



Spring 2005

STRIVING TO PROTECT FOOD, FAMILIES AND FARMLAND

Yesterday's "Vision" —Today's Policies

Stanislaus County's Board of Supervisors has an opportunity to move its "vision" to save farmland to a policy to save farmland. Stanislaus County's population is one of the fastest growing in the nation. Today, while there is still productive farmland to save, is the time to direct the cities within the county to work together to preserve our most productive farmland.

Supervisors must act before our county becomes another Los Angeles County.

The supervisors must take the lead in establishing a policy to mitigate for the loss of farmland. This is too important to be left up to the nine cities acting independently. The policy must be uniform and county-directed. Any hope of regional planning must start with the county.

Simply stated, farmland mitigation is the practice of charging housing and commercial developers fees on farmland that is developed, then using that money to preserve threatened farmland.

To keep the land agricultural, development rights are legally separated from the land and those rights are held, in perpetuity, by a land trust. This is a non-profit organization that works with willing landowners and public agencies to conserve farmland.

The Central Valley Farmland Trust, a regional land trust, would use the mitigation fees collected by Stanislaus County to permanently preserve farmland through the purchase of conservation easements.

Farmland mitigation will allow Stanislaus County to establish a long-term solution for the problem of paving over the best farmland. Counties throughout California have found that the loss of productive farmland can be partially mitigated by placing conservation easements on farmland that will face the most pressure from urban development.

Strategically placed conservation easements can be used to preserve the farmland that is critical to keeping cities separated.

Stanislaus County's vision is that the cities in the county be separated by farmland. Conservation easements provide a vital role in permanently preserving the land that separates the cities. When cities lose their rural edges and run together in an urban soup, the character of the cities is lost and can never be reversed. When growth is rampant, this can occur very quickly.

We will demonstrate our resolve to produce a world class example of "DOING IT RIGHT" so that Stanislaus County remains blessed with a bounty of fertile land for agriculture. Population growth will be accommodated in communities of varying sizes ranging from larger metropolitan areas to mid-sized cities, to small rural towns and enclaves. Communities will plan, grow and evolve in a compact, efficient fashion. Large expanses of agricultural land and other open space will secure buffers between urban areas and preserve the beauty of views and vistas throughout the County.

Land use vision — Stanislaus County

Recently, the City of Modesto recognized the opportunity to permanently preserve farmland with the use of mitigation fees. The city established a precedent in the county by mitigating for the loss of farmland with the new Kaiser Hospital.

With the county's explosive growth, it is obvious that today – not tomorrow – is the time to establish such a policy. Farmland mitigation is the most effective tool to save a portion of the world's best farmland and practice smart growth in our county.

The county needs to take the lead in setting policy. The Board of Supervisors must act quickly.

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



President's Message

A Vision and a Legacy –

Farmland Working Group made our first video in 1999. The film, *A Vision and a Legacy*, captures the essence of what makes the Central Valley of California the agricultural powerhouse that it is. It also talks about the need to balance the projected population, ten million in the next thirty years, with the protection of the valley's most amazing resource – the productive farmland that feeds one quarter of our nation.

Since 9/11, food security has taken on new meanings. New attention is being given to “national food security” to ensure that the food we import is safe from contamination from terrorists. Food security is also the capability of the United States to feed our own people. This may be the bigger issue in an age of terrorism, world conflict and a growing population.

The “food production capability” of the United States will diminish as urban development continues to consume productive farmlands. Leading the nation in “food production capability” is California, producing 25% of the nation's table food. No other state has the food production capability of California, or the ability to grow the variety of crops that are harvested in California's Central Valley, over 250.

IS THE VISION ALIVE ?

BY JEANI FERRARI

Steve Hallam, Community Development Director for the City of Oakdale, was asked, “Is the Visioning Process/2000 alive and active in Stanislaus County?” His reply, “It is in intensive care.” “How do you implement a vision?”

Our discussion focused on the purpose for creating a vision. The vision was a collaborative effort, by the nine cities and county, to create a plan for the future. The plan was a regional approach for the county and cities to work together.

“I'm surprised at how little conscious thought is given to regional issues by many of the planning professionals and elected officials in Stanislaus County.”

Steve asked, “Where do we want to be in twenty years? We will never have an opportunity to create our own destiny better than now. We can set the bar wherever we want.”

What could be done in Stanislaus County to more effectively preserve important farmland?

“First, the cities and County should truly acknowledge by very specific public policy that the new urban development patterns should take place within the existing urbanized cities, not in the unincorporated territory of Stanislaus County.

Second, the cities should cooperatively consider the establishment of permanent urban limit lines, particularly along those sides that have the most threat to important farmlands adjoining each community.

Finally, with the establishment of realistic urban limit lines the cities should support new development at a higher density or building intensity (while still enhancing quality of life factors). In other words: Put more of the “right things” in the “right places.”

Given this scenario, America will increasingly have to rely on food imports to sustain this nation. And, as time passes, those imports may not be readily available. Throughout the world, farmland will be paved to accommodate a growing population. Other nations will be competing with the United States to import food. Where will this food come from? One sobering thought is that worldwide demand for imported food will cause further clear-cutting of the world's rain forests.

