



Farmland Working Group

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

NO FARMLAND — NO FOOD



by Jeani Ferrari
The Modesto Bee
April 23, 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically illustrated the importance of our agricultural foundation in Stanislaus County.

"Agricultural foundation" is a broad term that includes farmland, farmers, processors, packers, workers, distributors, transporters and the many businesses that support the industry, all considered essential by our state and nation.

During this crisis, Stanislaus residents have food on their tables, produced here with the highest food safety standards in the world. Unlike other industries, our food producers enjoy a reliable U.S.-dominated supply chain led by our irreplaceable farmland in this county. Our grocery stores are open and our pantries and refrigerators have a variety and quality of food most of the world's population will never see.

Without the farmland, Stanislaus County would have no agricultural foundation — no farmers, processors, distributors — or the dozens of commodities and foods. More than 40 vegetables and legumes are grown in Stanislaus County, from asparagus to turnips and tomatoes to Swiss chard. Without the farmland we don't have the two-dozen tree crops, a dairy industry or field crops that feed the hogs, pigs, sheep, lambs, chickens, turkeys and cattle.

In 1999, Farmland Working Group was formed as a non-profit organization with a bold mission statement: to preserve the agricultural foundation of our region and promote smart growth in our urban communities through education, outreach and action. The organization's printed materials start with a broad vision: "Striving to protect food, families and farmland."

Farmland Working Group recognizes the urgency of preserving Stanislaus County's highly productive farmland for the long-term. Counties throughout the state see value in protecting their farmland. Merced County has over 10,000 acres protected with conservation easements, San Joaquin County has protected nearly 3,000 acres and Yolo County has protected more than 11,000 acres.

The list goes on. One dozen counties and 48 cities in our state have urban limit lines. Due to the work of the California Farmland Trust, Stanislaus County has 300 acres protected.

Farmland Working Group continually urges our elected officials to protect our county's farmland for the long-term. This can be accomplished with urban limits lines and farmland mitigation.

An important region of the Great Central Valley, Stanislaus County is one of few places in the world with the ability to produce a variety of foods, year-round. It has the capacity to feed its own population and provide essential foods for our nation and the world.

We celebrated Earth Day, April 22, sheltered in our homes. Farmers and farmworkers were farming. Farmland Working Group encourages you to share its passion, preserving the agricultural foundation of our region, the irreplaceable farmland. *Jeani Ferrari is a founding member of Farmland Working Group.*

“Without the farmland, Stanislaus County would have no “agricultural foundation” – no farmers, processors, distributors — or the dozens of commodities and foods.”

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

Megan Ebner — 2020 Scholarship Recipient

Los Banos High School, Los Banos

What is the long-term plan for agricultural preservation?



I grew up around agriculture. It has been a part of my life since I was little. With only 3% of our population pursuing a career in agriculture, it is important that as a nation we have a long-term plan for agriculture preservation. The estimate at this time is our population will reach 438 million by 2050. It is clear that the importance of food production to our country

as well as to the rest of the world has never been a more pressing issue.

Agriculture over the century has grown and changed and become more viable, but we are still faced with many challenges. One challenge is our growing population and the increasing demand for food. Another consideration is that urban development is taking up open space and rural areas, thus causing a loss of farmland. Furthermore, the conversion and fragmentation of farmland has resulted in the permanent loss of farmland. In addition, high land values have decreased the viability of agriculture as the promise of greater financial reward promised by urban development has led to unprecedented urban sprawl. We are also faced with the restraints farmers face brought about by requirements dealing with water quality and supply.

Although these developments are daunting, there are things that can be done to mitigate the negative effects of these issues. An effective first solution is to encourage the use of conservation easements, which are voluntary legal agreements between a landowner and a qualified land trust, conservation group, or government agency. These easements put stipulations or restrictions regarding the future use of private property on land so that the land can remain profitable for agriculture. These easements can provide tax advantages to landowners that help the farmer and reduce a property's overall value thus making the land more affordable for future farmers. Promoting the use of these voluntary tax incentives and conservation easements can do much to increase the viability of farming. Additional conservation incentives dealing with

estate taxes can raise the deduction for a conservation easement from 30% of a farm's income in any year to 50% which then allows qualifying farmers to deduct 100% of the income from their land. This incentive for an easement donor can be carried forward for another 5-15 years by the Family Farm Preservation Estate Tax Act. The protection afforded by the conservation easement lasts until the land is sold outside the family.

