

20th Anniversary!

Winter 2019

Farmland Working Group

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

URBAN LIMIT LINES Protecting Farmland, Growing Cities

Lines on the Land: The Urban Limit Line in Contra Costa County

One of the most important and powerful tools communities have for managing growth stopping sprawl development is the Urban Limit Line, or ULL (also known as an Urban Growth Boundary in some parts of the region). A ULL is the legally-protected line in the sand beyond which sprawl development is stopped in its tracks. Inside the ULL, urban services can be connected and all sorts of residential and commercial zoning is allowed, but just beyond it, development is severely restricted. This land beyond the ULL helps form the Bay Area's greenbelt.

In Contra Costa County, priceless ecological gifts like the County's acres of prime agricultural land and the critical wildlife habitat on the slopes of Mt. Diablo have inspired County residents to fight for its protection.

In 1990, voters approved Measure C-1990, which created a guarantee that at least 65% of land in the County would be preserved for agriculture, open space, wetlands, parks and other non-urban uses, and that no more than 35% of land would be used for urban development. In order to implement this "65/35" standard, the County established a ULL, which clearly defined where urban development was welcome, and where it was not.

Voters gave some extra teeth to the ULL in 2004 by voting for Measure J. In order to receive money from a transportation tax in the County, each city either had to adopt the County's ULL or obtain voter-approval for their own ULL. The incentive worked, and all cities approved a ULL—only Pittsburg, Antioch, and San Ramon approved a ULL different from the County's. Voter-approval is clutch and not all ULLs in the Bay Area require it—but a voter-approved ULL is a much safer protection than a city council-controlled one.

Contra Costa once again doubled down on the ULL in 2006 by voting for Measure L, extending the 65/35 designation and the Urban Limit Line until 2026. In 2016, the County did an extensive study to determine whether it could meet its housing and jobs needs within that boundary through 2036. The conclusion was a resounding yes...

By HAYLEYCURRIER99

<https://allianceforabetterbrentwood.org/2019/02/08/urban-limit-lines-in-contra-costa-county>

Urban Growth Boundaries in the Bay Area

Alameda County: Alameda County, Dublin, Fremont, Hayward, Livermore, Pleasanton

Contra Costa County: Antioch, Contra Costa County, Danville, El Cerrito, Hercules, Martinez, Oakley, Orinda, Pinole, Pittsburg, Pleasant Hill, Richmond, San Pablo, San Ramon, Walnut Creek

Marin County: Marin County, Novato

Napa County: American Canyon, Napa, St. Helena, Yountville

San Mateo County: San Mateo County

Santa Clara County: Cupertino, Gilroy, Los Gatos, Milpitas, Morgan Hill, Palo Alto, San Jose

Solano County: Benicia, Fairfield, Rio Vista, Vallejo, Vacaville

Sonoma County: Cloverdale, Cotati, Healdsburg, Petaluma, Rohnert Park, Santa Rosa, Sebastopol, Sonoma, Windsor

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



WE'VE *been* WORKING... *OVER 20 YEARS!*



Good morning Supervisors,

Please find attached a proposed Stamp Out Sprawl Campaign initiative, PAL. Notice small i for initiative. This is a request to initiate action.

Following the leadership of Mayor Brandvold and the entire Modesto City Council, who during the Thanksgiving week, voted unanimously to advance measures for the purpose of placing an urban limit initiative on their November 2020 ballot.

The time is right for Stanislaus County and all of the cities to do the right thing and establish certainty as to where we will and will not build (urbanize), for the ultimate purpose of protecting our most valuable farmlands.

This SOS Campaign initiative welcomes amendments and creative language that may contribute to a ballot document to be placed by the Board on a public ballot in the near future.

The only significant reasons why Measure E, the countywide SOS Initiative, which passed by a super-majority public vote in 2008, did not include all urbanization are: 1) Farmers were concerned that development of storage and immediate-product-processing may be restricted. (i.e., hullers, packers, etc.)

Agricultural zoning has addressed the majority of those concerns. 2) It was expected that action would be taken at the BOS level to truly direct urbanization into our cities. It is recognized that any land use document may need some flexibility, such as the expansion of existing businesses in the unincorporated areas in example, the Fruit Yard or Bronco Winery. That is why a public vetting process is needed.

It is recommended that this discussion be directed based on our natural boundaries, our rivers. North and south of the Tuolumne River, and west of the San Joaquin River. Discussions are now needed with the cities north of the Tuolumne first. Modesto, Riverbank, Waterford, as well as all the county unincorporated towns, communities and county pockets.

With urban limits bringing focus to/for our cities, regarding where they can/cannot build, the County may provide more certainty that development beyond those city urban limits will not occur. The action of both cities and the County are needed to bring focus to urban centers and focus to long term agricultural production.

With more certainty, both urban and ag communities may thrive.

