

Farmland Working Group

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

Our Agricultural Heritage and Productive Farmland must be Promoted and Protected



With some of the best farmland in the world right here in our county, it is critical that we have local appointed and elected leaders who understand the importance of agriculture and economic growth working hand in hand,

instead of against each other, when it comes to land use decisions. Local representatives are key because land use is managed at the local level. While the State requires adherence to broad general plans, actions by local officials impact how and when land is used and for what purpose. This control gives our community great opportunity to shape our own future, and toward that end, I am delighted to be serving at the local level again on the Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors.

Economic development is important for all of us who call Stanislaus County our home. It leads to good-paying jobs, homes that people can afford to buy, lower crime rates, better schools and parks, diverse activities, and a vibrant and thriving community. Preserving our agricultural heritage is also critical and should be part and parcel to our region's economic growth, serving as a catalyst for retaining and attracting ag-related businesses and industries.

For too long, agriculture and economic development have been pitted against each other when it comes to land-use decisions... It need not be so. Instead, cities and the County should work together to make thoughtful decisions about how and where we want to grow as a region. How

can we encourage infill development so that still-vacant buildings become thriving commercial centers? Where should we locate new housing and how can we provide a variety of housing choices, styles, and sizes that will meet the needs of all individuals and families? Where should we develop shovel-ready land, with infrastructure in place, to attract business growth and flourishing job centers so that fewer people have to commute to work? How can we capitalize on the strength of our rich farmland and continue to promote it as the fundamental base of our economy, attracting new companies that rely on the raw products we grow?

By being strategic and thoughtful about these and other questions, we can make good land-use decisions that are in the best interest of farmers and builders, agriculture and business.

As one of the County's representatives on the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO), I will work alongside my city and county colleagues to make good land-use decisions that protect our best soils and provide ample land for growth.

We must recognize that our agricultural heritage and productive farmland is an economic engine that fuels our community and feeds the world. It cannot be ignored or diminished. On the contrary, it must be promoted and protected.

For too long, agriculture and economic development have been pitted against each other when it comes to land-use decisions... cities and the County should work together to make thoughtful decisions about how and where we want to grow as a region.

By Kristin Olsen
Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors, District 1

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

The Central Valley of California Provides America with over 25% of everything We Eat



The Central Valley is one of the most productive regions on earth. It has hot and dry summers, cool, wet winters and rich soils, coupled with a 300-day growing season.

The Valley is 450 miles long, 40 miles wide and covers about 11% of California land. About one sixth of the irrigated land in the U.S. is in the Central Valley. No other state or even combination of states can match California's output per acre.

Virtually all non-tropical crops are grown in the Central Valley, which is the primary source for a number of food products through the United States, including tomatoes, almonds, grapes, cotton, apricots, and asparagus.

December is Membership Month

- **Renew your membership**
- **Become a member**
- **Give a gift membership**

Your Support Keeps Us Going

...Worth Repeating

Our View: Reasons not to develop Wood Colony

Some members of the Modesto City Council and their friends at the Chamber of Commerce have tried to depict their desire to include Wood Colony on the city's general plan as an either-or situation. Either designate the 1,800 acres of prime farmland as future business parks, or the city will run out of jobs. Why frame it in such stark terms? Because if they don't, the public is unlikely to embrace this bad plan. We do not believe Wood Colony is the city's only option for attracting good jobs. Here are some reasons we feel the council should look elsewhere to expand the city.

Distant horizons – Council members say business parks being envisioned along Kiernan Avenue could be built long before the city would develop Wood Colony. Putting business parks along Kiernan makes sense despite the fact that it will cover farmland that's even better than that in Wood Colony. Why? Because if the long-awaited north county corridor ever becomes reality, business parks from Salida to Riverbank to Oakdale will have a direct link to Highway 99. That direct link, by the way, will be a lot more likely if county residents pass a transportation tax in the near future.

Even if development in Wood Colony is a decade or more into the future, is that supposed to placate families who have lived on the land for four or five generations? If development is that far off, there should be ample time to identify and develop other suitable alternatives. Embracing Dave Cogdill Jr.'s call for a general plan update would be a good first step.

Plow-ready – It's absolutely true there isn't much "shovel-ready" land in Modesto. And many angry residents have pointed to vacant retail space throughout the city as alternatives. But even vacant big-box stores won't work for a large, industrial facility. They're too small and traffic would be a nightmare. Still, designating Wood Colony for eventual development won't add a square inch of ready-to-build land to the city's current portfolio. Instead of being shovel-ready a decade from now, this land is plow-ready today.

Meanwhile, the soils east of Modesto are not nearly as rich and don't produce the same kinds of highly valuable crops. More visionary leaders have talked about putting business parks and houses on that land for decades, as Riverbank and Oakdale have done. Using land east of Modesto would probably be less costly than land in Wood Colony without incurring the losses in agricultural productivity.

Perhaps the city could talk to Riverbank and Oakdale officials to see how they did it.

