

FARMLAND WORKING GROUP

Winter 2006

STRIVING TO PROTECT FOOD, FAMILIES AND FARMLAND



Blueprint for Our Future! **Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley**

Governor Schwarzenegger ordered eight of his Cabinet members to meet with local governments, business people and regular folks to generate ideas on boosting the valley's economic future.

From an Executive Order by the Governor of the State of California to neighborhood meetings, the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint Planning Process is gearing up to have an impact in and on the lives of valley residents.

The San Joaquin Valley is getting some recognition. Governor Schwarzenegger established the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley ("Partnership") with a purpose to "Identify projects and programs that will best utilize public dollars and most quickly improve the economic vitality of the Valley."

In line with the "Partnership" the Councils of Governments (COGS) throughout the San Joaquin Valley have taken on the challenge to ad-

dress critical needs of the valley. "The San Joaquin Valley Blueprint Planning Process" has been initiated and includes local government agencies, elected officials, and residents appointed to regional advisory committees. Following initial meetings, the COGS will expand the process.

The first Blueprint Regional Advisory Committee (BRAC) meeting was held in Modesto December 4, 2006, with over 100 people attending. The next meeting will be in Kern County in February 2007.

"What is the process? The Blueprint is a 'bottoms-up' process rooted in working with the public at the local level. The Blueprint process assumes that the city councils and the board of supervisors are the decision makers who will guide its development, determine the vision, policies, and programs that will be included and lead its implementation. The Blueprint will identify issues related to future growth and subsequent impacts on the San Joaquin Valley. The Project will develop a vision, goals and

objectives, and define evaluation criteria for comparing alternatives. The project will update GIS traffic modeling tools, collect and analyze updated traffic and demographic data, develop alternative scenarios, and evaluate each scenario and related impacts. The Blueprint partners will identify a preferred scenario and implementation strategies, which will be incorporated into the long-range plans for the eight county region."

Given the scope and initial level of authority assigned to this process, "The Blueprint" appears to have the potential to overcome the negative image of Visions past. The possibilities to transform the SJ Valley can be as uninspiring as the LA basin or a cornucopia of the ultimate American Dream.

Look for information about upcoming Blueprint Community Forums in your local newspaper or on radio and television throughout 2007.

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

We feel our alternative will result in a better quality of life for the citizens of Riverbank and a more cohesive community. It will better protect our rural, small town identity. Our plan will stop the degradation and elimination of prime farmland, a non-renewable resource. "Riverbank's historic roots in agriculture, the railroad, and the River, should be recognized, celebrated, and respected as we create the City's future." We are certain that with our Alternative Plan this vision will be realized.

Closing Summary -as submitted to the City of Riverbank by Riverbank Watch



WE ARE WATCHING...

Stanislaus County

County of Stanislaus

Supervisor Jim DeMartini is heading a series of public reviews for revision of the county ag element. Avoiding the creation of ranchettes in production agricultural areas is one focus of the revision. Updating and specifying the type of farmland mitigation required of urban development is also under review. Recently the San Joaquin County adopted an "in-kind" mitigation requirement, which means that developers must protect an acre of farmland for every acre urbanized.

City of Modesto

The Modesto City Council (MCC) recently put new growth on the back burner for another two years. Modesto will not likely have another Measure A/M expansion vote until the 2009 ballot. The MCC is required to have an advisory vote for sewer extension before approving new development areas. The next area for annexation will be the Sylvan/Roselle

part of Village 3, called Tivoli. The developer is required to mitigate for the loss of prime farmland on 200 of the 450-acre expansion. Modesto's development east is onto lesser quality soils.

City of Riverbank

A citizens' group, "Riverbank Watch", formed to insure public input in the City planning process. They have submitted an alternative plan to a proposed 700-acre Westside expansion. Prime farmland west of the city, once proposed as the County's first Conservation Easement, is now proposed for urban development.

The City to-date has no agriculture mitigation requirement. Riverbank borders the Modesto General Plan at Claribel Road on the south.

riverbankwatch@yahoo.com

Merced County

County of Merced

A citizens group has called on the Board of Supervisors to place a moratorium on new development until an update of the County General Plan (GP) occurs. The GP was last adopted in 1990. Many developments have occurred, including the University of California, Merced campus at Lake Yosemite. The moratorium chides piecemeal development and a need to address "quality of life" issues before more urbanization is allowed.

