preferred site of campus expansion.

Alternative sites could take more productive ag land.

County of Merced

Williamson Act removals are becoming a hot topic. For more information email the Merced Farm Bureau: mcfb@pacbell.net To follow county planning efforts or attend community meetings go to: www.co.merced.ca.us/gpu/meetings.html

Farmland Working Group
P.O. Box 948 Turlock, CA 95381
(209) 526-5821



Get Involved!



Will growth management techniques be enough to maintain the farming industry and high quality of life? Or will sprawl steadily eat through the countryside?

FARMLAND WORKING GROUP

Summer 2006

STRIVING TO PROTECT FOOD, FAMILIES AND FARMLAND

Stanislaus County Ag Element Updated - Keep Development Off Productive Farmland

In 1992, the Agricultural Element of the Stanislaus County General Plan was adopted. The 59 page document was designed to promote and protect agriculture. Fourteen years later, the Ag Element is being revised. The new draft document has fewer statistics with more policy and implementation. The 2006 Ag Element has teeth.

The Goals that make up the policy are essentially the same as in the original 1992 version:

1. **Strengthen the agricultural sector of our economy.**
2. **Conserve our agricultural lands for agricultural uses.**
3. **Protect the natural resources that sustain our agricultural industry.**

In supporting Goal 2, the new draft document reads, "The parcelization of farmland often results in the creation of ranchettes due to the diminished agricultural economic viability of smaller independent farming units. Ranchettes are characterized as rural home sites valued primarily for their residential development..."

In recognition of the legitimate reasons for parcelization of farmland, there are options available to insure ranchettes are not inadvertently created. These options could include: increasing the minimum parcel size requirements, restricting development on parcels not meeting a minimum gross production standard, or establishing

'no build' provisions for newly created or adjusted parcels. Lot line adjustments of farmland also have the potential in the creation of ranchette parcels."

Supervisor Jim DeMartini has been leading the charge to make certain that the Ag Element has the policy and the implementation to support and encourage agriculture in Stanislaus County. DeMartini commented, "If I'm going to accomplish something while in office, it is to create an Ag Element that protects ag land. The Agricultural Element of the General Plan is the county's official agricultural policy and we're dealing with problems that didn't exist in 1992."

"We will not permit anything in an agricultural area that isn't agriculture. That's my philosophy, I want to make sure that farmers are able to farm."

-Supervisor Jim DeMartini

DeMartini continued, "A forty acre home site was unheard of when the Ag Element was written in 1992. Today, it is comparable in price to the half acre lot in upscale neighborhoods. There is concern that the forty acre parcel (A-2-40 zone) is seen by

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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.

The Future is Now: Central Valley Farmland at the Tipping Point?

American Farmland Trust has completed an exhaustive study of what is happening to Central Valley farmland and why. *The Future Is Now: Central Valley Farmland at The Tipping Point?* is available only on the Internet at: www.farmland.org.

The Future Is Now covers 11 counties, from Sutter in the north to Kern in the south, and looks at changes during the period from 1990 to 2000 (when the most comprehensive data on farmland are available).

Over 97,000 acres of farmland were urbanized dur-

ing the 1990s, a 17% increase in just a decade. Another 27,000 acres were developed between 2000 and 2002.

This brought the total urban area of the Valley to about 696,000 acres. Of this, about 202,000 acres of developed land (26%) were outside city spheres of influence. Another 127,000 acres of land are developed as "ranchettes," rural residences on lots ranging from 1.5 to 10 acres. Thus, 40% of all development in the Valley now sprawls beyond the areas where development is supposed to be located in order to promote orderly growth, protect agriculture and keep public service costs and taxes low.

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out-of-towners, with financial means, as a large lot on which to build a home. Stanislaus County is losing ag land to the development of ranchettes."

The updated document states: "Conversion of agricultural land occurs when nonagricultural uses are introduced into agricultural areas and when agricultural land is parceled or adjusted into sizes too small to sustain an economically viable independent farming operation." DeMartini points out that businesses that have been allowed on ag land will face tighter scrutiny in the new Ag Element. Examples of these businesses are repair shops, trucking terminals and other ag-related businesses that should be directed to urban areas. Protected by State laws, school districts can build schools on land zoned agriculture. School sites, as well as church sites, make it difficult for farmers to farm and encourage piecemeal conversion of a larger agricultural area to non-agricultural uses, which induce growth.

DeMartini's concern about ranchettes is supported by American Farmland Trust's latest report on loss of farmland in the Central Valley of California, *The Future Is Now: Central Valley Farmland at the Tipping Point?* The report identifies ranchettes as the greatest threat to farmland loss in the Central Valley of California.

Jim DeMartini, Supervisor District 5, Stanislaus County
(209) 525-4470 demartinij@mail.co.stanislaus.ca.us



- Supervisor Jim DeMartini

The revised Ag Element of Stanislaus County's General Plan will be released later this month and public hearings will begin. According to Supervisor Jim DeMartini, who has worked many hours on the revision, larger parcel sizes will be one of the recommendations.



Message from the President

Our last issue focused on the number one concern of Valley residents – Growth. Specifically, the negative impacts of growth: traffic congestion, air quality and the loss of farmland. The bigger picture is the impact of growth on our quality of life.

People moving to the Central Valley are often seeking a better quality of life for themselves and their families. The new transplants are often leaving areas that have intolerable traffic congestion, and sprawling growth that has consumed open space, farmland and all sense of place.

