

Farmland Working Group

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

State of the Art on Agricultural Preservation

This white paper was produced as a collaborative effort between CALAFCO and American Farmland Trust (AFT).

AFT believes in the importance of protecting farmland while supporting sustainable community growth. AFT promotes LAFCo's as key players in conserving agricultural land since most productive farmland is located around cities. Having actively promoted farmland conservation in California for nearly two decades, AFT offers insight on why it is important to preserve farmland and presents best practices.

A Unique Perspective from CALAFCO -

The Legislature intends LAFCo's to be responsive to local challenges as well state priorities. An individual LAFCo's policies can lay out LAFCo's statutory mandate to balance the state interest in the preservation of open space and prime agricultural lands with the need for orderly development. LAFCo's have used their planning authority to anticipate and reduce or avoid the loss of agricultural land. Across the state, LAFCo experiences reflect the variance of practices on agricultural preservation between

rural, suburban and urban counties.

An AFT View: Why It Is Important to Preserve What We Have Left—What's at Risk? California boasts some of the most productive farmland on the planet, as measured in terms of the ratio of agricultural inputs to outputs. This productivity is largely possible because of California's Mediterranean climate and fertile soils, which require fewer inputs and are less subject to unfavorable climate conditions and pest pressures. This is important for many reasons, including state and national food security, California's prospects for economic growth and competitiveness on the agricultural market, and the efficient utilization of scarce resources such as water.

Current Trends Of California's approximately 100 million acres of land, 31 million acres or one-third, are used for agriculture. Of this agricultural land, 19 million acres are used for grazing land and 12 million acres are used to grow crops. That figure may seem significant, but only about 9 million acres of this cropland are considered to be prime, unique or of statewide importance (as defined by the California Department of Conservation's FMMP).⁵

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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.



This resource is diminishing and is likely to continue to do so, mostly due to conversion to urban development, but also from other causes. Considering that not all remaining farmland is ideal for agriculture due to current and future water stress, climate and temperature changes, and other constraints such as strong soil salinity, protecting what is left is paramount. In the last 30 years, California has lost more than one million acres of farming and grazing land, and about half of that loss was prime farmland. Figure 2 below provides a snapshot from the California Department of Conservation of what has happened to farmland over that period.

Quick Facts on California Farmland, 1984–2012 - Did you know, over the course of 30 years, over 1.4 million acres of agricultural land in California were removed from farming uses (a rate of nearly one square mile every four days). Of converted land, 49 percent was prime farmland. For every 5 acres leaving agricultural use, 4 acres converted to urban land

LAFcos' Mandate to Preserve Agricultural Lands - Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act 2000 (CKH Act) - Among the purposes of a commission are discouraging urban sprawl, preserving open-space and prime agricultural lands, encouraging the efficient provision of government services, and encouraging the orderly formation and development of local agencies based upon local conditions and circumstances. (Gov. Code §56301, emphasis added). Preserving prime agricultural lands and open space is a key statutory mandate of LAFcos and the CKH Act provides direction to LAFcos on certain policies, priorities, and information that LAFcos should, and/or must consider when analyzing boundary change proposals that could potentially impact agricultural lands.

Approaches to LAFco Agricultural Preservation Policies - Though the CKH Act provides some policies specific to agricultural preservation, these are baseline parameters and guidelines from which individual LAFcos can carry

out their mandate. Ultimately, a LAFco's broad powers will guide and influence annexation decisions and how a LAFco will respond to the need to balance urban growth and preserving agriculture and open space.

Over the years, LAFcos, on an individual basis, have adopted various local policies and procedures to assist them in their effort to preserve agricultural lands. These policies generally call for the avoidance, minimization, and mitigation of adverse impacts to agricultural lands. Avoidance consists of anticipating and taking measures to avoid creating adverse impacts to agricultural lands from the outset, such as steering development away from agricultural lands to avoid their conversion to other uses.