Land Trust Merger

Merced County Farmland and Open Space Trust (MCFOST) recently completed a merger with and became part of the Central Valley Farmland Trust (CVFT). MCFOST has been a very active trust and brings thousands of acres of protected farmland easements to the CVFT. The CVFT presently oversees farmland easements in a four county area which includes Merced, Stanislaus, San Joaquin, and Sacramento counties.

We are watching and commenting

These comments submitted during public review process.

The Farmland Working Group (FWG) supports the adoption of a strong Agricultural Element of the Stanislaus County General Plan that will foster the \$1 billion agricultural-based industry in Stanislaus County and protect some of the best farmland in the world.

The Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors has been a leader in promoting its agricultural base economy. Stanislaus County was one of the first counties to adopt an agricultural element in its General Plan. Stanislaus County has one of the highest enrollment rates under the Williamson Act. And in 2000, the County appointed a committee, as part of the “Visioning” process, to study the development of a local land trust to hold conservation easements permanently protecting our best farmland. That committee led to the formation of the four county regional land trust, the Central Valley Farmland Trust, which now holds agricultural easements on thousands of acres of ag. land in the northern San Joaquin Valley and manages thousands of dollars of ag. land mitigation funds in Stanislaus County and the region.

We believe that the Ag Element should specifically recognize the County’s role in the formation of the Central Valley Farmland Trust and CVFT’s role in implementing farmland mitigation programs in Stanislaus County.

Because incorporated cities will cause most of the urbanization in the county, it is critical that the Ag Element strongly encourage cities to adopt similar farmland mitigation measures in their respective General Plans.

Farmland Working Group also recommends additional implementation measures under “Objective 2.4: Assessing and mitigating impacts of farmland conversion”.

As a top ten producer of agricultural products in the U.S., Stanislaus County needs strong policies and implementation measures to stabilize the farmland base.

Specific implementation measures to mitigate the farmland impacts from urbanization are one of the important tools for sustaining productive land for the agricultural industry in Stanislaus County.

Therefore, under policy 2.20 (“The County shall require mitigation of the impacts of farmland conversion”), we recommend that the County add the following as mitigation measures:

1. Working with the Central Valley Farmland Trust, the County shall require as a condition to any entitlement (General Plan amendment, re-zone, subdivision or parcel map) for uses not allowed under the current agricultural zoning ordinance that the property owner place an agricultural easement on an equal number of acres of farmland that meet the criteria set forth in the County’s Policy Regarding Agricultural Lands Transaction (Board Resolution No. 2001-536) and provide funding for the administrative and monitoring costs of the easement.
2. The County will encourage cities and LAFCO to adopt the above implementation measure.

We also support the Draft Ag. Element’s attempt to ensure that minimal parcel sizes are sufficient to support production agriculture. We also believe that the County should close a “loophole” often used to convert ag. land to urban uses by including a policy prohibiting the expansion of the footprint of non-conforming uses in agriculturally zoned properties.

Thank you for consideration of these recommended additional implementation measures and policy to the Stanislaus County Ag Element.

Ag Element Committee





Message from the President

Blueprint for a better San Joaquin Valley...

Regional Planning is currently a hot topic. This concept is not new. Whenever growth hits a region, land use planners talk passionately about the need for cities and counties to work together to make long-range plans for the best and wisest use of the limited resources.

Whenever cities and counties work together on land use issues it is most often called Visioning. California has a long history of visioning. Sometimes visioning is referred to as a Blueprint Process. And, while visioning or blueprint processes always create documents that are both broad and specific to land use in regions as small as a county or as large as the state of California, there has been little lasting success.

One problem is how to enforce the many details of the blueprint. While great care is taken to make the vision/blueprint inclusive, once the mayor, council member(s) or Governor is no longer in office, the vision loses its luster and becomes just another land use plan sitting on the shelf.

