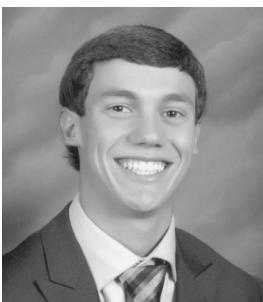


STRIVING TO PROTECT FOOD, FAMILIES AND FARMLAND

Why is it important to mitigate and conserve farmland in California's Central Valley?



by Gavin Abraham

Of California's 100 million acres, only about 9 million are considered to be prime or important farmland or about one third of the state's total cropland.

Approximately 3.4 million acres in California agricultural counties are consumed by homes, apartment buildings, offices, shopping centers, industrial plants and the like. In

some areas development has resulted in the complete abolishment of agriculture. Development consumes approximately 40,000 acres of agricultural land per year.

Of critical importance is that the San Joaquin Valley, which accounts for over 50% of California's agricultural production, had more than 60% of its prime or important farmland developed. The primary cause of productive farmland loss is rapid population growth and inefficient land use. Statewide development has consumed one acre of land for every 9.4 people. However, in the San Joaquin Valley the rate is one acre for every eight people. This is a significant and important number.

It is estimated that if the trends continue, 1.3 million acres of California will be consumed by development. Of that total, 670,000 acres of our prime and important farmland will be lost in less than forty years. The financial agricultural loss is estimated to be two billion dollars. Only five counties in California currently produce more than that amount! With California in the depth of its financial situation, how can we even consider the loss of these dollars and the continued, permanent loss of productive farmland?

The San Joaquin Valley is the most fertile, productive, and versatile agricultural area on earth. Important soils, weather, usually abundant water and water quality, micro climates,

sufficient cold and appropriately timed warming periods, cooling evening breezes combine with other important and local characteristic conditions to make this area so very special and desirable for agricultural production. No other area of the state or nation can duplicate these exceptional conditions! Of the more than 240 commercially grown crops in California, the vast majority is grown in the Central Valley. That includes crops such as strawberries, cherries, apricots, pistachios, nectarines, oranges, tangerines, almonds, peaches, fresh and wine grapes, walnuts, melons of all kinds, pomegranates, figs, asparagus, sweet potatoes, cotton, sugar beets, blueberries, plums... and the list goes on and on.

Are we to be limited to grow corn, wheat, rye and oat products, or soybeans grown mostly elsewhere? Am I desiring or ready for a soybean desert or a ten-dollar watermelon if these become the remaining options? No!

Fortunately, the California Environmental Quality Act includes the loss of farmland as a significant impact that must be avoided or mitigated. Results of this act have preserved several thousand acres through conservation easements and have made the public more aware of existing conditions and the consequences. The California Farmland Conservancy Program has, with aid of state, federal, and private funds, committed 41,000 acres into its conservation program.

There is evidence that changes need to be made. One regional planning process study done in the San Joaquin Valley found

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

Farmland Mitigation Economics



Local leaders often tout the value of small county-wide sales tax plans as high value return when promoting road-way improvements. They are called self-help plans. There is an economic benefit to the local community. The amount generated by the local fee is used to gain favor and dollars from state and federal funding sources. That funding in-turn generates an expectation in the private sector that brings investment dollars

and all that money turns over and over in the local economy called a multiplier effect. In other words, the amount the local taxpayer commits generates more from other sources to get us more roads, bridges, etc.

So, too, is the economics of farmland mitigation.

Small amounts of local funding generated by mitigation requirements for conversion of only our better soils, generates a multiplier effect for the local economy and institutes a disincentive to convert those valuable soils. Farmland mitigation applied to our better soils is a local tool to direct urbanization to lesser soils and/or promotes urban infill projects and higher urban densities within new development. Local mitigation says that the community values the better soils and requires those seeking to change the current agricultural zone to urban uses to pay for that loss of value to the community.

Use of local mitigation fees leverage more funding from sources outside the local community and thus is a much broader support of farmland protection by the general community statewide and nationwide.

Support of farmland protection by funding programs at state and federal government levels recognizes that domestic food

generation is a national security issue. Domestic farmland is a national and natural treasure. The Central Valley of California is so important in it's role of securing our self-reliance for food that 8 of the top 10 food producing counties in the United States are here. Three northern San Joaquin Valley counties are listed. San Joaquin, Stanislaus, and Merced counties are top producers. Central Valley Farmland Trust holds approximately 13,000 acres in Agricultural Conservation Easements in these counties and Sacramento County.