This most efficiently occurs at the time a city or county is updating its general plan and the issue can be viewed at a regional level and not based on an individual proposal. Minimization consists of measures to reduce the duration, intensity, and significance of the conversion and/or the extent of adverse impacts to agricultural lands (including direct, indirect and cumulative impacts as appropriate) that cannot be completely avoided. Mitigation consists of measurable preservation outcomes, resulting from actions applied to geographic areas typically not impacted by the proposed project, that compensate for a project's significant adverse impacts to agricultural lands that cannot be avoided and/or minimized.

Did you know, over the course of 30 years...

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STATE OF THE COUNTY 2018

by Chairman Jim DeMartini



...Stanislaus County encompasses over 1500 square miles and is home to 540,000 people. We have nine incorporated cities, the Coast Range to our West, the Sierra Nevada Mountains to the East and some of the world's most productive farmland on the valley floor. We are recognized internationally for our agricultural innovation and our ability to grow more than 200 commodities here.

The state of the County is healthy and strong. We will always have to take steps to address new obligations that impact our community issued from Washington DC or Sacramento. But we have handled those in the past and will do so again. With one exception, we can face this year and the next decade in much better shape than fourteen years ago when I was first elected to this board.

In the past few years, life has gotten better in Stanislaus County but before I go into the things that I believe have made Stanislaus County a better place to live and work, I would like to compliment my colleagues on the Board of Supervisors for their professionalism and dedication to doing what is best for our community. Being a member of this Board has taught me the importance of collaboration and long range planning. I have always considered it an honor to work with such distinguished and professional individuals, both past and present, that have always had the County's best interest at heart. That doesn't mean that we always agree on everything. We have all been on the losing side of a four to one vote. We often engage in heated debate, that is not a bad thing. We have an obligation to fight for our beliefs and what we think is best for the citizens of Stanislaus County. We all come from different backgrounds, so different views can, and should be expected. While we sometimes disagree, we do it with respect for each other and we all learn from each other. When the vote is taken we accept the decision of the majority and go on to the next issue in full support and committed to success....

The strength of our community has always been its people. From the pioneers who immigrated from around the world and established communities here, to the railroads that connected us, to the Gallo Brothers whose start up business would go on to become the largest family owned winery in the world. Stanislaus County has always been home to people with vision and the unique ability to turn challenges into opportunities.

Agriculture, and the businesses that support it, is our County's most important industry. Farmers and ranchers, food processors, equipment repair and manufacturing, trucking companies, nurseries and all the other business that support agriculture comprise one third of our workforce. Stanislaus County's 4100 farms produce almost \$3.3 billion in farmgate value annually; this is more than the entire agricultural value of many states. Our rich soil and our Mediterranean climate make us unique in the world. Stanislaus County must continue to be an

advocate for agriculture. We must continue our support for the Ag Commissioner's Office and the programs that strengthen agriculture. We should also continue our commitment to the UC Cooperative Extension which conducts educational and applied research programs that help our farmers develop the best management practices necessary to be able to compete in the world marketplace.

We must never forget the value of our agriculture and the importance of preserving farmland for it has been the driving force of our economy. The County's farmland is an irreplaceable natural resource, protected by our Ag Element and LAF-CO policy. Only by balancing the need to create housing and job opportunities for an expanding population, with the need to protect our agricultural land, will we ensure the continuing success of our local agriculture...

No State or Federal money went into the construction of the Don Pedro or Exchequer dams. These dams are owned by the ratepayers of the irrigation districts. Yet the State Water Resource Control Board wants to take the water stored behind those facilities that we own, and use it for their purpose. We are told it's for the benefit of the salmon. But in their own reports they acknowledge that salmon restoration can only be accomplished by combined efforts of flow increases, predation suppression and habitat restoration. But the only mandate in the proposal is to increase flows. A study by the Modesto and Turlock Irrigation Districts show that up to 97 percent of the salmon smolt are eaten by striped bass, a non-native fish, before they reach the ocean. If the State Water Resources Board really wanted to improve the mortality of salmon smolt they should start with a plan to reduce the number of striped bass first. By their own admission, just increasing river flows does little if anything to increase salmon numbers. Yet that is their only requirement...

