



## WHAT ARE CONSERVATION EASEMENTS?

What will our community be like in twenty years? That question ended our cover article in our last newsletter (Spring 2002). If we would ask each of our elected officials that question, we would surely have different answers.

Hopefully, our elected officials would have a vision that includes a vibrant agricultural economy, compact growth and protection of farmland. Only one thing can insure all of these, urban boundaries. Urban boundaries will direct growth away from our most productive farmland, while utilizing our urban land in a compact and cost-effective way.

An urban boundary can be achieved, in part, with the use of conservation easements. These have proven to be a very effective tool in holding an urban line and protecting farmland. While relatively new to the Central Valley of California, conservation easements are “holding the line” in Delhi, Merced County, and Madera, Madera County.

### Guidelines for Selecting Conservation Projects

**Soils**: Farmland evaluated by the California Department of Conservation Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program as being “Prime farmland or farmland of Statewide Significance will receive highest priority.

**Water**: The property has a dependable and sustainable supply of high quality water for irrigation.

**The property is agriculturally viable**:

The land is large enough to sustain commercial agricultural production.

The property is not substantially surrounded by urban development such that its continued agricultural viability is threatened.

**Effective buffer**: The property may serve as an effective buffer to further urban development of valued agricultural lands.

**Urbanization pressure**: The property may be subject to urbanization pressure within the foreseeable future.

**Consistent with community plans and goals**: Existing community goals, plans and political boundaries are compatible with permanent agricultural use of the property.

## President's Message

I once heard that we should have a passion in life and then commit ourselves to it. My passion is preserving the amazing legacy that is the irreplaceable irrigated farmland of the Central Valley of California. I work with others who want to protect the most productive farmland in the world from being paved over forever.

I especially like working with young adults. Farmland Working Group began the High School Program in 2000 with Ceres High School. Last year we added Hughson High School and now we have added Turlock High School. It is important that the next generation of voters in our region recognize the incredible resource that we have. Knowledge is power and we strive to inform and empower our next generation.

In addition to our powerful video about the land, water, climate and people who have developed what is arguably the most productive farmland the world has ever known, we wanted to create a video about conservation easements. FWG has commissioned a talented filmmaker to produce a short documentary about farmers who have protected their land from development with conservation easements. The film will be finished in January 2003.

## The Future for Farmland Here in the Three County Northern San Joaquin Valley Lies in the Hands of its Urban Citizens.

This is so because the urban public comprises more than 90% of the total population of the region. By their sheer numbers and voting power, it will be up to the people of the region's cities, towns and hamlets to decide how their urban settlement will continue to grow, where they will grow and whether they will have stabilized urban edges, beyond which is permanently protected farmland and open space.

Today, three quarters of California voters support the idea of setting up urban boundaries to stop sprawl and preserve agricultural land and open space.

## DO YOU NEED A SPEAKER OR PROGRAM FOR A MEETING OR EVENT?

Farmland Working Group can provide a speaker and/or a video for your event or meeting. We would be happy to share our ideas about farmland protection and smart growth.

We can give you information regarding conservation easements, including a new documentary about the farmers who have permanently protected their land from development in the Central Valley of California.

FWG can provide a program about Agricultural Land Trusts, the non-profit, community-based organizations who place and hold conservation easements.

For further information contact Jeani Ferrari (209)634-4495 or write to Farmland Working Group, P.O. Box 2646, Turlock, CA 95381

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

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## What is An Agricultural Land Trust?

**A** Land Trust is a private, community based organization working with landowners and public agencies to conserve farmland. The volunteers directing land trusts work to provide landowners with alternatives to the sale or development of their farmland. Recognized as a charitable organization by the Internal Revenue, Land Trusts can offer incentives and potential tax relief for landowners who wish to participate.

A Land Trust is not interested in owning farmland, but in providing conservation easements that limit future development on productive farmland. The landowner retains title to the land that includes a negotiated deed restriction to preclude development. The conservation easement may be donated, sold or sold at a below market rate as may be agreed upon. The conservation easement relinquishes the development rights to a parcel of land.

A Land Trust is not a governmental agency, nor does it have the ability or intent to acquire land or conservation easements through condemnation proceedings. Voluntary, confidential negotiations that produce conservation easements are what this community organization is all about.

## What Can a Land Trust Do For The Landowner?

**T**he land trust can coordinate and customize land conservation options with the land owner, in conjunction with tax and planning professionals, that maximize potential tax benefits. The flexibility and creativity can be tremendous in fashioning a program to trade long-term land conservation for potential tax relief.

## Where are Conservation Easements Placed?

**T**he land trust's main focus is to offer incentives to owners in the large contiguous farming areas on the outskirts of towns. The focus for long-term conservation is on the most sustainable farmland, in areas with affordable water and with elbow room to continue to profitably operate farms.

## Why a Land Trust?

**L**and trusts, as community organizations, have been used by landowners for nearly 100 years. Nationwide, over 900 land trusts enable landowners to protect important land resources in their communities. For example, subdividing and selling farmland has, in the past, been the only alternative for farming families to meet the challenges of Estate Taxes. The Agricultural Land Trust, recognized as a tax exempt organization by the Internal Revenue, creates options for landowners that address their family and land use plans.

## What is the Urgency?

**T**he Central Valley of California is a special place for agriculture as well as for people. The Valley's population has soared in the past decade and is projected to triple by the year 2040. Central Valley residents need to begin thinking how they can ensure a healthy, safe, and agriculturally sound future for the region. As our population grows, pressures on our irreplaceable farmland resources cause conversion of farms at a rate that will not sustain a profitable industry.

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## Who Provides Funding for Conservation Easements?

**U.S. Department of Agriculture/National Resources Conservation Service—Farmland Protection Program**  
**California Department of Conservation/California Farmland Conservancy Program**  
**The Agricultural Transaction Program/The Great Valley Center**

## What Farmland Trusts are Operating in Our Part of The Central Valley?

### **Stanislaus Farmland Trust**

Post Office Box 3090  
Modesto, CA 95358  
209/523-3276

### **Merced County Farmlands & Open Space Trust**

Post Office Box 3696  
Merced, CA 95344  
Website: <http://www.mcfost.org>  
E-mail: [mcfost@mcfost.org](mailto:mcfost@mcfost.org)

## Our Mission

**To Preserve the Agricultural Foundation of Our Region and Promote Smart Growth in Our Urban Communities Through Education, Outreach and Action.**

There are changes and choices ahead for Valley communities. There is real potential of a Los Angeles-like mega-city developing in the three-county Northern San Joaquin Valley region within one lifetime from now. Instead of a population of about 1.25 million in our region today, projections indicate that our region could have 5.7 million people—almost the current population of the entire 9-county Bay Region.

FWG will make every effort to inform the public and to create the dialogue that promotes awareness and involvement. Our volunteer members will talk to groups and individuals about our greatest resource—the richest farming region in the world. **FWG will continue to promote farmland preservation, regional planning and “smart growth.”**

The task at hand is to influence and shape public policy that promotes long range planning that includes balanced growth and the protection of our agricultural foundation. We all know that our farmland is a non-renewable resource. Farmland disappears quietly—once paved over, it is gone forever. Urban sprawl appears just as quietly...

**There is no issue that will impact our lives more than that of growth in the Central Valley.**

### Farmland Working Group 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.**

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\$20     \$50     \$75     \$100     other

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