

Your Vote Counts !

The mission of Farmland Working Group is to educate the public of the need to preserve the world's most important farmland in the Central Valley of California. Our work is critically important with the enormous growth pressures in the Central Valley. What will our communities be like in twenty years ? If we continue to grow (and sprawl) as we have until now we will be another Los Angeles County. The unique and special towns of the Central Valley will be joined in a blur of auto plazas, shopping malls, and subdivisions. Traffic congestion and brown air will become a way of life like it is now in those once charming towns in Southern California.

*Is this inevitable ? NO !! **Never before has your vote been so important. The people that we elect today will shape our future and define what our towns will be like in twenty years.** Just as we can no longer grow the way we have for decades, we can no longer elect public officials the way we have in the past. Name recognition, club affiliation and incumbency are no longer the litmus tests. As citizens, we must be certain that we vote for candidates that are committed to the long term plan for balanced growth.*

Long term planning for balanced and sustainable development means protecting our most important resource, our prime irrigated farmland. Housing those who work in other counties not only paves over the most productive farmland in the world, it promotes imbalanced short term growth. This type of growth creates the lifestyle we see in Los Angeles and Santa Clara Counties: congested roads, polluted air, urban blight, loss of community and negative economic impacts !

Protecting our farmland and agricultural heritage, and promoting balanced and sustainable growth must be top priorities for our elected officials. How can we be certain that candidates who claim balanced growth and the protection of our agricultural lands and economy as their campaign promise are truly committed ? **Ask questions...**

If a candidate favors long-term balanced growth s/he must support urban limit lines or urban growth boundaries. All communities that are striving to have balanced growth must have the ability to direct development as well as protect resources. Our greatest resource in the Central Valley is our unique and limited irrigated farmland. It cannot be replaced or moved. **Once it is paved, it is gone forever.**

Long-term planning also means protecting our other important resources: our water supply and clean air. Both are difficult and expensive to clean once they are polluted. Already today, almost half of our valley population suffers from asthma. More commuter miles means more polluted air.

Balanced communities feature vital town centers, less dependency on cars, cleaner air, better schools, less crime, affordable housing, more quality time for families, more volunteer opportunities, open space, and a sense of community. All communities and counties must strive for balance—**JOBS, HOUSING, TRANSPORTATION AND PROTECTED RESOURCES.**

Let your vote count, elect responsible candidates.

Message from the President, Jeani Ferrari

UC Merced and Farmland Protection

by Rudy Platzek

An article in our recent newsletter spoke to the real potential of a Los Angeles-like mega-city developing in our three county Northern San Joaquin Valley region within one lifetime from now, if business-as-usual continues. Instead of a population of about 1.25 million in our region today, our projections indicate that the regional mega-city could have 5.7 million people—almost the current population of the entire 9-county Bay Region. The now largely freestanding cities along the region's Highway 99 corridor would have merged into one continuous sprawling mega-city from the north San Joaquin County line to the south Merced County line and as much as 1.3 million acres of the region's Valley Floor important farmland would be lost. **What does this have to do with UC Merced ?**

- First, construction of the university campus is planned to begin next year. A related University Community is also being planned adjacent to the campus to accommodate the University-related population. Together, the University and the new community are expected to attract an additional 45,000 people to the Merced-Atwater area. While the University campus is to be built on foothill grazing land, the 2,133 acre University Community is being planned to convert 1,120 acres of Valley Floor important farmland to development.
- Second, the University's curriculum and research is being planned to primarily emphasize high economic growth sectors—namely information technology. High tech industries tend to cluster near big research universities that focus on information technology; witness Silicon Valley high tech industrialization related to nearby Stanford and UC Berkeley. Then it should be remembered that Santa Clara County was the number one U.S. agricultural county in the 1950's—and look at what happened there.

With that nearby experience in mind, it should be expected that UC Merced will also attract high economic growth industries which, in turn, will induce soaring population growth, urban sprawl and major farmland loss in Merced County.

Given the potential for a 50 percent loss of Valley Floor important farmland in Merced County, as well as

elsewhere in the Northern San Joaquin valley region within one lifetime from now, local governments in Merced County need to seize the golden opportunity they still have (before the university and its related new community proceed too far) to convene a cities-County planning process. The goal of such process should be a collaborative plan for countywide growth management and farmland preservation. The following initiatives are recommended by the FWG.

