



Farmland Working Group

Striving to protect food, families & farmland. Since 1999.

LIMITS ON MODESTO'S SPRAWL COMING TO BALLOT

Never in the history of humankind has an assembly of resources been amassed that compares in scope or potential with the food-generating capabilities of the great Central Valley of California. Combine our natural resources with modern technology and one can see our importance to the world.

But we need political will to prevent us from sprawling out of urban communities and smothering our best food-producing soils.

lesser soils. It will also have the effect of creating a land budget and bringing focus onto improving existing communities.

Urban limits are tools to assure self-determination for voters and taxpayers over where and when cities develop. Modesto voters are used to directing their council through advisory votes. But Measure I will be mandatory, requiring the Modesto City Council to get voter approval before planning or expanding beyond mapped limits. To see the limits, go to www.stampoutsprawl.com.

Other cities in Stanislaus County have taken action to manage urban areas. A supermajority of Newman voters adopted an urban limit in 2014. Other cities,

such as Hughson, have adopted farmland protection measures, which require protection of 2 acres of farmland for each one developed. Mayor Richard O'Brien of Riverbank has said that the city will have an urban limit measure on the ballot in 2018.

So, what is your city doing to protect surrounding farmland?

Reasonable measures can be generated at the local level through a city council. If not, organize a local citizens initiative, just as the citizens of Modesto have done. After all, we are only trying to protect "the most productive agricultural area the world has ever known."

Denny Jackman, Modesto - Editorial Board
The Modesto Bee, July 09, 2015

Save Farmland!
Yes on I
Protect Wood Colony

We must direct growth into urban areas and away from our superior farmland and groundwater recharge areas.

In November, the Stamp Out Sprawl initiative will be on the Modesto ballot as Measure I. Nearly 10,000 voters signed petitions to place urban limits before voters. It will place boundaries on three sides of the city and direct development toward the east onto

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 LAFCO

www.stanislauslafco.org

The mayors of the cities voted 5-4 to oust Mayor Matt Beekman as a small city voting member on the LAFCO Board. The simple majority chose to impose their option that Mayor Beekman did not vote the way they wanted him to vote regarding farmland mitigation fee structure. Despite Mayor Beekman's clear explanation that his vote was a reflection of his conscience and commitment to the charge of LAFCO, 5 mayors chose termination. It is premature to assume that this rebuke of independence will result in a mitigation fee policy reversal. Particularly, in light of the changes to the board now that Mayor Katen of Newman has left office and was a vocal advocate for Mayor Beekman's removal.

Stanislaus County

www.co.stanislaus.ca.us

Widening of Claribel Road from McHenry Avenue to Oakdale Road continues through planning and construction processes, currently planned to expand

from 2 to 4 lanes. FWG questions if the plans for the North County Corridor will be incorporated with this expansion in order to avoid unnecessary duplication, expense and farmland loss. We hope so.

City of Modesto

www.modestogov.com

With a success for Measure I on the November ballot the City will need a public vote to urbanize north of Kiernan Road. That restriction doesn't exist for Stanislaus County. The County cannot allow residential development, per Measure E in 2008. Commercial and industrial development could occur if the County does not respect the implication of the Modesto vote to preserve and protect the community resources of that area, prime farmland and water recharge. The entire corridor, on the south side will be available for development with city services available.

City of Riverbank

<http://www.riverbank.org>

Massive urban expansion is back on the table at a recent Council workshop.

2015 Essay Winner



If we are going to be able to feed the increasing population of the world, Central California's farmland must

be conserved and young people must be encouraged to either enter, or remain, in agriculture.