Thank you –
Our community looks forward to your leadership to
Protect Agricultural Lands,

Protect Agricultural Land (PAL) – Urban Restriction

A. Purpose. The purpose of this initiative measure is to: (1) establish a mechanism for the retention of agricultural land in land-use decisions affecting County policies, and (2) minimize sprawl, maintain farmland, by restricting the conversion of agricultural zones to urban uses.

B. Findings. The voters of Stanislaus County find: 1. The protection of existing agricultural land in Stanislaus County is of critical importance to the County's present and future residents. Agriculture has been and remains a major contributor to local and regional economy. Agriculture creates direct and indirect employment for many people, provides valuable food crops distributed worldwide, and defines the County's identity and way of life. 2. Continued urban encroachment into agricultural lands impairs agriculture and threatens the public health, safety, and welfare. Such encroachment causes increased traffic congestion and air pollution, and threatens the quantity and quality of water supplies. Continued urban encroachment into agricultural lands also requires significant new public infrastructures and facilities, places additional stresses on existing public infrastructure and facilities, and increases costs on existing residents. 3. The unique character of Stanislaus County and the quality of life enjoyed by County residents depend on the protection of agricultural land. The protection of such land aids the continued viability of agriculture and defines urban/rural boundary. 4. This Citizen's Right to Vote on Agricultural Protection policy establishes a mechanism for direct voter participation into land-use decisions authorizing urban development of lands designated for agricultural uses. Providing for such participation is consistent with, and builds upon, existing General Plan policies designed to protect agricultural land and open space.

General Plan Amendment

The Stanislaus County General Plan (as adopted in October 1994, and as amended through the effective date of this initiative measure), is amended as follows:

The following Goal and Policies are inserted into the General Plan Land-Use Element, immediately following Goal Seven:

GOAL –

Provide for direct citizen participation in land-use decisions involving the expansion of urban development into agricultural areas in order to preserve agricultural land.

POLICY

A. Any decision by the Board of Supervisors of Stanislaus County to approve the re-designation or rezoning of land from an agricultural use to an urban use shall require approval by a majority vote of registered voters at any general or special election.

B. The requirement set forth in paragraph (A) shall apply to all such decisions affecting land that is designated for agricultural use on the Land Use Map of the County's General Plan as of the effective date of this policy.

C. The Board's decision to approve the re-designation or rezoning of land from an agricultural use to an urban use constitutes the "approval" of a "project" for purposes of CEQA. For this reason, the County shall comply with CEQA prior to the Board's decision to approve the re-designation or rezoning.



Message from the Chair

Lori Wolf

Our non-profit organization is as focused today as it was twenty years ago, educating and advocating for the long term preservation of farmland in our local region. As Rudy Platzek would say, "it's the steady drip" — FWG's persistence, presence and perseverance. We worked to pass the county-wide initiative, Measure E, that directed residential growth into cities, stood with the Wood Colony community to stop annexation into Modesto and helped put to rest the county's "Salida Now!" In 2015, our efforts were on an urban limit line for

Stanislaus County's largest city, Modesto. Our efforts fell short by 215 votes.

Dozens of towns and several counties to our north and south are protecting farmland as well as growing healthy, compact cities with urban limit lines (sometimes called an UGB, urban growth boundary).

Farmland Working Group has no paid staff, it never has. We depend upon donations to support our work, including our highly regarded newsletter.

It's that time of year when we ask that you support FWG with a generous end-of-year donation.

FWG Executive Board

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Please support our important work by making an end-of-year donation

Donations can be sent by mail – PO Box 948, Turlock, CA 95381

or, on-line – farmlandworkinggroup.org



Big Win: Sonoma County Renews Community Separators for 20 Years

The most important green measure in Sonoma County in 2016 was Measure K, which renewed voter protections for community separators—the greenbelt lands in between the county's cities and towns—for another 20 years. More than 80% of Sonoma County voters cast a yes vote for Measure K, which needed a simple majority to pass.

The purpose of community separators is three-fold:

1. They serve as green buffers between cities and towns.
2. They contain urban development.
3. And they preserve the rural charm of Sonoma County's landscape.

Community separators complement cities' urban growth boundaries by safeguarding adjacent unincorporated lands.

For more than two decades, Greenbelt Alliance has helped Sonoma County prevent sprawl through urban growth boundaries and voter protection of community separators, which were passed by more than 70% in a countywide vote in the 1990s. Voter protections for Sonoma County's community separators were set to expire in 2016. If they were not renewed, the county would have risked opening the door to new sprawl development. Beginning in 2014, Greenbelt Alliance dedicated nearly two years of organizing and outreach to advance and strengthen these essential greenbelt protection measures.



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A donation
has been made
In memory of
**JoAnn
DiGiovanni**



by
*Farmland Working Group
Board of Directors*

JoAnn was a Founding
Director and one of the
signees for FWG's
Articles of Incorporation
in 1999.

What Are Urban Growth Boundaries?

An urban growth boundary (UGB) separates urban areas from the surrounding natural and agricultural lands, or greenbelts. It puts a limit on how far out the city can expand. UGBs are often set for a specified period of time, such as 20 years. Different cities may call these barriers by different names, such as “urban limit lines” or simply “growth boundaries,” but they serve the same purpose of stopping sprawl development and encouraging sustainable growth practices.

Sprawl is an expensive proposition

As housing prices escalate, some are quick to blame smart growth and UGBs, and say that expanding our cities into open space and agricultural lands will solve our affordable housing crisis. The evidence doesn't support this view; rather, multiple studies show that sprawl is far more expensive than smart growth. A 2015 study found that sprawl costs America over \$1 trillion, and can increase per-capita land consumption by up to 80% and car use by up to 60%.

Providing water, sewer, roads, and other services to far-flung neighborhoods is very costly for local governments. Smart growth allows more affordable housing types at increased densities, reduces land requirements per household, has lower public service costs, and reduces transportation costs. The higher housing prices that residents may pay will be offset by lower transportation costs, energy costs, and better access to jobs, services, and amenities in more centralized locations.

Sprawl residents pay more for public services

Sprawl requires more expensive public services than smart growth. For example, a new development on the outskirts of a city requires police and fire services. Because this development is more distant, more officers may need to be working at a time to cover the additional area. The further a home is from a fire station, the higher its property insurance rates to address a low fire rating.

Similarly, the costs of municipal services also rise as sprawl increases. Denser communities pay less to provide infrastructure and services including water, roads, solid waste, libraries, parks and recreation, governance, and more. A city's annual average household cost for public services is \$1,416 in high-density areas, and up to a whopping \$3,462 in sprawling areas.

Sprawl causes more traffic

Building or expanding roads to serve new or existing sprawl only increases congestion through “induced demand.” Adding road capacity encourages people to take longer trips or more trips by car. A recent \$1 billion infrastructure investment to widen I-405 in Los Angeles resulted in commute times one minute slower than before the widening. This in turn only lengthens driver's commutes. Drivers with a 30-minute commute will spend on average 87 hours dealing with traffic delays over the course of one year. That's over 3 1/2 days of sitting in congestion. Furthermore, the estimated annual costs per household to provide roads in the most sprawled communities averaged \$804.74 in comparison to \$19.87 in the highest density communities.

California UGBs

Cities that have adopted UGBs tend to grow at slower rates, both in terms of land area and population. Between 1990 and 2000, the total land area of municipalities with growth boundaries expanded at a rate approximately 5 percent slower than that of other California cities. This implies that open space and farmland are slightly less likely to be developed outside of UGB-adopting communities. Similarly, cities that have adopted growth boundaries experience less population growth – about 13 percent less.

SOAR is a series of voter initiatives that require a vote of the people before agricultural land or open space areas can be rezoned for development.

Sitting on Los Angeles County’s northwestern boundary, Ventura County is subject to tremendous development pressure. Ventura County’s rolling hillsides, rugged mountains, beautiful beaches and fertile plains and valleys present a spectacular setting that creates conflicting incentives to preserve and develop this landscape.

With a population of approximately 850,000 and over 100,000 acres of agricultural land in production, the county offers a highly attractive semi-rural respite from the urban sprawl of Los Angeles County, where strip malls and subdivisions of one community merge indistinguishably with the next.

The first SOAR initiative was approved by the voters in the City of Ventura in 1995. Since then, seven others have been enacted around cities in Ventura County, as well as in the County’s unincorporated areas.

All of the SOAR initiatives were renewed by voters in November 2016, extending their expiration date to 2050. No other county in the United States has more effective regulations against urban sprawl.

The County’s SOAR initiative requires a majority vote of the people in order to rezone unincorporated open space, agricultural or rural land for development. The eight voter-approved SOAR initiatives passed by the cities of Camarillo, Fillmore, Moorpark, Oxnard, Santa Paula, Simi Valley, Thousand Oaks and Ventura require voter approval for urban development beyond a City Urban Restriction Boundary (CURB), or, in the case of the City of Ventura, before rezoning agricultural land within the city’s sphere of influence.

In 2016, voters overwhelmingly elected to extend the SOAR initiatives until 2050. We need to monitor and respond to new threats such as weakening of land use policy protections, developer-led ballot initiatives, and attempts to constrain or co-opt grassroots democratic processes to benefit over-development.

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SOAR COMMUNITIES

Ventura County	Oxnard
Camarillo	Port Hueneme
Fillmore	Santa Paula
Lake Sherwood	Santa Rosa Valley
Malibu/Yerba Buena	Santa Susana Knolls
Moorpark	Simi Valley
Oak Park	Thousand Oaks
Ojai	Ventura





Farmland Working Group

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 www.farmlandworkinggroup.org



OUR 20TH ANNIVERSARY!

**It's that time of year...
Please support our work
with an end-of-year donation**

Our Promise for 2020

To work with community groups,
regional organizations, local citizens
and elected officials
to establish Urban Boundaries
that protect, for the long term,
Stanislaus County's most valuable resource
F a r m l a n d
while growing healthy, compact communities