In order for this blueprint process to have real impact on regional growth and land use, there will have to be incentives and penalties implemented. Without incentives, this process will go the way of every other visioning process. And, this blueprint process is a costly endeavor. Each county in the San Joaquin Valley: San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare, and Kern Counties will

be granted money from the state to engage a consultant. The consultant will bring each county constituency together, from supervisors and council members, staff and citizens.

The eight counties and their Councils of Government joined forces to develop an integrated regional blueprint plan. They were awarded \$2 million in 2006 and an additional \$2.5 million through 2008.

If the Blueprint Process is going to be successful, it will require participation by citizens.

**The success, in part,
will be the bottom-up
process. It is critical that
citizens embrace the
project and participate.
The Blueprint Process
has already begun!**

Please learn more by going on line:
<http://www.greatvalley.org/blueprint>

The San Joaquin Valley Blueprint Planning Process is part of Governor Schwarzenegger's reauthorized San Joaquin Valley Partnership.
<http://gov.ca.gov/index.php?/press-release/4792/>

Get Involved!

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2006

A Busy Year for FWG

Farmland Working Group has had a busy year and we look to more busy years ahead with growth and farmland loss two important issues in our region. While maybe not a household word, Farmland Working Group is looked upon by many as a group that speaks out on land use issues. More often than not, FWG is called upon to save "the farmland" and stop dumb growth.

In 2006, FWG spoke before a joint meeting of the Riverbank City Council and Planning Commission, and a packed house, asking that they give proper consideration before expanding their General Plan. We had been contacted by local citizens who were outraged that the cost of the General Plan update was going to be paid by the Grupe Company, the very company that was proposing the development.

FWG understands the importance of a county's General Plan. An important segment of Stanislaus County's General Plan is the Agricultural Element. The Ag Element is currently being updated. Members of our Board have attended the public comment meetings that were held throughout the county. When the Draft Ag Element was released, FWG carefully read through the lengthy document and sent a formal comment to the Planning Dept. and the Board of Supervisors.

When the county's Ag Element Advisory Committee recently made modifications to the Draft Ag Element, FWG sent additional comments to Stanislaus County Planning Dept. and the Board of Supervisors. Farmland Working Group understands that the Ag Element is a critical part of Stanislaus

**Christmas
is a time
for giving!**

Anytime is a good time to
make a donation to FWG.
Please know that if your
donation arrives in the last

quarter of the year
(Oct. through Dec.) your
membership rolls over to the
next year.

In the spirit of giving,
December is membership
month and each new or
renewed membership receives
a gift membership at no cost!
Send one to a friend!

County's General Plan. This sub-document spells out how agriculture relates to the county and identifies government responsibilities for implementation and protection.

Farmland Working Group continues to educate the public about our amazing resource, the world's most productive farmland, and the need to have sustainable growth in our urban communities. FWG recently spoke at a regular meeting of the League of Women Voters of Stanislaus County and drew the largest audience, to date. We are available to speak to any group and we encourage teachers to use our video and curriculum to educate their students.

E-MAIL and WEBSITE

We're compiling an e-mail address list. Please include your e-mail address on your donation form. With your permission, FWG can send Alerts and Newsletters via e-mail.

We are working on an enhanced website – look for an announcement in our Spring newsletter.

We are also looking for creative folks to help with our newsletter and website.

Please consider helping FWG – our work is vitally important.

Farmland Working Group
P.O. Box 948 Turlock, CA 95381
(209) 247-2503

Our wish for 2007

Standing
room only
at local
Blueprint
for the
San
Joaquin
Valley
meetings!

'Tis the Season for sharing hopes and
dreams for our valley



Last issue
time to renew!



EXECUTIVE ORDER S-5-05
by the
Governor of the State of California

WHEREAS, the San Joaquin Valley is a region rich in resources and important to California's heritage, economy, environment and identity. It is one of the most productive agricultural regions in the world—home to farmlands that feed the nation and the world. It encompasses three world-class national parks that preserve the natural beauty of the Valley and the mountains that bound it. The San Joaquin Valley is intersected by a transportation corridor that is critical to the state's interstate commerce. Its people are hardworking and representative of many cultures, races and nationalities.... *complete document available at www.valleyblueprint.org*

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger