

# Farmland Working Group

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

## NO ANNEXATION of WOOD COLONY

Anyone who has been keeping up with Modesto news these last few months has seen that there has been a lot of coverage of the city's attempt to add prime farmland located along the Highway 99 and 132 corridors to their General Plan. The area I am referring to is better known as Wood Colony. As a fourth generation farmer in Wood Colony

I am adamantly opposed to any growth west of Highway 99. However, the city is determined to keep some portion of Wood Colony in their General Plan. Their main argument for retaining Business Park zoning in Wood Colony is the rerouting of Highway 132 will create a demand for business to locate in that area. This is where the city and I disagree.

It certainly appears that the Highway 132 project is closer than ever to beginning construction. In fact, at this point, it is almost a sure thing that a new Highway 132 will be constructed between Highway 99 and Dakota Avenue. This will allow commuter traffic easier access to 132 from Hwy 99 as they make their daily journey to and from the Bay Area. This new addition will not, however, encourage commercial and industrial building along its route. Here are a few reasons why:

1. **Hwy 132 will remain a two lane road for several miles to the West.** The argument that a new 132 will allow for better industrial traffic to the Bay Area is a farse. Hwy 132 is only being developed as far west as Dakota Avenue. Adding industrial truck traffic to an already extremely dangerous commuter highway will only create more problems.
2. **Highway 99 cannot handle an increase in industrial truck traffic.** The new 132 will dump traffic onto Highway 99 in downtown Modesto. Where is Hwy 99 traffic the worst when traveling through Modesto at rush hour? Between Briggsmore and Hatch. Adding industrial truck traffic to an already overpopulated Hwy 99 will only make matters worse.
3. **There is not enough land to entice commercial or industrial development.** Modesto is looking to add over 1,000 acres of prime farmland in Wood Colony to their General Plan. The acreage is split between to different development sites. According to most planners a minimum of 2,000 acres is needed for a commercial/industrial development. City of Modesto leaders have acknowledged that Wood Colony does not have the needed acreage.



(Continued page 2)

Jake Wenger

(Continued from page 1)

Even with these issues Modesto has proceeded to include portions of Wood Colony in their General Plan. The reason being that regardless of the issues with development, the city needs to add commercial/industrial acreage in order to encourage companies to settle here. I have never disagreed with this point. It is reasonable for the city to want to have a plan for the future, say 30-40 years down the road. I simply disagree with where they choose to put this development.

East of Modesto the farmland is marginal when compared to the soils to the north and west. You do not find many high value crops planted east of town because the ground is not as viable for permanent crops. This is where we should be directing our growth. I will take it one step further. The ideal place for Modesto to set aside land for future development is south of Claribel Road and east of Claus Road. This location is ideally suited for commercial/industrial development for a number of reasons. Here are a few:

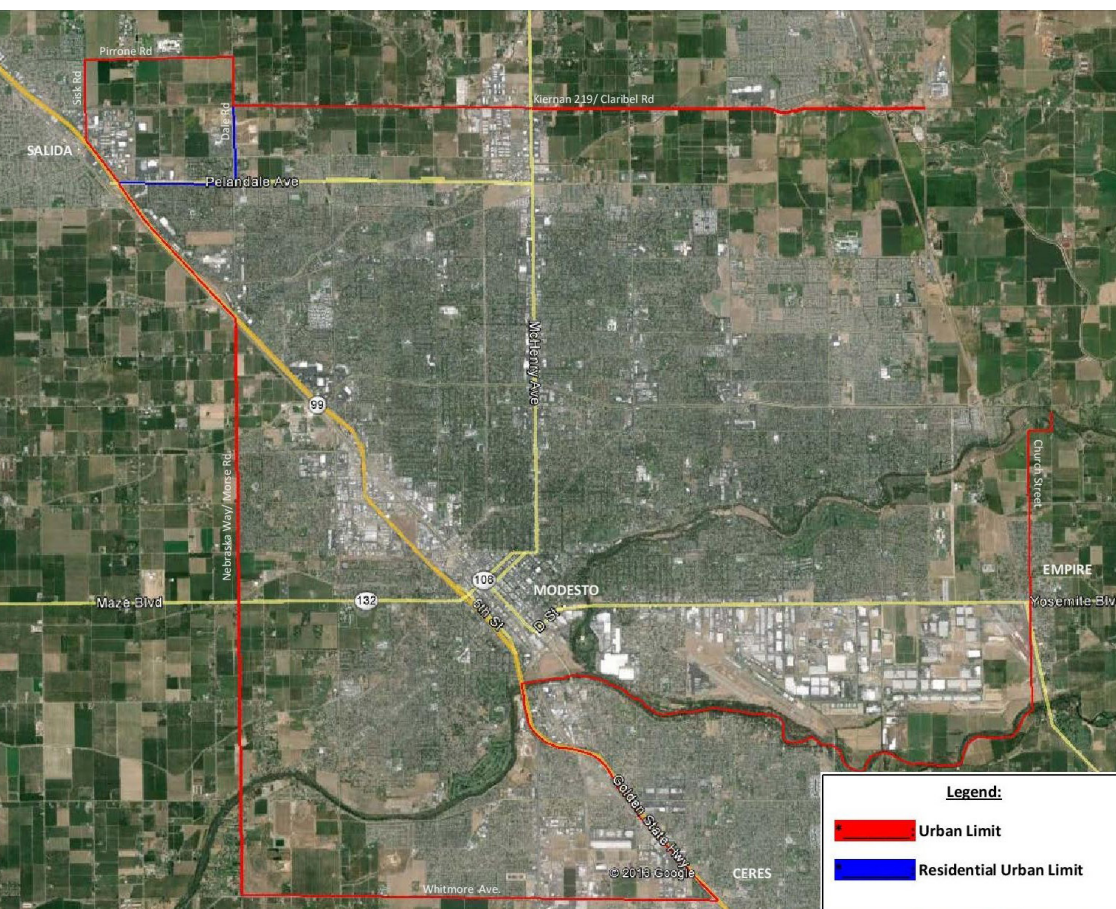
**1. Kiernan Avenue / North County Corridor is already being constructed.** Kiernan overpass at Hwy 99 is being widened, Kiernan itself is being widened and both should be completed prior to any work on Hwy 132. Looking 30-40 years into the future it is also a significantly greater likelihood that a North County Corridor is completed all the way to Tuolumne County before Hwy 132 is completed to Interstate 5.