What kind of jobs? – Proponents say Wood Colony's proximity to Highway 99 makes it perfect for future employers. But what kind of employers insist on being located along a major highway? The answer is obvious: transportation-based and logistics companies. We would never want to turn away such jobs, but warehouses do not offer the high-paying work our civic leaders say they want to attract.

Experts project the fastest growing occupations over the next 10 years to be health care services, research (perhaps for food companies), computer design and construction. Such businesses are not dependent on easy highway access. And though we would never mock City Council members for being dedicated to finding "jobs, jobs, jobs," we must note that not all jobs are created equal. Is the job of farmer less important than that of a truck-stop cashier?

Follow the money – Commercial land sales generate commissions of roughly 5 percent, according to industry sources. While good farmland might go for \$50,000 an acre, 10 years from now an acre of industrial property will likely fetch at least \$350,000, probably more. Conservatively, the sale of 1,500 acres would generate commissions of \$26 million. You can follow the money all the way from Wood Colony back to Modesto. We applaud anyone who can make a profit, but you can take a commission on eastside properties, too.

Asphalt is not inevitable – Those who want to see business parks west of Highway 99 say that someday those farms will all become businesses or houses, just as farms along McHenry, Pelandale and Coffee roads have all disappeared. And we recognize the truth in the saying that most farmers are just developers wearing coveralls. But property owners in Wood Colony have resisted the siren call of easy money for, oh, 110 years and created some of the best-tended and most productive farms in the area.

There's no reason to expect their hearts to change.

Good neighbors – This issue has generated a flood of letters, heated community meetings and alternately irritated or dismayed City Council members. Nearby, the city is fighting with Salida about joining Modesto. If the city proceeds with its plan to include Wood Colony in its general plan, it will likely create enemies on two fronts.

Get a new plan – It's true that Modesto needs more land for industry. A new general plan will help identify the most suitable land for that purpose. We've joined the chamber and planners in pointing this out for many years and we fully support designating land east, south and north for this purpose. But more than a decade ago, those trying to envision a viable future for our valley recommended that we save the best soils for farming and put houses and businesses on ground that's not as good. More than a century ago, some industrious families identified the land of Wood Colony as perfect for farming. Each of those assessments was correct and neither has changed.



WE ARE WATCHING...

County of Stanislaus

www.stancounty.com/

The North County Corridor is slowly moving into its final pre-build planning phase. The public comment period for the environmental report closed in October, 2017. The Final Environmental Impact report of the project is to follow with Final Design and Right of Way (RoW) determination before any dirt can be turned in 2018. Four alternative routes were study between Tully Road and a Hwy 120 connection.

Each alternative had similar impacts with costs varying based on local desires, RoW and intersection design. The next step is for the Project Development Team (PDT) to make a recommendation for a preferred alignment for the final environmental document and the Caltrans District Director's consideration. The PDT is comprised of staff from Caltrans, StanCOG, Stanislaus County, the Cities of Modesto, Oakdale and Riverbank and key members of the environmental and engineering consultant team.

In cooperation with Caltrans and FHWA, proposes to widen McHenry Avenue. The project is located 2.4 miles south of State Route 120 near the City of Modesto. The purpose of the project is to widen the existing 2 lane McHenry Avenue to a total of 5 lanes from the intersection of Ladd/Patterson Road to the south abutment of McHenry Avenue Bridge over the Stanislaus River.

Schedule: Complete Environmental Studies: Fall 2017 Complete Permitting: Summer 2018 Complete Final Design and Right-of-Way: Spring 2019 Begin Construction: Spring 2020

City of Patterson

www.ci.patterson.ca.us/

The Sperry Road/I 5 Interchange Project is a partnership between CalTrans and Stanislaus County with main benefit going to Patterson and the adjacent industrial park. Two alternatives are being considered with price tags of approximately \$12M and \$16M each.