Stanislaus County has a proud past and as we chart our course for a bright future, County government must be focused, efficient and professional. Your County Board of Supervisors has developed priorities that focus on public safety, health, economic development and the efficient delivery of public services.

I have listed many positive things about us today in this State of the County Address. Life has improved in Stanislaus County and continues to get better. We must all work together to define our future. We have always faced challenges, and with challenges come new opportunities. How we handle them is fully in our hands. We should not look to Sacramento or Washington to solve our problems or make us more prosperous. They do not know what is best for us. That task is ours and ours alone.

I want to thank my fellow Board Members, Department Heads and all the employees of this great organization for their dedication and commitment to excellence. Together we will be up to all the challenges that lie ahead.

Excerpts from State of the County speech
February 6, 2018 - entire speech is online:

www.stancounty.com/bos/stateofcounty/state-of-the-county-address.pdf

Central Valley Farmland Trust and Brentwood Agricultural Land Trust merge to conserve more farms together



Elk Grove, CA: The Central Valley Farmland Trust (CVFT) and the Brentwood Agricultural Land Trust (BALT) have merged to form one outstanding organization dedicated to serving more California farmers.

BALT was formed in 2002 and CVFT in 2004, both land trusts' missions focused on farmland protection and they each led flourishing programs within their respective regions of Contra Costa County in the East Bay and the Central Valley. When BALT's Executive Director Kathryn Lyddan accepted a new position with the Department of Conservation, the board decided it was time to join forces with another agricultural land trust.

With its focus on agricultural conservation, the neighboring Central Valley Farmland Trust was a natural fit for a merger. After several months of discussions, the two boards consummated the merger in the final months of 2017.

The newly enhanced board of directors, composed of CVFT and BALT board members, has a wide range of perspectives including farmers, agricultural advisors, property rights advocates, city and regional planners, other farming professionals, and land stewardship experts.

"This board is reflective of a California that is growing, that must meet the needs of diverse populations who deserve local food, economic vitality, and the many extended benefits of farmland nearby," said Charlotte Mitchell, Executive Director of California Farmland Trust (CFT), formerly executive director of CVFT.

Together, as the California Farmland Trust, the board and staff are looking forward to a future full of productive farmland. The new mission of CFT is to "help farmers protect the best farmland in the world" – because so much of it is right here at home in California. California is one of five regions in the world with a unique combination of climate, soils, and water ideally suited to produce over 400 crops and provide the majority of America's fruits, nuts, and vegetables.

Charlotte Mitchell also stated, "We are thrilled at our new partnership with the Brentwood agricultural community, and look forward to protecting more of the farms that feed our families."



Central Valley Farmland Trust – Agricultural Conservation Easements

County	Nearest Town	Ag Prod.	Year Closed	# of Acres	County # Acres
Merced	Livingston	Sweet Potatoes	2011	211.90	10,331.27
	Santa Nella	Field crops	2014	178.00	
	Merced	Almonds	2011	243.99	
	Livingston	Almonds	2008	77.90	
	Delhi	Almonds	2002	44.00	
	Delhi	Almonds	2002	27.90	
	Delhi	Almonds	2006	40.70	
	Delhi	Almonds, peaches	2007	38.80	
	Delhi	Peaches	2007	38.46	
	Delhi	Almonds, peaches	2008	39.00	
	Delhi	Sweet potatoes	2002	25.50	
	Planada	Alfalfa and grain crops	2000	615.80	
	Planada	Cattle grazing	2000	391.00	
	Delhi	Almonds, walnuts	2005	263.00	
	Gustine	Alfalfa, field crops	2008	287.00	
	Livingston	Almonds	2015	100.5	
	Hilmar	Corn, alfalfa	2009	38.00	
	Cressey	Alfalfa, pasture grass	2006	89.00	
	Cressey	Corn, sudan, pasture mix	2006	382.9	
	Livingston	Almonds	2007	78.8	
Stanislaus	Modesto	Almonds, walnuts	2009	155.83	306.94
	Modesto	Almonds, walnuts	2011	151.11	
San Joaquin	Linden	Walnuts, cherries	2010	48.78	2305.98
	Linden	Walnuts, cherries	2014	158.18	
	Linden	Walnuts, cherries	2011	174.24	
	Stockton	Corn, oats	2011	216.30	
	Lockeford	Walnuts	2012	253.75	
	Linden	Walnuts, cherries, peaches	2015	160.00	
	Lathrop	Onions, asparagus, hay	2006	927.90	
	Lathrop	Tomatoes, hay	2011	241.83	
	Stockton	Alfalfa, Tomatoes, Grain, Corn	2017	125.00	
Sacramento	Elk Grove	Corn and field crops	2013	166.20	709.08
	Elk Grove	Hay	2003	97.00	
	Howard Landing	Hay and grain	2007	225.00	
	Elk Grove	Vineyard	2003	220.88	