- Undertake a Countywide visioning Process. This would bring together the County of Merced and its six cities to develop a shared vision for what their county should become in the next five decades, with the advent of UC Merced. Such initiative could draw upon the visioning experience of their neighboring Stanislaus County where local governments have already developed a shared Vision Statement. In fact, planning to preserve farmland separators between Oakdale and Riverbank and between Turlock and Denair is now underway, as called for in the Vision Statement.
- Develop a Single Unified Cities-County General Plan for the Highway 99 corridor. This part of the regional growth management initiative would see the cities of Merced and Atwater, as well as the County of Merced, formulate one unified cities-county comprehensive General Plan for the County's Highway 99 corridor, with a major emphasis on retaining the identify of each urban community in the corridor by permanently preserving farmland separators between urban communities.
- Develop a Countywide Growth Management Initiative. Progressive actions by any one city will only offer temporary barrier to urban sprawl and farmland loss. Such city will remain vulnerable to nearby growth decisions of other cities or the County. Therefore, FWG urges the cities and County of Merced to draft a Countywide Growth Management Initiative (similar to that in Ventura County) that will require all cities and the County to establish urban limit lines and greenbelts around each city and unincorporated population centers.

We are all residents of the Northern San Joaquin Valley region. In that regard, we need to keep our eyes on the regional big picture so that we can forestall the good possibility that one huge mega-city develops in our region, while losing 70 percent of our region's Valley Floor important farmland. Hence, this article's purpose is to call your attention to growth issues in neighboring Merced County.

The Lack Of Vision In Stanislaus County

by Bruce Frohman

If you ask your locally elected public official whether preservation of farmland is important, the response will always be “of course.” Next time, ask your representative to specify what he or she is doing to protect the source of your food supply. Expect to be disappointed with the response.

For over ten years, Denny Jackman, a Modesto City Council candidate, and I have been looking for a way to stop the incessant conversion of prime farmland to urban use. Three years ago, we took the idea of establishing urban limit lines to virtually every City Council member and County Supervisor in Stanislaus County.

The universal response was that it sounds like a good idea, but they aren't willing to do it and aren't willing to put forth an alternate proposal.

The closest we could come to getting a public vote on the idea was when the Modesto City Council unanimously agreed to put the FOOD initiative on the ballot IF the County agreed to do so first. As of this writing, the County Board of Supervisors has indicated no interest in putting any measure on the ballot that would limit urban growth. However, they have gone full speed ahead in allowing growth in unincorporated Salida and are promoting a big urban development along I-5 near Patterson.

When we asked the Board of Supervisors to put the initiative on the ballot two years ago, Denny and I were told that all of our concerns would be ad-

ressed on the County-wide Visioning process that had already been in progress for a year. Two years later, the Visioning process has not been completed and hardly anyone talks about it anymore.

As the world population continues to explode and a large number of acres of arable farmland is in danger of conversion to urban uses, a good planner would logically conclude that it is essential to save every available acre of land for food production. Allowing

If you ask each candidate running for office what he or she plans to do to preserve farmland, you will be disappointed to find that very few have any idea how important it is to conserve.

the world's best farmland to be relentlessly squandered for urban growth brings the days of hunger closer for future generations.

If you ask each candidate running for office what he or she plans to do to preserve farmland, you will be disap-

pointed to find that very few have any idea how important it is to conserve. Admittedly, it is very difficult to convince folks who have always had enough to eat of the need to conserve farmland. Unless we are in crisis, elected leaders are not inclined to act. Unfortunately, when folks are going hungry, it will be too late.

Denny Jackman and I will continue the effort to educate our public servants. However, if you like to eat, we certainly could use some of your help! Please ask your elected leaders to protect your food source by either establishing urban limit lines or by implementing a comparable conservation plan.

Bruce Frohman is a member of the Modesto City Council.

FWG Needs Your Support

FWG depends on contributions from individuals to keep our non-profit organization active and vital. Your support keeps us going!

Please take a moment to join us and be part of the solution in protecting our agricultural heritage and promoting Smart Growth in our region.

Our active members meet monthly and regularly make presentations to service organizations, clubs and classrooms. For information contact Jeani Ferrari (209) 634-4495.

Yes, I want to support FWG. **Here is my tax deductible contribution.**

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

\$35 \$50 \$75 \$100 other

The Farmland Working is a broad range of individuals committed to preserving the agricultural foundation of our region and promoting Smart Growth in our urban communities through education, outreach and action

Farmland Working Group
Executive Board

President— Jeani Ferrari
Vice President— Rudy Platzek
Treasurer— Joyce Warner
Secretary— JoAnn DiGiovanni
Director— Joel Hidahl

NEWSLETTER SPONSORS

**Dave Wilson Nursery
Bank of America
E. & J. Gallo Winery**

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

**FARMLAND WORKING GROUP
PO Box 461
Ceres, CA 95307**

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
TURLOCK, CA
PERMIT NO. 756

YOUR VOTE COUNTS!

ELECTION DAY
NOVEMBER 6

there are no more valleys over the hill...