Another tactic to ensure the protection of farmland is to encourage more participation with different California land conservation programs, such as the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District, the Santa Clara Open Space Authority, the Mid-Peninsula Regional OSD, and the Marin County OSD. These have resulted in the attainment of 30 land trusts and 4 open space districts that use agriculture conservation easements. The Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation Act provides 1/4 cent sales tax and voluntary conservation agreements with 85,000 acres of land protected since 1990 and over 225 million dollars generated for projects. Also, conservation easements make up 70% of all transactions.

As a democratic nation we need to increase the influence of voter-approved ballot measures that lead to the long-term preservation of agriculture. Examples of this are Santa Clara County's Measure A (1990) that created agriculture preservation and open space districts, Measure C (1990) that provided 1/4 cent sales tax to support agricultural preservation over a 20 year period, and Measure F (2006) that renewed this sales tax until 2031.

Other concerns must be addressed. Preserving farmland will require that we continue to promote strategies that focus on the affordability and viability of farmland, that we continue to emphasize the importance of collaboration with all stakeholders in this effort, and that we applaud and encourage the practice of environmentally beneficial processes like carbon sequestration on grazing land. Public education and outreach programs that focus on the preservation of local farms and a commitment to sustainable practices must be encouraged as well.

As population keeps growing and the demands on agriculture and land productivity increases, awareness of the pressing need to keep this issue in the forefront becomes even more evident. In history, impressive strides have been made in agriculture. Inventions of the Industrial Revolution in the 19th Century greatly altered how we preserve and store food, and the Green Revolution of the 1960s helped produce more food and prevented the starvation of many people in developing countries through the use of fertilizers, pesticides, and high-yield crop varieties. We now understand that prime farmland is not an infinite resource, so the challenge we face today is to preserve and protect this valuable, life-sustaining resource.



WE ARE WATCHING...

Stanislaus County www.co.stanislaus.ca.us

After 50 years of talk, Highway 132, west of Modesto, is moving and eventually expanding to a four lane expressway. How long it will take to reach freeway status and connect state routes 99 and 132 remains hypothetical. As too does the question of a plan for agriculture in a county that is continually in the top ten food producing counties in the US. In 2008, voters overwhelmingly approved the Stamp Out Sprawl Initiative Measure E. That action requires a citizen vote of any housing projects outside of incorporated cities within Stanislaus County. It did not, does not stop urbanization from being approved along the edges of all our cities. And that is the rub for some developers who would like more certainty when they work with the cities to plan commercial and/or industrial development, only to see that piecemeal development continues outside of city limits, negatively impacting long term planning strategies of cities.

And so it goes,

City of Modesto www.modestogov.com

While considering plans to establish urban limits, Modesto, and all of the cities see piecemeal development approvals around their city limits. Urbanization of North McHenry, outside of the Modesto City Limits, continues to complicate long term planning for managing urbanization and defining urban and ag areas. Should Modesto say no to development if Stanislaus County is saying yes? Should Modesto consider Kiernan Road the stopping point

for sprawling over the best farmland to its north, if Riverbank continues to want to urbanize all the way to McHenry Avenue? Where is the plan for agriculture?

City of Riverbank www.riverbank.org

The Crossroads II development approvals for the prime farmland area west of Oakdale Road is slowly taking shape. So, where does Riverbank sprawl stop, halfway between Coffee and Oakdale Roads? Or is the input of citizens living in the Crawford Road area to be ignored? West of Riverbank is some of the best food growing soils and water recharge area in all of the County. Don't expect LAFCO to direct urbanization away from the best farmland, it approved the first and second Crossroad development expansions...

City of Newman www.cityofnewman.com

The only city in Stanislaus County with an urban limit is about to ask their citizens if more is better. A 350 acre development called "Northwest Newman Phase I Project" has processed through LAFCO. The City is coordinating with the County Elections Department to complete a special election on August 25th to determine the final outcome. The majority of the registered voters within the area, who vote, will determine the expansion and annexation to the City.

The only residential subdivision work taking place is in the Villages of Patterson on the east side of town. Self-Help has a project underway off Walnut Avenue. As for the business park, the cannabis operation south of Fire Station #2 is making progress on its building. Not sure when it's scheduled to open.