Californians don't have to look very far for reminders of what we don't want to happen in the Central Valley of California. Just 50 years ago, Los Angeles County was the number one agricultural county in the nation. While we talk of our vision to save our most productive farmland, we have not created long-term policies to implement our vision. We are on a course to become another Los Angeles County.

Our elected leaders will determine the future of the Central Valley of California. They need to start their plan of action so that our legacy isn't that the Central Valley was once the agricultural powerhouse of our nation. **Got Food?**

CONVERSATIONS with Directors of Development

Randy Hatch is the Planning and Community Development Director for the City of Ceres. Randy was eager to talk about Ceres' commitment to Stanislaus County's Visioning Process/2000. His role, as Community Development Director, is to "institutionalize" the visioning process in his work with staff. This is done when references to the visioning process become part of the staff report that goes to the city council – Is this consistent with the Visioning Process?

With the continual reference to the vision in internal processing forms, Randy hopes to keep the vision alive. Randy sees the City of Ceres very active in smart growth, especially in the area of infill. "We do have, as part of our General Plan, a designated green-belt policy – basically an urban limit line/community separator. We have staff agreement with Stanislaus County and it is in both our General Plans– therefore, it is policy."

What are the biggest challenges in keeping the vision and protecting our prime farmland. "Our growth is in the bulls-eye for all growth in northern California. The City of Ceres is working with ten to twelve developers from northern California."

And, while Randy spoke of an existing urban limit line between Ceres and Hughson, he acknowledged that a huge challenge for the future will be developing within those urban limit lines. To do that, "we need to have better infill and increase densities to 6-7 units per acre.

Our best hope for preserving our productive farmland is having, in our General Plans, urban limit lines."

"Is the Vision Alive?" is a series of conversations with the Directors of Development from our nine cities in Stanislaus County. These are the first two conversations.

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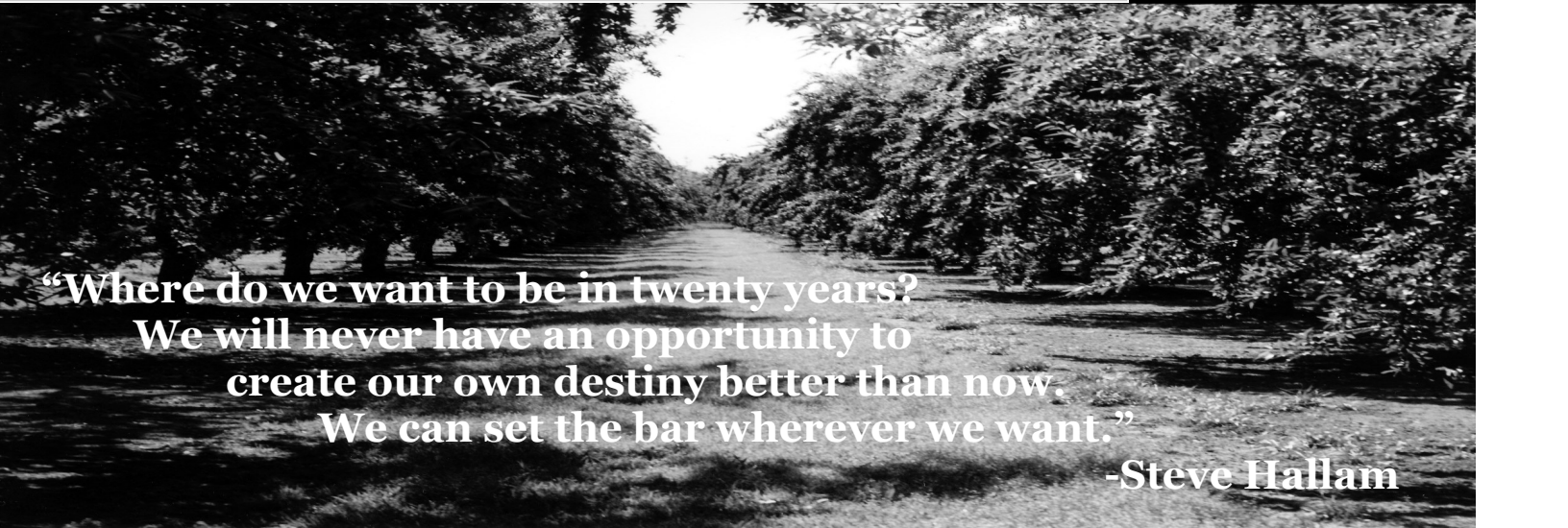
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**"Where do we want to be in twenty years?
We will never have an opportunity to
create our own destiny better than now.
We can set the bar wherever we want."**

-Steve Hallam

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Your
BUMPER STICKER
is enclosed!!!



“Ultimately,
land use is a public
responsibility and trying
to use infrastructure
to control it doesn’t work—
not water,
not highways,
not trains,
not anything
other than we,
as citizens,
electing public officials
who know how to say
NO to development
when that is appropriate”

-William R. Englander



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