**2. The roads can handle the increased traffic to the Bay Area.** While Hwy 99 is a logjam downtown where Hwy 132 will intersect, at Kiernan Avenue, Hwy 99 is starting to spread out and traffic thins. It makes it quite easy for truck traffic to access Hwy 99 from Kiernan, making a right turn onto the freeway, and take a short drive to Hwy 120 for easy access to I-5 and the Bay Area.

**3. Riverbank's industrial site would be located across the street.** The larger the potential industrial complex, the greater the demand for companies to locate there. Why does all the acreage have to be in Modesto? Riverbank has had a hard time trying to lure business to their old ammo plant industrial site. Modesto locating a business park across the street would create a regional business area.

The discussion on where to locate growth around Modesto is far from over. My hope moving forward is that we can have a realistic approach to growth and not look to develop an area simply because it looks good on paper. Urban planning should always have a regional view and should always account for the fact that we are blessed to live in the bread basket of the world. We are surrounded with a finite resource – prime farmland – and we should do all we can to protect and preserve this treasure. I look forward to continuing to work toward a solution for Modesto's growth problems. Developing any part of Wood Colony is not one of those solutions

by Jake Wenger • [jake@woodcolony.com](mailto:jake@woodcolony.com)



### Stamp Out Sprawl Modesto!

The Stamp Out Sprawl Initiative is collecting signatures of registered Modesto voters. Urban limits will allow citizens to stop sprawl over Wood Colony and our best farmlands. Urban limits will help the Modesto City Council plan the use of existing areas first. To go outside the limits they must get your vote.

The proposed limit uses common sense lines such as Fwy 99 and the city limit on the westside, thus preventing the destruction of the Wood Colony area. East of Dale Road, Kiernan Avenue will provide an excellent buffer between Modesto and the best farmland and water recharge area in the world! The area between Modesto and Salida has been in job creating plans for nearly 20 years, so Make Kiernan Work! Now we need your signature, later we need your vote.

So, Stamp Out Sprawl Modesto!

Denny Jackman, California grown



# Wood Colony - the Latest Chapter in a Familiar California Story



By Jennifer Helzer  
CSU Stanislaus Professor of  
Geography

Since the mid-1800s, domestic migrants and immigrants from all corners of the globe have come to California seeking a better life. The Central Valley in particular has long served as a refuge for migrants and the destination of choice for those who first recognized the abundant agricultural potential of the region.

Immigrant farmers have converged on the Valley with common goals — to cultivate fertile soils, to adapt to new lands, and to pass on their knowledge and heritage to their descendants. As a result, our region is a land where many cultures have met and mingled and ultimately contributed to the economic development and prosperity of the region.

The local region is home to large communities of Mexican, Azorean, Hmong, Punjabi, Cambodian, Lao, and Assyrian immigrants, as well as numerous descendants from Europe. Over time these different groups brought agricultural knowledge from their homelands to be woven into the rural fabric of the Central Valley. While not all migrants chose to permanently settle in California, those with ties to the land most often stayed, resulting in one of the most culturally diverse and agriculturally rich regions in the world. Early settler societies plowed fields, harvested crops, built homes and eventually established communities that became the foundation for our current cities and towns.