Some agricultural commodities grown in the United States, such as almonds, are produced almost exclusively in California, with the majority of those being produced in the Central Valley. The prices of those crops are already increasing drastically simply because of expanding use around the world. Add to that, California's ongoing three-year drought and its effect on water supplies and the supply of water for irrigation is not keeping up with the demand. Other crops are greatly affected as well because the Central Valley has such a great diversity of agricultural products and they all need water. Cropland is being sacrificed so that cities and

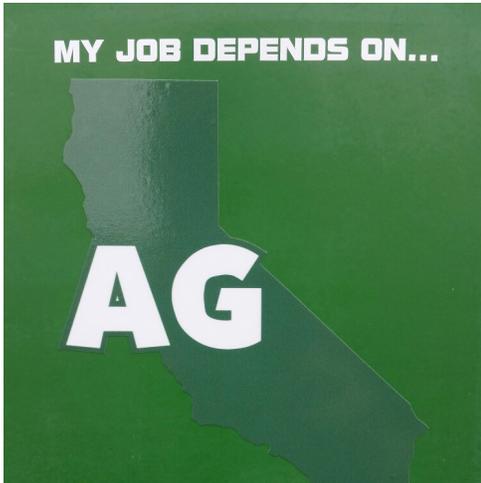
environmentally sensitive areas can be sustained. It may be years before some of that land will be able to be put back into production. Farmers are currently paying more for their water than they can profit from their crops. Again, farmland is lost and supply doesn't equal demand and prices increase.

Encroaching housing is also having a detrimental effect on Central Valley farmland. As more and more people want to live in California, they are putting down roots in the Central Valley as it is less costly than land on the coast. When farmland is lost to housing, it is lost forever. Supplies of crops decrease once again with more people to feed in the world.

Families may not be able to pay inheritance taxes and are forced to sell all, or part, of their farms in order to generate money for those taxes. Something must be done to eliminate this problem so younger generations can stay in farming and produce the food so badly needed for the world. The Central Valley of California is a vital link in producing this food and it is imperative that the farmland be conserved for agriculture.

Clayton Sardella
Buhach Colony High School, Atwater, CA
(photo - Clayton with Erica Stewart, our newest board member)

My Job Depends On AG



Entering a possible fourth year of drought, the news reports started to slowly trickle out that AG uses

80% of the water and is only 2% of the economy. Frustrated by these incorrect facts, I was trying to figure out a way to change the public's perception of AG. Most of the public has only seen what the media has shown them.

Fast forward to May 2015. My longtime friend Steve Malanca called me and said he had this decal he was designing. He mailed a picture of it to me and I loved it! He said he was going to print 200 and asked if I wanted some. I said I wanted 50. Steve and I thought it would be cool to get all our friends and business customers to put the decals on their vehicles. On May

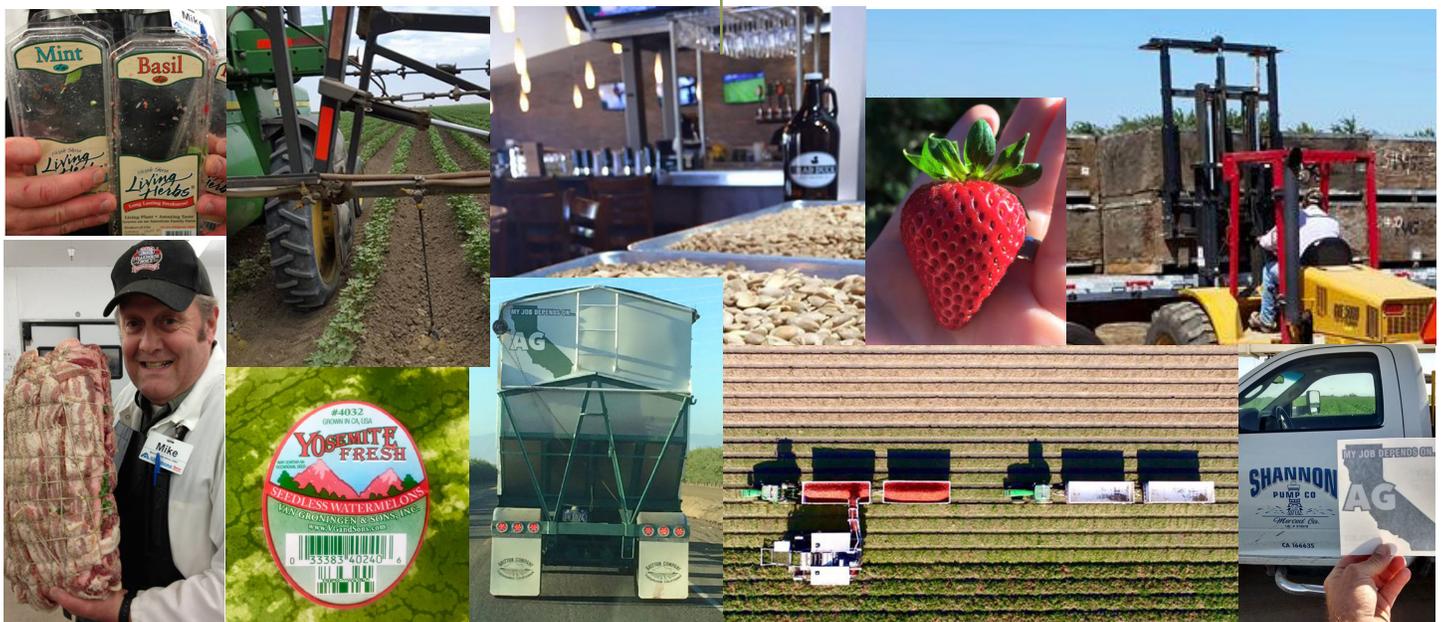
8, a friend posted on his Facebook page, "Hey friends, it's raining, where in California are you?" I was actually in the middle of a cornfield spraying, so I took a photo of what I was doing and posted it to my friend's post. As more people responded to his post... guess what? They were all AG related.