E. Timothy Parker
The West Side Index &
Gustine Press-Standard
Feb. 20, 2020

To the editor,
As vice-chair of Farmland Working Group, I'd like to commend the residents forcing a vote upon the City of Newman's proposed annexation of

121 acres of farmland. I have not been a fan of the City taking the "lead" on expanding its sphere of influence based on the General Plan - I've long held the belief let development pay the costs of infrastructure and beyond if they want to come to Newman. Unlike what has been stated by the Mayor, Newman will not "die" if it does

not grow! Newman is over 125 years old, generations of families have lived in this quaint farm town long before he or I ever arrived and will still be standing long after we are gone.

The administration places too much emphasis on the idea of job housing balance - show me in our valley where that has materialized and truly exist? We believe in farmland first, the Central Valley remains an National bread basket. LAFCO heard you, you've made the City take notice. Perhaps your lands have been in your family for multiple generations when Newman was 5x smaller than it is now.

50th Anniversary
Earth Day



Earth Day – 50 Years

Each year, Farmland Working Group, with the help of volunteers, has a booth at the city of Modesto's Earth Day Festival held at

Graceada Park. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the festival was canceled this year. While disappointed, FWG hopes our supporters will spread the word about the region's world-class farmland and the urgency of preserving this non-renewable resource.

Without the Earth Day booth, we won't be signing up new members, renewing memberships or receiving

donations. Please take a moment to renew your membership, become a member or make a donation.

FWG Depends on Your Support to Keep Us Going! It's never been more important. The United States is losing two acres of mostly prime farmland every minute to development, the fastest such decline in the country's history. Only a small percentage of the nation's farmland can produce the number of commodities grown in our region.

To make a donation, go online to www.farmlandworkinggroup.org and use the PayPal button, or use the self-addressed envelope to mail your check (please, no cash).

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Food for Thought

Food production in the simplest terms is a process of converting sun energy and water into something to eat.

It must take place in an inches-thin layer on the surface of the earth – fertile soil.

Dependable seasonal climates and sunny weather are essential for plant production.

This combination is found near the earth's equator, is seasonally absent from the poles, and most useful between 50 degrees north and south of the equator.

This productive sunbelt travels through much of North America. There is also much land in Southern Europe, Asia, Latin America and Africa. But why do the people of these lands suffer from hunger? Because they have too little water and they will always have too little water.

Rain on any land is a function of nearness to great water surfaces and favorable west-east wind patterns. The water, in the form of clouds, must be moved from the oceans to the land. It is wind that moves the evaporated water.

As the winds are driven across elevating highlands, they cool and lose their water as rain or snow. It is this phenomenon that determines our good fortune. The orientation of the mountain ranges is the critical means of elevating and cooling these winds...

Only on the American continents and the eastern coast of Australia do those mountain ranges run north and south. In contrast, we observe a west-east orientation everywhere else on earth. These areas will remain forever dry.

The Central Valley of California is created by the Coastal Mountains to the west and the Sierra Nevadas to the east, running north and south and capturing the moisture from the Pacific Ocean.

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NO FARMLAND — NO SWEET POTATOES



California is the second largest sweet potato producing state after North Carolina

California's 80 or 90 growers are based in Merced County, where 90 percent of the state's sweet potatoes are grown. Farmers here produce a wider variety of sweet potatoes than the Tar Heel state farmers. California sweet potatoes are, fittingly, multi-colored – orange, red, white and purple.



- The sweet potato crop is started as "slips" in the spring in hot beds, from roots that are started over winter. The baby plants are cut from the beds and bundled. Workers place the slips on planting wheels as the planter moves through the field.
- The sweet potato ranks higher than almost any other vegetable in nutritional content. They're high in calcium, vitamins, fiber and all things that make for a healthy diet.



Please take a moment to support
Farmland Working Group with a donation.
Use the enclosed envelope or donate on-line.
We'll keep Striving to Protect Food,
Families and Farmland,
as we have for the past **20 years!**



Farmland Working Group

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 www.farmlandworkinggroup.org



No Farmland - No Food

No Farmland...

No city, stock market, university, church or army

Agriculture is not crop production as popular beliefs hold — it's the production of food and fiber from the world's land and waters. Without agriculture it is not possible to have a city, stock market, banks, university, church or army. Agriculture is the foundation of civilization and any stable economy.

Allen Savory