Their labor, knowledge of the land and pioneering spirit made the Central Valley what it is today, and that's what makes the Wood Colony story so compelling. Today, Wood Colony represents a distinct strand of agricultural heritage and a unique cultural island within a rapidly urbanizing Northern San Joaquin Valley, and efforts to preserve this landscape and way of life are at the forefront of current public debate.

More than 100 years ago, pioneering German Baptist Brethren families settled on lands in northern Stanislaus County. Their agricultural labors have had a lasting impact upon both the history and economic development of the region. Wood Colony's influence and way of life are an indelible mark on the agricultural landscapes of the region, and their unique ethno-religious cultural heritage is an example of how human identity and place are intertwined.

It's not difficult to understand the claims made by the residents of Wood Colony — that their contributions have created a special place worthy of protection. The original settlers of Wood Colony are among the region's first inhabitants who created a viable, self-perpetuating society that has had a lasting economic impact on the region.

A distinctive cultural landscape of well-kept farmhouses and fields, a house of worship and a rural cemetery offer a microcosm of agricultural life that was once more prevalent in the Valley. It is one of the few remaining areas where one can find the incredibly rich culture and practices associated with independent, sustainable family farming. The Wood Colony community has cultivated land, raised their families and built homes and schools, and based on this experience they exhibit a strong attachment to place and claims to the area.

Wood Colony also evokes strong emotions in people not directly connected to it. For many, the hundreds of acres of prime agricultural land embody the strong work ethic and family-centric and faith-based values that the region is known for. They understand that to lose your place — literally the land that visibly represents a people — means a loss of community not just for the residents of the Wood Colony, but for everyone. What happens to Wood Colony has now become a clear statement about what and who matters in the region.

Perhaps the most lasting and important gift the Wood Colony settlers have given the region is their determination to stay. They brought families and invested their resources. They constructed houses and churches and eventually whole communities, many of which have survived for a century. This stable community is now faced with drastic change brought on by the proposed development of Wood Colony, and the tradeoff couldn't be clearer: prime agricultural land or shovel-ready industrial space.

The residents of Wood Colony face a more serious loss — their homes, their place of worship and their economic livelihoods, all at once. The story of the displacement of people from their land has played out in California time and again, although generally those who face dislocation have had few resources and political power to fight back. The resistance of Wood Colony residents and their anti-sprawl allies may be different in this respect, and it could be the key to maintaining their Central Valley homeland.

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## WE ARE WATCHING...

FWG previously noted that the developer, Fitzpatrick Homes, had requested of the Modesto City Council to include the LAFCO required farmland mitigation to their application for residential development. It would not be a stretch to connect the developers within Stanislaus County to farmers who may want to preserve the land. Wood Colony folks have expressed interest in preserving their heritage. What better way to truly build community than for farmers and developers to work together. Fitzpatrick Homes, Inc. (209) 543-1608.

### **City of Oakdale**

[www.ci.oakdale.ca.us](http://www.ci.oakdale.ca.us)

Alternatives for the North County Corridor have been reduced to a couple of likely routes. The North County Corridor Authority recently provided maps showing a general picture of impacted areas. Areas of greatest impact are south of the City and the final choice will have significant land-use impacts, particularly at intersections and where the new Hwy 108 meets existing Hwy 120. See the Modesto Bee link: <http://www.modbee.com/2014/03/27/3262651/north-county-corridor-details.html>

### **City of Riverbank**

[www.riverbank.org](http://www.riverbank.org)

A realignment of Hwy 108 as part of the North County Corridor Project may be cause for some land-use action for the cities of Modesto and Riverbank, depending on final route selection. Parts of the route between McHenry and Claus Road are planned to swing south from a Claribel Road alignment to allow for new intersections at various crossroads and to avoid conflicts with Riverbanks Crossroads Shopping Center at Claribel and Oakdale Roads.

### **City of Modesto**

[www.modestogov.com](http://www.modestogov.com)

The Planning Department has its work cut-out for it. The Modesto City Council had directed staff to produce necessary environmental impact reports for a residential urban limit line, planned for the November 2015 ballot, prior to the announcement of the Stamp Out Sprawl – Modesto citizens intent to petition an initiative for the ballot. The initiative is a combination residential urban limit and an urban limit line. The distinction between them is that an urban limit line restricts all development without voter approval first. While residential urban limits, by design, prevent commercial and/or industrial development from switching to a residential use, an urban limit requires voter approval for any urban expansion beyond certain boundaries.