The Ag Element is one of many tools that can be used by the County to reduce farmland loss and put development in urban areas where there are appropriate urban services.

For the new transplants, their new hometown feels good. There is open space and farmland and a sense of community. For the longtime resident, the perception is very different. Open space and farmland is disappearing and traffic congestion and dirty air makes home feel more and more like Los Angeles.

The recent study by American Farmland Trust, *The Future is Now: Central Valley Farmland at the Tipping Point?* and the Great Valley Center's 2006 Conference, *At the Tipping*

Point, express what many believe, that the Central Valley is at the tipping point. If we continue to grow our cities the way we have in the past, we are destined to become another San Fernando Valley. We are reaching a point of no return.

There are elected officials who understand that the Central Valley is at the tipping point and are doing the right things to preserve farmland and food security. The Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors will be doing the right thing if they adopt the 2006 Ag Element to the General Plan.

The 2006 Ag Element addresses a serious problem in Stanislaus County, the loss of productive farmland to parcelization. When land is divided into small parcels, often it is to create rural residences. The negative impact of the residential development ultimately interferes with farming operations surrounding it. Included in the 2006 Ag Element is the "Right to Farm Ordinance," which spells out the rights of the farmer to farm.

The Ag Element is one of many tools that can be used by the County to reduce the loss of ag land and put development in urban areas where there are appropriate urban services.

Farmland Working Group commends the Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors for updating the Ag Element of the General Plan. We applaud Supervisor Jim DeMartini for his commitment to creating a document that puts real language and real policy on the table to protect our irreplaceable farmland.

FWG Executive Board

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Directors
Mark Bender
Denny Jackman
Vance Kennedy
Rudy Platzek

Many thanks to our sponsors for underwriting the cost of FWG's newsletter:

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The FWG website is under construction. Look forward to its return soon.



FWG Board Welcomes New Directors

The Executive Board is welcoming three new Directors: Mark Bender, Vance Kennedy and Rudy Platzek. They join Denny Jackman who has been a Director for two terms and, until now, the only Director serving on the Board.

Along with the expansion of the Executive Board comes a major change in the operation of Farmland Working Group. The non-profit organization will meet as a Board six times a year. There will no longer be a general meeting each month. As stated in our By-laws, FWG will hold its Annual Members Meeting and elections in April each year.



Mark Bender , Ph.D.

Mark is a Professor and Endowed Chair for Agricultural Studies at California State University, Stanislaus. He has a long history of involvement in Agricultural Education and concern for California and Valley agriculture. Having spent 3 years in high school teaching, 27 years at Modesto Junior College (five as Dean of Agriculture, Environmental Sciences and Technical Education), and 4 years starting the new Agriculture Program at Stanislaus, Dr. Bender is concerned about the sustainability of this valley from an economic, environmental, and social perspective. He believes that the solution to our population, traffic, land use, environmental and economic challenges lies in cooperative effort. Crucial is building on common goals for healthy, vibrant communities with agriculture at the epicenter of economic and environmental stability .

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Vance C. Kennedy, Ph.D.

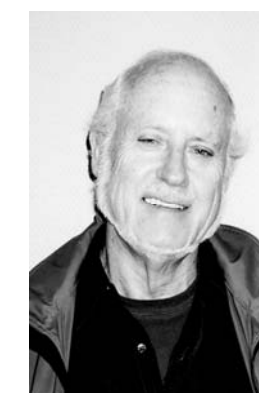
Vance is a retired research hydrologist, U.S. Geological Survey, and maintains active contact with the organization. He operates a small farm north of Modesto. His academic background includes degrees in chemical engineering, geophysics, geochemistry, and geology. He is establishing a fruit stand market on his property, specializing in citrus (some quite uncommon), and will re-

lishing a fruit stand market on his property, specializing in citrus (some quite uncommon), and will re-

The Board is excited about the addition of the new Directors and is looking forward to another productive year.

If you have an interest in educating the public about the most productive farmland in the world, please contact us. We are looking for a few good people to work with us. Our immediate needs are: people interested in working on the production of our newsletter (published three times per year), people who enjoy talking with high school students and adults about our program/curriculum, and people with skills in creating DVDs (visual and technical skill).

sale products from local farmers. Saving Central Valley farmland for future generations has been Vance's major goal for many years. Helping local farmers to survive fits that goal.



Rudy Platzek

Rudy's professional career included regional planning director for the Association of Bay Area Governments, where he prepared the Bay Area's first regional plan. He owned a planning firm, and prepared city and county General Plans (GPs) throughout California.

Born in 1930, Rudy was raised in the Sacramento Valley . The Central Valley (CV) was rural and agricultural. He moved to the Bay Area in the 1950s, then back to the CV in the 1980s and saw a vastly different CV, with large urban areas along Highway 99 beginning to grow together.

Due to his concern, he and a team aggregated and mapped the proposed urbanization of all the CV's city and county GPs. This one map showed a staggering amount of proposed development already planned for the CV. Mapping to the year 2080 (one lifetime) with an expected 25 million people, showed over 2/3 of the CV farmland lost to urbanization.

Rudy believes that the present planning system will not provide sufficient farmland protection to preserve food security for future generations. He sees the need for a State mandated management system that permanently protects the CV's farmland base from future urban sprawl.