One local example of leveraging mitigation values follows from construction of the Kaiser Hospital in Modesto. The hospital paid about \$450,000 to mitigate for the loss of 50 acres of prime farmland. That money was used to help secure more funding from state and federal sources to-date to protect 300 acres of prime farmland three miles west of Modesto. We leveraged over four times the local mitigation fee from other funding sources, for a total of almost \$2,000,000, which was injected into the Stanislaus community to secure 300 acres for food production in perpetuity.

There are many choices for local leaders to make. One of the best, self-help, choices is to leverage more support for protecting our local national/natural resource, prime farmland, through adoption of significant economic programs, such as farmland mitigation.

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Denny Jackman, President
Central Valley Farmland Trust

Stanislaus County agriculture made record \$3 billion last year

The Modesto Bee Staff Reports

The farmers of Stanislaus County topped \$3 billion in gross income for the first time last year, according to a report presented Tuesday.

Almonds and walnuts had an outstanding 2011, while prices improved for milk, still the top-grossing product, Agricultural Commissioner Gary Caseri told the Board of Supervisors.

The \$3.07 billion total is 18 percent more than the record \$2.57 billion for 2010 and more than double the 2003 figure.

Caseri cautioned, as usual, that the report does not reflect production costs, notably the high feed costs that have squeezed dairy profit margins.

But the report notes how the income ripples through the economy. Farmers spend money on tractors, pesticides, labor and other needs. People process crops, haul the goods and do other work related to producing food.

"The number of businesses allied with agriculture either as a supplier, a processor of raw goods or as a handler of finished products is quite astonishing," the report says.

The top 10 for 2011 gross income in Stanislaus County:

1. Milk \$766.2 million
2. Almonds \$628.3 million
3. Chickens \$220.1 million
4. Cattle \$207.6 million
5. Walnuts \$175.7 million
6. Silage (feed) \$156.3 million
7. Tomatoes \$91 million
8. Deciduous nursery \$71.4 million
9. Alfalfa \$70.1 million
10. Turkeys \$67.2 million

Earth Day in the Park

Graceada Park, Modesto, CA
April 21, 2012



2012 High School Scholarship Recipient *Gavin Abraham, Livingston High School*

(Continued on page 1)

that by increasing densities of dwellings to ten per acre would reduce farmland loss by 53%, a savings of 174,000 acres. However, a U.C. Davis study found that a number of cities in the Modesto-Turlock growth areas reflected a 47% consumption of prime agricultural soils. The majority of cities reported growth projections far exceeding what those communities realistically need. Some cities proposed growth boundaries by percentages of 100% to nearly 800% more than needed. The boundary excesses can take those properties out of production or limit their useful agricultural life.

Why would any reasonable person be willing to forgo our most valuable resource? Are we destined to grow the food we need and love in planter boxes on our windowsills and porches? Are we

prepared to pay exorbitant prices for products, normally grown in our area, but coming from elsewhere? What about unknown health or safety issues with imported food? I hope not.

Once our farmland is lost, it is lost forever!

Gavin Abraham is attending Fresno State as a Crop Science Major

High school seniors throughout Stanislaus and Merced Counties submitted essays answering the question: Why is it important to conserve and/or mitigate farmland in California's Central Valley?



WE ARE WATCHING...

Stanislaus County

www.co.stanislaus.ca.us

Protect Agricultural Land (PAL) lawsuit against Local Agency Formation Commission continues through the Superior Court system for their approval of the City of Ceres Sphere of Influence and annexation expansion. The suit sites violations by LAFCO of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

LAFCO, in a recent July meeting, considered adoption of a revised agricultural preservation policy submitted by staff. There was considerable public input. The commission asked staff to bring back a number of changes for a 6pm September 26, 2012 meeting. Meetings are held in basement chambers at 1010 10th St., Modesto, CA.

A public meeting was held by Cal Trans in August seeking input for the need to replace the overpass at Hammett Road and FWY 99. The interchange redo was called for in the Salida Now Initiative adopted into law by a 3-2 vote of the Board of Supervisors in 2007. The Salida Plan is in limbo, mostly due to the economic downturn. Though the interchange remains in the current General Plan of Stanislaus County, the meeting audience was less than enthusiastic to support a third major project in the area. Concerns of cost, sprawl, and giving the public more say over the fate of Salida was discussed.

The Stanislaus County BOS voted recently to share the cost of a study to determine the viability of allowing Modesto to move forward with annexation plans of the Salida Community.

Modesto

www.modestogov.com

The Modesto City Council (MCC) recently voted to share the cost of a study regarding the annexation of the Salida Community.

FWG continues to wait for Mayor Marsh to agenda a proposed Residential Urban Limit (RUL) for Council consideration. All Council members have been briefed on the specifics of the RUL and are expecting a public opportunity to consider and submit a plan to the public for a vote in November 2013. FWG is considering support for a RUL if the MCC does not have a ballot measure proposal designated for a public vote in March 2013. The March date is important for a citizens initiative to begin if they are to secure signatures in time for a November ballot.