Immediately, I called Steve and said, "I have this idea on how to engage the public." Steve had the decal that fit perfectly with the theme of how this page would work. MY JOB DEPENDS ON AG was written over an outline of California. I thought there were no better words that would work with my idea of connecting with the public. Steve and I had this feeling that this idea was going to be a big deal. People learn by visual images... no need for statistics.

We believe there is no job nobler than growing food. I thought if I had a place to share the stories, and those stories could be seen by those far removed from the fields, we could champion all those connected with AG in the state.

On May 8, 2015, MY JOB DEPENDS ON AG was born! We have over 35,000 members and now have decals representing 7 states. We're working on 5 more and this continues to spill into other states. Those states may not have water problems like California but they, too, have their own burdens. Steve and I want to hear from all those connected with AG and change the public's perception of AG.

Erik Wilson, Co-founder
FACEBOOK - MY JOB DEPENDS ON AG



Water, History, and the Environment: Part III

Fact? Fiction? What's the diff?



Even though the state has mandated sustainable use of groundwater resources, there's still a lot of misinformation about groundwater, rivers, and aquifers. Sometimes the misinformation appears in mainstream media and adds to public confusion about the harm caused by overdrafting groundwater.

That's what happened in a recent Modesto Bee opinion piece by Janie Gatzman. Gatzman is an appraiser with American AgCredit. In "Orchards on the east side are not a new trend," Gatzman argued that groundwater-dependent farming in Stanislaus County's eastern foothills is sustainable because decades-old farms have not, "caused land subsidence, widespread residential well failures or significant impacts to downstream city wells."

Gatzman is apparently unaware of a large cone of depression in the exact region she's talking about. It's widely agreed that the groundwater deficit is the result of overdrafting by farmers in the foothills east of Turlock.

In fact, the City of Turlock is rushing to locate surface water supplies because it can no longer depend on groundwater. As long ago as August of 2013, then Turlock Mayor John Lazar said,

"Now that the farmers on the east side are pumping all our wells dry, there's no water in our aquifer."

Turlock's Municipal Utilities Director added this:

"The groundwater in our area is a diminishing resource. Pumping is exceeding that resource, and that's leading to a general decline in groundwater levels."

More recently, people living in and near Denair, which is east of Turlock, have experienced clusters of dry domestic wells. The situation is so severe that Stanislaus County Supervisors will have a town hall meeting on August 12 to address the problem.

Contrary to Janie Gatzman's claims of sustainable farming in the eastern foothills, the facts show the Turlock basin has had a groundwater deficit in some areas for years. Any equilibrium in groundwater levels is mostly due to recharge from the Tuolumne and Merced Rivers. A 2008 study commissioned by the Turlock Groundwater Basin Association found the following:

"Groundwater levels have been declining since the mid-1990s, and declines may have accelerated during recent years. However, the groundwater system has been in a near-equilibrium state with the water use since about 1990...The principal hydrodynamic adjustment has been an increase in the recharge from the Tuolumne and Merced rivers."