City of Riverbank

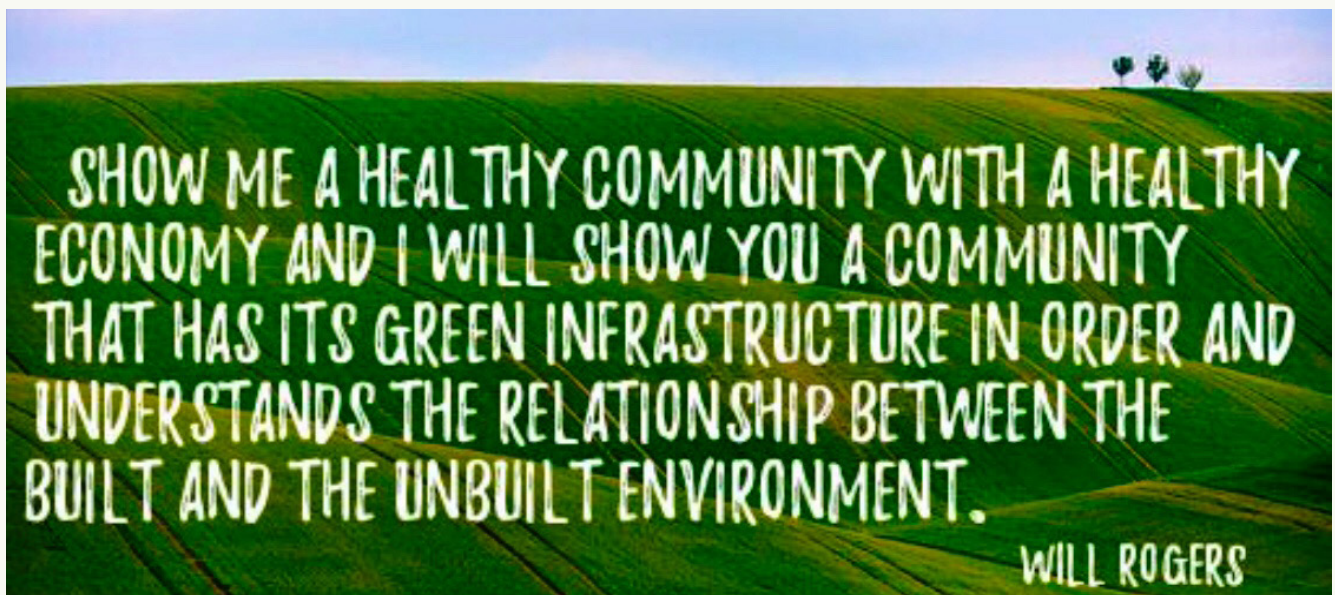
www.riverbank.org/

Plans are slow to form for last years approved expansion of its Sphere of Influence by LAFCO. Total acres beyond the city limit for urbanization is 2,187 acres, about half east and west. Nearly all west of City is prime farmland.

City of Modesto

<https://www.modestogov.com/>

Little activity is going on around Modesto development. There remains approximately 12,000 acres outside the City within the 2010 adopted Sphere of Influence. Tivoli, the last major planned development community to be approved for annexation is stalled by the inability of the City to provide services.





Message from the Chair

E. Timothy Parker

This past year as chair of FWG was an honor. As I close out nearly 30 years in law enforcement, land preservation will remain a keen interest and I'll continue to 'keep watch' as a board member.

Often as we think of ending the year our gaze moves toward what will unfold in the future.

Have we learned from the past? A recent visit to Cuba had me wondering about sustaining vital farmland when you have minimal resources to make due. Cuba is often described as an island where time has stood still. I can attest to the beautiful 57' Chevys where every night looks like Hot August. I was able to see how Ernest Hemingway's

writing was inspired by the scenery and the culture... salsa dancing by the sea.

Sugarcane was abundant as we traversed the countryside from Cienfuegos to Havana. Cattle was seen grazing in the fields. No modernization to farming in Cuba. The farmland appears safe from development. It's certainly designated without urban encroachment.

With that said, there is not the same great food abundance like we currently have in the Central Valley. Perhaps we simply take it for granted, our great abundance of food. The Central Valley once stood still in time when farmland was the priority. Not anymore.

How about this future thought, protection of our best and most fertile farmland without urban encroachment?

FWG Executive Board

Chair

E. Timothy Parker

Vice Chair

Lori Wolf

Treasurer

Audie Dahlgren

Secretary

Jeani Ferrari

Directors

Lisa Braden

Chance Carrico

Elizabeth Mullen

Ana Ringsted

Erica Stewart

Lani Turner

Thank You
To Our Sponsors



Sustaining Sponsor
E. & J. Gallo Winery

Supporting Sponsors
Farm Management, Inc.
Garton Tractor

Stanislaus LAFCO

2016 CITY LIMIT & SOI ACREAGES

(Rounded to the Nearest Acre)

CITY	SPHERE OF INFLUENCE (SOI) INCLUDING CITY LIMITS	CITY LIMITS	REMAINDER OUTSIDE CITY, WITHIN SOI
Ceres	8,487	5,989	2,498
Hughson	2,029	1,239	790
Modesto	40,512	28,768	11,744
Newman	3,980	1,397	2,583
Oakdale	6,706	3,993	2,713
Patterson	6,149	5,112	1,037
Riverbank	4,850  ^{+1,479}	2,663	2,187
Turlock	13,088	10,701	2,387
Waterford	2,734	1,560	1,174
TOTAL	88,535  ^{+1,479}	61,422	27,113

 = increased in 2016

Date: 12/31/2016

Source: Stanislaus LAFCO

A donation
has been made:

In Memory of

**Patricia
Jackman**

by

FWG Board

*Lisa Braden,
Chance Carrico,
Jeani Ferrari,
Elizabeth Mullen,
Timothy Parker,
Ana Ringsted
Erica Stewart,
Lani Turner
Lori Wolf*



Farmland Working Group

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

 www.farmlandworkinggroup.org



It's time to renew your membership!

Our Wish for ~~2016~~, ~~2017~~ 2018

**The statutory goals of LAFCo
(Local Agency Formation Commission)**

**Encourage the preservation of agricultural land and open space
or, conversely, discourage urban sprawl.**

**Commissioners should be selected
based on their commitment to the mission of the agency.**

**Farmland Working Group hopes
the mayors and supervisors
appoint LAFCo commissioners
who are committed to LAFCo's intent and purpose.**