

# FARMLAND WORKING GROUP

Spring 2007

STRIVING TO PROTECT FOOD, FAMILIES AND FARMLAND

## *Farmland Mitigation* — **Stanislaus County and Modesto to follow San Joaquin County and Stockton?**

**F**or decades Stanislaus County has followed San Joaquin County in Top Ten USDA listings of agriculture producing counties in the United States. They share a heavily dominated Central Valley presence on the list that routinely includes Fresno, Tulare, Kern, and Merced counties.

San Joaquin County adopted a farmland mitigation ordinance in November 2006 that requires developers, who want to convert agland to urban uses, to conserve an equal number of farmland acres in perpetuity. The City of Stockton quickly followed with a similar ordinance that requires acre/acre mitigation for development over 40 acres. An in-lieu fee is assessed for urban conversion under 40 acres. The fee is paid by the developer to fund agricultural easements in the county through a farmland trust. In-lieu fees may not have the mitigating effect needed if fees collected do not keep pace with the local real estate market or the lag time to secure a willing landowner becomes excessive.

There are also differences in the quality of land throughout the Central Valley. California's Department of Conservation (CDC) distinguishes the various productive types of land by five categories. They are Prime, Statewide Importance, Unique, Local Importance, and Grazing. For more info: [www.consrv.ca.gov/DLRP/fmmp/mccu/map](http://www.consrv.ca.gov/DLRP/fmmp/mccu/map)

Local and regional policies and ordinances will likely impact incentives and disincentives in their respective land-use market. If in-lieu fees are easier than acre/acre requirements, we could expect more conversion. Local governments may choose to "direct growth" to lesser soils by increasing requirements (2/1 or acre/acre) for Prime and Statewide categories while charging in-lieu fees for Unique and Local Importance categories.

Stanislaus County has been identified by the CDC as having a high conversion rate of prime farmland into urban uses over the past decade. Most of this impact was due to development in North Modesto and Salida. Other cities have similar difficulty not impacting prime farmland if they are to expand. Modesto, Turlock, Riverbank, and Oakdale all have adjacent areas that are of lesser quality soils.

Should Stanislaus County and its' cities follow the lead of San Joaquin County and Stockton, our local officials may set in motion a very positive land-use market practice that utilizes the best land for farming and directs urbanization to our poorer soils.

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**Draft Ag Element Public Hearing  
Stanislaus County Planning Commission  
Thursday, April 5, 2007 at 6 pm  
Chambers 1010 10th Street, Modesto**

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***

#### **County of Stanislaus**

The Stanislaus County Planning Commission will hold the first public review input session of the Draft Ag Element to the General Plan on April 5 at 6 pm at Tenth Street Place basement chambers. Included in the document are farmland mitigation, urban buffers, and ranchette development.

The Board of Supervisors (BOS) picked the Kamilos Group for an exclusive 12-month planning process to develop the former Naval Air Station at Crows Landing. Most Westside citizen input favored a smaller, base-contained proposal by Hillwood Development. The BOS chose to plan for a much bigger area and enhance the possibility of Kamilos securing funds from the state in order to develop a short-line rail system for freight with the Oakland Port Authority. The rail is planned to include future commuter service to the Bay Area. Both Kamilos and Hillwood agreed that no homes would be built outside of incorporated cities, and that any farmland converted would be mitigated by agriculture easements on other farmland. This may mean an attempt to incorporate Crows Landing in order to accommodate the larger Kamilos plan.

#### **City of Riverbank**

Since the Grupe Company pulled out of their plan to develop 700 acres west of the City, new questions arise as to what direction Riverbank will go or grow. Just three years ago, this area was to be the county's first agriculture easement. General Plan Environmental Review updates are expected in April. For more information contact the Riverbank Planning Dept. or [riverbankwatch@yahoo.com](mailto:riverbankwatch@yahoo.com)

#### **City of Waterford**

The General Plan update proposes to direct growth toward the lesser soils east of the City. Prime farmland surrounds much of the City. Hopefully farmland mitigation will be added to their long term plans.

### ***San Joaquin County***

#### **County of San Joaquin**

The Board of Supervisors approved farmland mitigation that requires developers who urbanize farmland to protect the same amount of farmland through agriculture easements in perpetuity.