What this means is that in many cases when there is a severe drawdown of groundwater levels from overdrafting, recharge is due to water drawn from our major rivers. Though unaccounted for, that diverted water means reduced flows for fish, downstream farmers, and urban users.

Groundwater-dependent farming is not only unsustainable, it frequently draws on water belonging to others—the water can be from rivers, lakes, reservoirs, or neighboring property. Most every expert in the field of hydrology today will say that farming should rely primarily on surface water with groundwater held in reserve for emergencies like the current drought. When we sell surface water outside our region and permit conversion of rangeland to permanent crops solely dependent on groundwater, we promote unsustainable agriculture.

Unless we want to delay solutions, we shouldn't deny problems associated with groundwater-dependent farming. The future of agriculture depends on facing hard facts and working within the sustainable limits of finite water resources.



Mayor Matt Beekman

Beekman's removal a victory for pettiness

They sure showed Matt Beekman. Mayors from five of Stanislaus County's six smallest cities voted to remove the Hughson mayor from his position on the Local Area Formation Commission, a little-known agency that rules on annexation requests from cities and other government entities.

Never mind that Beekman was highly qualified to be on the commission. Never mind that his views on growth appear to reflect those of the majority of Stanislaus County residents. Never mind that he did nothing improper, immoral or even incorrect.

They kicked him off because he refused to vote the way the building industry wanted him to when it came to setting a little-used fee for farmland mitigation.

This appears to be an act of petulance. It was unworthy of their offices.

Mayors Pat Paul (Oakdale), Richard O'Brien (Riverbank), Ed Katen (Newman), Luis Molina (Patterson) and Mike Van Winkle (Waterford) acted out of misplaced loyalty. They claimed to be either protecting the prerogatives of cities to set growth policies or their own prerogatives to dictate LAFCO votes. Regardless, the result of their vote also could protect the profits of builders.

The reason they removed Beekman was his vote on how much developers must pay when converting farmland outside of cities into residential neighborhoods after annexation.

Developers have three ways to mitigate farmland loss. They can build within established urban limits; they can purchase development rights on an equivalent amount of land that will continue to be farmed; or they can pay a per-acre fee that is turned over to a nonprofit organization that buys development rights on other land. The formula for that per-acre fee is decided by LAFCO.

And there's the rub.

In March, Beekman joined county Supervisors Terry Withrow and Jim DeMartini in voting to charge 40 percent of the sale price of comparable land. Based on recent sales, that is roughly \$7,100 per acre.

Builders prefer a flat, per-acre fee determined by cities where they have greater influence. Patterson's city manager, for instance, recommended \$2,000 per acre – a fee endorsed by the Building Industry Association and even lower than flat fees in Manteca and Tracy.

Such low fees encourage the destruction of farmland, which LAFCO is legally obligated to protect.

The firm Churchwell White works under contract for Patterson, Riverbank, Oakdale, Newman and Ceres; the firm disputes LAFCO's ability to even set fees. It's an interesting point, but if the cities feel LAFCO has overstepped its bounds, they should contest the issue in court – not send out their mayors to bully one of their peers.

The mayors of the county's largest cities – Garrad Marsh of Modesto, Gary Soiseth of Turlock and Chris Vierra of Ceres – all voted to keep Beekman on LAFCO. Every person who spoke Wednesday defended the mayor of the county's smallest city. At a previous meeting, nearly 100 showed up on his behalf.

It didn't sway O'Brien, Molina, Katen, Paul and Van Winkle. Their votes were a victory for vindictive, petty politics.

The Modesto Bee Editorial Board
July 9, 2015

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Farmland Working Group

P. O. Box 948 Turlock, CA 95381 (209) 343-4174

www.farmlandworkinggroup.org

2nd Annual



Country Fair & Colony Tour

Saturday October 17th, 2015

Hart- Ransom School
3930 Shoemake Avenue
9:00AM - 3:00PM



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Denny Jackman

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