Turlock

www.ci.turlock.ca.us

Public hearings are currently scheduled on September 6 for Planning Commission and September 11 for City Council to consider the Environmental Impact Report and the adoption of the General Plan Update. To be held in the Yosemite Conference Room, 2nd Floor, Turlock City Hall, 156 South Broadway. The Planning Commission meets at 7 PM and the City Council Special Meeting at 4:30 PM. Documents will be posted on the web at <http://www.turlock.ca.us/citydepartments/developmentservices/planning/generalplan/>

Patterson

www.ci.patterson.ca.us

The Patterson City Council (PCC) has advanced a request to expand their city limits to urbanize an additional 1,100 acres of prime farmland for the West Patterson Business Park to LAFCO for an October meeting.

On the same agenda the PCC was to give staff direction "Regarding Policy Considerations Relating to Agricultural Mitigation Goals and Policies for Future Development in the City." No minutes were available by newsletter press time.

Council agrees with planning on growth

General Plan sees fewer citizens, preserves more farmland than previous drafts - Sept. 12, 2012

Breaking with tradition – and moving away from a plan more than four years in the making – a split Turlock City Council voted 4-1 Tuesday in favor of a growth plan which will see Turlock remain compact, house fewer citizens than previously projected, and preserve farmland.

Once finalized, that new Turlock General Plan will guide the city's growth for the next 20 years, setting the tone for Turlock's next generation...

And despite the smaller footprint, the area is expected to meet revised growth projections over the next 20 years, according to planner Leslie Gould of Dyett and Bhatia, the firm which drafted Turlock's General Plan. With the provision requiring 70 percent buildout of the Northeast Turlock, East Tuolumne, and Southeast 1 Master Plans before developers can move to Southeast 1, as many as 1,500 units could need to be built before even triggering a second Master Plan area...

By Alex Cantatore, acantatore@turlockjournal.com



Message from the Chair

Trickle down effects of less Water on our Food

Both farmland and water are essential to produce the food we eat. Currently, more than half of our nation is suffering record setting drought conditions. Some states have recently received 8 to more than 12 inches less precipitation than normal. These expanding dry conditions now impact one-third of our nation's counties across 29 states. Corn crops in seven states are in poor condition. Our government has declared some counties federal disaster areas so struggling farmers can apply for low-interest loans as their crops falter from lack of water. The United States Drought Monitor reported recently that 88 percent of corn and 87 percent of soybean crops are in drought afflicted areas. And predictably, recent corn and soy bean prices are at record highs. These increased costs will impact consumers from ranchers who are paying higher feed prices to other buyers of corn for food and gasoline products. Increased costs will be passed on and threaten an already struggling economic recovery.

Additionally, more than 50 percent of our rangelands and pastures are in poor condition due to high temperatures and drought. Ranchers short on feed for their cattle, are selling off

their herds to stay solvent. And the searing heat is causing dairy cows to drink more water and eat less dry matter resulting in decreased fat and protein in the milk they produce. When their milk becomes thin with less fat and protein, cheese makers require more milk to produce the same volume of cheese. Costs increase.

This drought has even crippled the mighty Mississippi and other vital waterways. Barges transporting crops must now make more trips and this increases food costs. When reservoirs shrink, communities must pay more for water or ration existing supplies. Food production will decrease and prices will increase if farmers decide to let land go fallow because water is either too expensive or unavailable for agriculture.

If we continue to develop and pave over 150,000 acres of our best farmland every year, we may discover that there is insufficient water to irrigate the less fertile remaining soils. This makes preservation of our unique, existing farmlands even more critical and necessary. Otherwise, we are carelessly risking our future in this perfect storm of climate change, drought and trickle down effects that could threaten our food supply.

Meet the newest addition to the Farmland Working Group

Elizabeth Mullen is our newest addition to the Farmland Working Group. While she is rather new to the Central Valley, having moved just one year ago, she has always been an avid environmentalist. Having grown up with family who are grapegrowers in Sonoma County, she has cultivated a passion for farmland conservation, and an apprecia-



tion for land. She studied wine while living in France, and wrote a thesis on the history of "Biodynamic Farming from Rudolf Steiner to Mike Benziger".

Most recently, Elizabeth was Co-President of the Stanford Graduate School of Business Wine Circle and Marketing Director for Stanford's Women in Management Organization. While she is not assisting the FWG with website design, she works in Operations at the E&J Gallo Winery, focusing on continuous improvement, operational excellence and relentlessly seeking higher quality fruit & wine.

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