Message from the Chair

Lori Wolf

Last year was my first year as Vice Chairman and I made valuable new contacts that will be a great resource in the fight to save farmland. I still remember when Jim DeMartini as Chairman for the Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors gave his state of the county address and likened agriculture to an hourglass. The constriction in the hourglass is the existing amount of ag land. Agriculture is our counties largest stable job producing sector and needs to be defended vigorously from conversion to other purposes. Once agricultural land is paved over it can never be recovered.

That being said I also think it is important to note that we can not pave our

way out of our existing road coagulation. The build at all costs practices of the California Department of Transportation need to be re-evaluated. The Stanislaus Council of Governments is looking at ways to fund a four lane freeway in West Stanislaus County called the SR 132 Expressway and Realignment. There are major issues with this project that affect prime farmland and encroachment on the San Joaquin National Wildlife Refuge. Hopefully we will have more information on this in the near future.

We will have a booth again this year at Earth Day in The Park, the City of Modesto sponsored event on Saturday, April 21st from 10 am to 4 pm. Stop by and see us.

FWG Executive Board

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Free to the public!

Graceada Park

Saturday, April 21, 2018

10am - 4pm

Live Entertainment!

Bubblemania & Co.
The Silly String Band
DJ Music & Games
Funstrummers
Petting Zoo

O'Brien's Market O'B-Green Recycling Event

Free Paper Shredding • Free Electronic Waste & CRV Recycling
Hope Chest Thrift Store Truck Accepting Donations

GUESS THE WEIGHT OR COUNT OF A RECYCLED COMMODITY AND WIN!

Sponsored by Modesto Junk Co. and Cruisers

Fresh Flowers • Rodin Farms • Solar Energy • Electric Cars
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Turlock Certified Farmers Market

OPENS

Saturday

April 21, 2018

8 am - 1 pm

Stanislaus

County

Fairgrounds

Farmland Working Group

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



www.farmlandworkinggroup.org



**Look for FWG at Earth Day in the Park
Festival, Graceada Park, Modesto
April 21, 2018 - 10 am - 4 pm**

Hierarchy for Agricultural Land Preservation Strategies

Avoid Impacts

Refers to steering growth away from agricultural lands using options such as an alternative project location or a smaller scale project in order to avoid conversion of agricultural lands. This is the **best strategy** when there is availability of vacant or underutilized lands within existing boundaries and there is no demonstrated need for expanding boundaries based on more efficient development patterns.

Minimize Impacts

Refers to considering alternatives in the location, siting and scale of a project; utilizing design features such as agricultural buffers, and /or adopting regulations such as Right to Farm ordinances, in order to minimize conversion and impacts on / conflicts with, agricultural operations or uses. This strategy is used to maximize preservation when there are significant constraints to entirely avoiding impacts.

Mitigate Impacts

Refers to measures meant to compensate for the conversion of agricultural lands, such as dedication of agricultural conservation easements, payment of in-lieu fees, or purchase and transfer of agricultural lands, to an agricultural conservation entity. This strategy is used as a **last resort** and only when all efforts to avoid and minimize conversion of agricultural lands have been exhausted.

LAFCo's unique mandates to preserve prime agricultural lands and discourage urban sprawl, and the fact that agricultural lands are a finite and irreplaceable resource, make it essential to avoid adversely impacting agricultural lands in the first place.