#### **City of Stockton**

In February, the Stockton City Council followed the lead of the SJ County Board and adopted similar farmland mitigation measures that require developers to protect acre for acre farmland converted to urban use.

### ***Merced County***

Two lawsuits were filed in January in the Merced County Superior Court by the California Farm Bureau Federation for the Merced County Farm Bureau. Merced County Farm Bureau's Board of Directors voted overwhelming to not support the Fox Hill Williamson Act cancellation or the Riverside Motorsports Park. These cases are important for agriculture in Merced County, the region and state.

In 2000, the County of Merced designated land under the California "Williamson Act." In order to approve a Williamson contract canceling, a city or county must abide by specific guidelines and make specific factual findings that are supportable by substantial evidence. The findings must demonstrate that the cancellation is either consistent with the purposes of the Williamson Act or in the public interest. If Fox Hills is allowed to develop the property, they would be replacing production ag land with low density housing and a golf course. The suit claims that this is not a sufficient public interest reason, nor is it consistent with the purposes required to cancel Williamson Act contracts.

The Motorsports Park would encroach upon an agricultural preserve and would be in direct conflict with the county's general plan. RMP has one or more alternative locations that would not take ag preserve land out of agriculture.



## *Message from the President*

**R**esidents of Stanislaus County have an opportunity to help shape their future. The Blueprint Community Workshops are under way in Stanislaus County. The first meeting was held in Salida on March 20 with about 80 people participating.

Never before has a vision been so important in our region. Record population growth and development has reached historic proportions over the last decade and by the year 2050 it is projected that 7.9 million people will be living in the San Joaquin Valley. As the fastest growing region in the valley and one of the fastest in the state, it is expected that the population in Stanislaus County will reach 1.2 million by the year 2050. Through the year 2030, the growth rate of the region is projected to be 65% higher than the state average. How effectively the region accommodates growth will be an important determinant of the state's future.

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed the Executive Order establishing the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley on June 24, 2005 in an unprecedented effort to focus attention on the needs of the region. The San Joaquin Valley includes eight counties – San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and Kern Counties. In cooperation with the “Partnership” the Councils of Governments (COGS) throughout San Joaquin Valley have taken on the challenge to work with the public in the process called the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint Planning Process –and referred to it as the Blueprint Process. The local meetings are Blueprint Community Forums or Community Workshops. However confusing the title is, the process is rooted in working with the public at the local level.

The success of this process will be engaging the public. As a member of the Stanislaus County Blueprint Regional Advisory Committee, along with Mayor Jim Ridenour/Modesto, Balavino Iri-zarry/Modesto, Denny Jackman/Modesto and Daniel Padrnos/Waterford, I understand that Community outreach and public involvement will be a fundamental component of the Blueprint Process. My community, Turlock (Denair and Hughson), will have its workshop on April 3, 6:30-8:30 PM at the Turlock City Council Chambers, 156 South Broadway. I would like to challenge families, individuals, service organizations, political, social and church groups, large and small businesses, students and entire classes to participate. If you are a high school teacher make certain that your students know about the Blueprint Process. It is critical for the public to participate.

**The San Joaquin Valley is California's 21<sup>st</sup> Century opportunity. Building new cities and schools, roads and factories, airports and parks, the Valley offers the opportunity to create a new model – to purposefully not re-create what has been done before, but to do it differently and better!**

There exists a unique opportunity to provide a world-class region, and a high quality of life for all. Other counties in the SJV Blueprint Process have completed, are beginning or are in the process of community workshops. This is a hands-on, regional, local, public accountability vision – please share your dream.

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## HELP OUR STATE'S FARMERS KEEP THEIR LAND IN AGRICULTURE

By TOM BERRYHILL

California was blessed with fertile and scenic land. Over the course of many generations, hardworking farmers and ranchers cultivated California's vast acreage, eventually making the state the world's fifth-largest supplier of food and agricultural products. This is a legacy to be proud of and one we should strive to maintain.

Unfortunately, as California ag land becomes more scarce and thus more expensive, there is an incredibly powerful incentive for individual farmers to sell their land rather than continue using it for agriculture or open space. Over the past 20 years or so, more than 1 million acres of agricultural land have been lost -- an area larger than Sonoma County.

Make no mistake, technological progress and innovative practices have made the agriculture industry increasingly efficient, allowing agribusinesses to produce more with less. However, the direction we are heading in terms of land use warrants concern.

Sixty years ago, Los Angeles County was the top agricultural producer in the nation. You read that right. A county that is now one of the largest urban areas in the world was an agricultural promised land not long ago.

With that in mind, it is important to note the rate of loss of agricultural land in California over the last few years. From 1996 through 2000, the state lost 218,000 acres of agricultural land. In the subsequent four years, that number grew to 345,000 acres.

The scarcity of ag land will only get worse. California's population is expected to grow by at least 7 million to 11 million people by 2025, with much of that growth in the Central Valley. If we are not careful, the San Joaquin Valley could end up going down the same path as Los Angeles County.

There are many opportunities more lucrative than farming and ranching, especially now. In our increasingly globalized economy, American agribusiness faces stiff competition from other countries where there is much less regulation and

cheaper labor. With the average age of California's farmers at 62 years, it is clear that many of their children are looking toward more profitable endeavors.

One of my goals during my time in the California Assembly is to enhance the incentives for farmers and ranchers to continue with their profession and for their children to enter the profession as well. Last year, as a director for the California Association of Wine grape Growers, I worked with a large coalition of supporters to get Congress to approve a federal tax credit for those who dedicate their land to conservation purposes.

This legislation allowed farmers who restricted future development of their land to deduct 100 percent of their income from their taxes (up from 30 percent), and nonfarmers to deduct 50 percent of their income (also up from 30 percent). It also extended the carryover period for these deductions from five to 15 years.

This year in the Assembly, I will be a joint author of a bill, with Assemblywoman Noreen Evans from Santa Rosa, that would make these same changes to the state's tax laws. Stronger incentives like this are absolutely necessary to maintain a reasonable balance of land use in California. There is much concern today about the country's dependence on foreign oil. Imagine the consequences of being dependent on foreign food if we do not preserve our agricultural resources.

I want my kids and their kids to benefit from and enjoy agricultural land and open space as I was able to. This is not possible unless we make it more financially feasible for landowners to keep their agricultural land and open space as it is.

Tom Berryhill represents the 25th Assembly District

**There is much concern today about the country's dependence on foreign oil. Imagine the consequences of being dependent on foreign food if we do not preserve our agricultural resources.**

## Blueprint Workshops

Stanislaus is one of eight San Joaquin Valley counties sharing a \$2.5 million grant to hold community meetings about growth.

### **Turlock, Hughson, Denair**

April 3, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Turlock City Council chamber  
156 S. Broadway Ave., Turlock

### **Patterson, Newman, Grayson, Westley, Crows Landing**

April 4, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Patterson City Council chamber  
1 Plaza, Patterson

### **Modesto south**

April 5, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Harvest Hall, Stanislaus  
Agricultural Center  
3800 Cornucopia Way, Modesto

### **Oakdale, Riverbank, Waterford, Hickman, Knights Ferry**

April 10, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Oakdale Community Center  
110 2nd Street, Oakdale

### **Ceres, Hughson, Empire, Keyes**

April 12, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Ceres City Council chamber  
2210 Magnolia St., Ceres

To register go to [www.stancog.org](http://www.stancog.org)  
or contact Lark Downs, StanCOG  
senior planner, at 558-4841.

[www.valleyblueprint.org](http://www.valleyblueprint.org).



## Sights and Sounds — Music by Brad Hart

Our new DVD includes FWG's two videos, *A Vision and a Legacy*, about the amazing farmland of our region of the Central Valley and the task of balancing growth and conserving our agricultural legacy and, *A part of the Soil*, the story of 8 Madera landowners, who joined together to put conservation easements on their farmland.

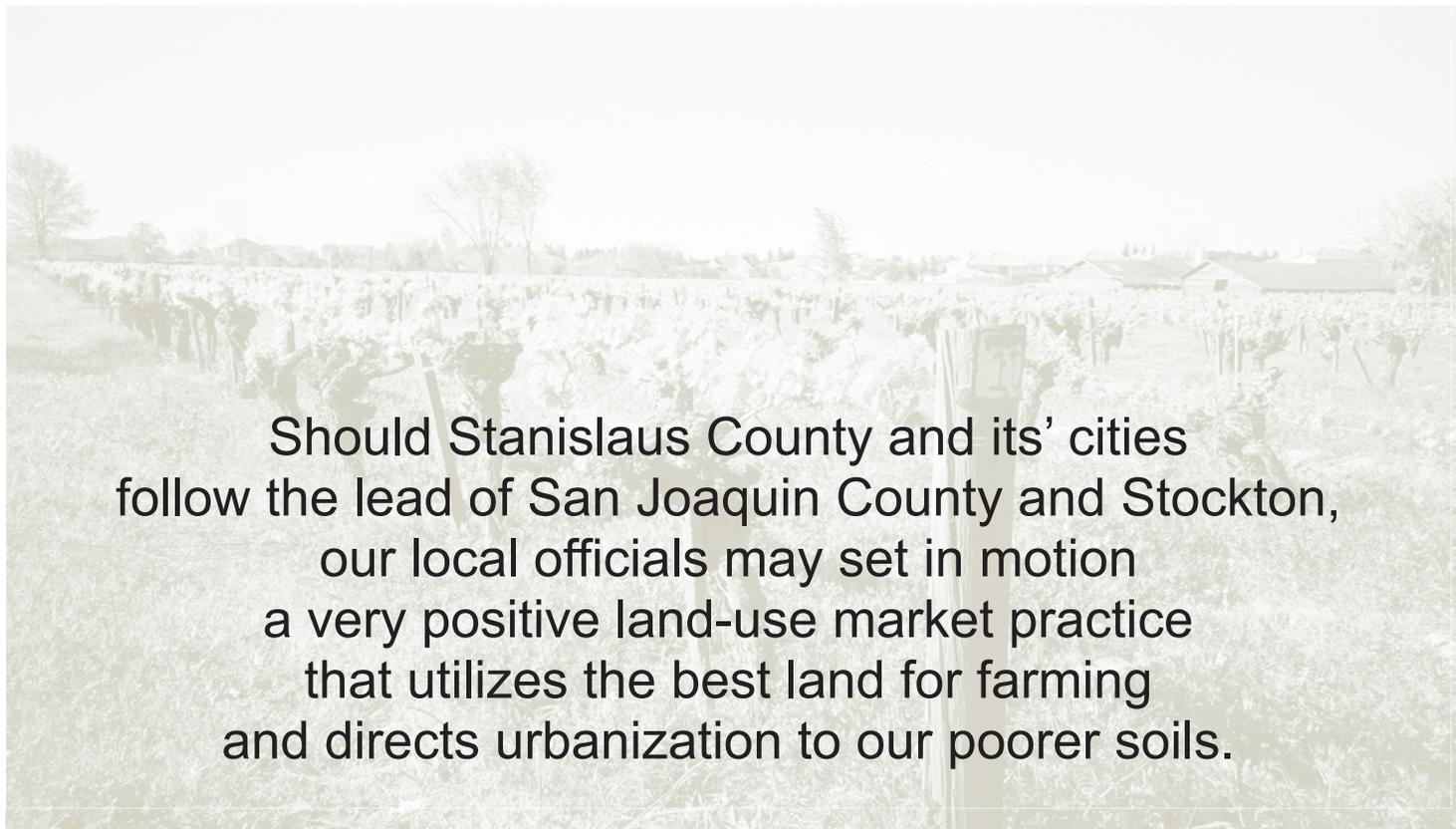
The DVD has original music written and performed by Brad Hart, a music major at CSU, Stanislaus. Our new DVD is available for teachers, group presentations and for your home collection. Contact us and we will send you a DVD for only \$10 - that includes shipping and handling ( and great music).

**Farmland Working Group**  
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Members are our greatest resource.

**Join us!**



Should Stanislaus County and its' cities follow the lead of San Joaquin County and Stockton, our local officials may set in motion a very positive land-use market practice that utilizes the best land for farming and directs urbanization to our poorer soils.