As announced in earlier FWG issues, the cities of Modesto and Waterford have publicly agreed to limit

growth, east and west respectively, beyond their general plan boundaries. Their city attorneys are writing the language for their agreements..

The cities of Ceres and Hughson are also interested in forming Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) between them and Stanislaus County. Since the County is the land-use authority for all of the land outside of city limits, it is very good that these two are working toward community-wide land-use agreements.

The Mayors of Stanislaus are to be commended for their on-going discussions.

### **City of Turlock**

[www.ci.turlock.ca.us](http://www.ci.turlock.ca.us)

The City has initiated work on an Active Transportation Plan. It is the first bicycle/pedestrian plan that lays out projects and priorities in detail. It will guide funding decisions and priorities as well as allow the City to apply for specific bicycle and pedestrian funding at state and federal levels. The project manager is Senior Planner Rose Stillo. Improving transportation inside of cities is a good way to draw attention into a city for infill and rehabilitation projects.

### **City of Newman**

[www.cityofnewman.com](http://www.cityofnewman.com)

Potential Voter Approved Residential Urban Growth Boundary.

In January 2014, the Council discussed the possibility of submitting an Urban Growth Boundary measure to a November vote in response to the Stanislaus Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) Agricultural Preservation Policy adopted in September 2012. The new policy requires all Stanislaus County cities to develop a method or strategy for minimizing the loss of agricultural lands when an annexation occurs. One potential strategy identified by LAFCO includes a voter approved urban growth boundary. Attached is a draft ag preservation ordinance modeled after the SOAR (Save Open space and Ag Resources) measures passed in Ventura County. See the Newman website, Council agenda for April 8, 2014, item 10C.



## *Message from the Chair* *Wood Colony - to be or not to be?*

The many persuasive arguments to save Wood Colony delivered by spokespersons, members and friends of Wood Colony are

compelling. And compromise may not always be the best strategy when fighting in the halls of democracy. To understand this battle better, consider three driving forces in the current Wood Colony debate. First is the right of self determination - including property rights. Second is the value of prime farmland. And third is the reality that "No Farms means No Food."

The message and theme song of the Save Wood Colony movement emphasize the importance of protecting irreplaceable prime soils now being targeted for destruction by annexation. Advocates for preservation of Wood Colony have been unapologetic in their fight to preserve their farm culture and fertile soil upon which the Wood Colony community is rooted and united. Deaf - or at least hearing impaired opponents retort "jobs, jobs, jobs" in orchestrated chorus. Between these contestants, less emotional voices propose a win for both sides by suggesting decisions and policies to generate jobs while preserving best soils for agriculture and existing employment in food production.

This controversy can be further simplified to the "No Farms, No Food" certainty outcome versus the "Build it and they (jobs) will come" - an uncertain outcome at best. All can agree that famine does not produce jobs. Witness North Korea -- a failing economy burdened by the hungry.

The Wood Colony challenge is also about deciding and assigning priorities as well as advancing effective local politics, successful leadership and representative democracy itself. All citizens in this community have shared interests in these processes, policies and outcomes evolving before us. Listen and learn. Engage. Exercise your precious freedoms: Speak up and out. You can make a difference. Vote.

Finally, I want to thank those young and old who have strengthened my own knowledge about this topic. I have learned from eager 4H students, Wood Colony residents and visiting PhD experts like Dan O'Connell. Your public testimonies at Modesto City Council Meetings, internet postings, letters and newsletters have raised the bar in this debate. You have gained the attention of many and you have earned support from friends and your neighbors.

Like the ingenious instinctive behaviors we witness in nature, the answer to the Wood Colony - to be or not to be question is already blowin' in the wind.

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# **Save Farmland Protect Our Heritage**

**[www.savewoodcolony.com](http://www.savewoodcolony.com)**

A donation  
has been made  
*In Memory of*  
**Don Ferrari**  
*and*  
**Harold DePalma**  
*by*  
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# Farmland Working Group

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 [www.farmlandworkinggroup.org](http://www.farmlandworkinggroup.org)

**BUILD UP MODESTO, NOT OUT!**

**Save Farmland  
Protect Our Heritage**

[www.savewoodcolony.com](http://www.savewoodcolony.com)

FWG ADVOCATES FOR THE LONG-TERM PROTECTION OF FARMLAND  
AND SMART GROWTH IN OUR URBAN COMMUNITIES

## Some Facts about the Rerouting of Hwy 132

- It appears the new Hwy 132 will be constructed between Highway 99 and Dakota Avenue – this will allow commuter traffic easier access to Hwy 132 from Hwy 99 as drivers make their daily journey to and from the Bay Area.
- Hwy 132 will remain a two-lane road for several miles to the West; adding industrial truck traffic to an already congested commuter highway will only create more problems.
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