



Farmland Working Group has fought sprawl in valley - Modesto Bee, The (CA) - August 28, 2019 - page 8A

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Farmland Working Group has been a consistent, persistent advocate for protecting our best farmland for over 20 years.

In 1999, FWG made its first video, "A Vision and a Legacy," capturing the essence of what makes the Central Valley of California an agricultural powerhouse. FWG newsletters, going back to the beginning of this century, chronicle the depth and breadth of our commitment. Each issue tells the stories of people committed to the land, taking steps to stop sprawl over our best soils.

In 2007 we questioned the logic of the Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors adopting the Salida Now initiative rather than sending it to a public vote. Our "Salida How?" headline challenged adding thousands of acres of urbanization in an unincorporated area without the structure and means to pay its own way for urban services.

In 2008, the public came out and voted for the Stamp Out Sprawl initiative with a super majority; the law of the land became "no more residential development outside of cities within Stanislaus County." We celebrated this landmark vote with our spring issue proclaiming "E Changes Everything!" And, so it did! For nearly 12 years, no new housing subdivisions have sprouted up over our best county lands.

2009 was our 10-year anniversary and we wrote about not allowing urban use in the ag buffer north of Turlock. We highlighted the need for "Rethinking the North County Corridor." The subsequent public outcry to "make Kiernan work" became reality and Kiernan Road continues to be the main four-lane divided corridor on the east side of the county.

In 2010, we encouraged Turlock to "hold the line" along their west side, and documented the courts upholding the Stanislaus County Farmland Mitigation Program when challenged by the building industry.

Residential urban limits were introduced to the public and proposed to the Modesto City Council in 2012. As an outgrowth, mayors of Stanislaus cities asked for collaboration between development attorney George Petrulakis and us to address the concept of agricultural investment zones. Today, this plan is dormant but may produce some future innovations.

2014 began with "No Annexation of Wood Colony" and ended with Stamp Out Sprawl urban limits qualified for the ballot in Modesto. Unfortunately, in November 2015, less than 25% of registered voters cast ballots and Measure I was defeated by 215 votes. 2016 and 2017 brought an ever-present concern about water and what state mandates may do to the future of agriculture.

In 2018, the Central Valley Farmland Trust merged with the Brentwood Farmland Trust of Contra Costa County, becoming California Farmland Trust. This is very dear to us; both of us served on the county committee that explored the feasibility of forming a farmland trust.

And now, in 2019 and beyond, our focus remains true to our mission: To preserve the agricultural foundation of our region and promote smart growth in our urban communities through education, outreach and action.

Denny Jackman and Jeani **Ferrari** are founding members of Farmland Working Group. They wrote this for The Modesto Bee.

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