



Farmland Working Group

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



We Must Work to Save Our Best Farmland

Our County remains committed to preserving our best farmland, the foundation of our \$3.9 billion farm gate income that generates \$15 billion of economic activity in our County. While the cities talk about the so-called “brain drain” of our educated children refusing to come back to our County after college, our farming and related industries continue to attract our skilled and educated kids to return home to carry on the legacy of their family farms or work in these Ag related industries in our County.

I will continue to advocate for policies that will protect our farms and enhance our local agricultural economy.

This last year we created the Wood Colony Municipal Advisory Council to ensure that the families in Wood Colony have a voice in a broad range of issues, including urban encroachment threats from the City of Modesto. I want to thank the folks who stepped up to make this happen, including the first members of the Wood Colony MAC: Lina Alldredge, Lisa Braden, Todd Heinrich, David Jones and Lori Wolf.

Our Stanislaus County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) decides whether and where the 9 cities in our County can expand. Unlike other LAFCOs in the California, our Stanislaus LAFCO requires cities to have farmland protection

programs as part of any annexation or change in their sphere of influence. As one of the two regular County members on our Stanislaus LAFCO, I can assure you that I will insist that the cities adopt strong farmland protection policies. I will also ensure that the Wood Colony in West Modesto is protected from urban sprawl into the world’s best farmland.

The City of Modesto City Council recently voted to update its General Plan using the 1995 General Plan map (which includes the so-called Beckwith triangle) rather than the map prepared in 2014. The 2014 map called for urbanization out to Dakota Avenue along the future 132 expressway. However, the City Council also made it clear that they intend to consider a comprehensive overall review of the General Plan map after holding public meetings and workshops, including meetings in Salida and Wood Colony.

I remain concerned that pro development forces will again try to destroy the farmland in Wood Colony as part of that effort. We must remain vigilant. Only by working together can we protect the world’s best farmland.

Terry Withrow
Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors, District 3



There was a full house for the August 8, 2017 Modesto City Council meeting. Under the direction of staff, the council voted to return to the 1995 Adopted General Plan (GP) and Sphere of Influence (SOI) boundaries for finalization of the GP Amendment Analysis (with one noted exception). The vote adjusted the boundaries along the Wood Colony area, raising concern for residents in the colony. Thirteen speakers asked that Wood Colony not be annexed and remain a rural community of working family farms. By reaffirming the 1995 GP, the City can continue to update items within the GP; it doesn’t eliminate the intention to consume Beckwith Triangle, which is a part of Wood Colony, for development.

27 years ago, our 'tomorrow' looked like this

Wrapped in a blue-green paperback cover, what might have been the future of California rested on the bottom shelf of the bookcase, wedged between a volume of quotations from John Muir and a 1930 booster pamphlet for Santa Barbara.



PETER H. KING

"The California Tomorrow Plan," it was entitled, and the publication date was listed as the summer of 1972.

"This," it began, grandly, "is a plan for California – its land, its cities and its people."

In the pages that followed, two contrasting visions were

presented of California in 1999, now less than a month away. The first, a warning of sorts, they simply called California One. It described a state that had grown and spread pretty much as it always had, amid a jumble of governmental entities working at cross purposes, with suburbs sprawling across farms and open land, leaving behind choked, congested cities and all the attendant social maladies: "A tortured place."

The alternative vision was labeled California Two. California Two was the future that the authors – an assortment of conservationists and public policy types – were pitching. This was the California that could be, if only their plan was adopted.

Though they missed on some points – the elimination, mainly through conservation, of a need for heavy reliance on nuclear power, for one example; the replacement of Santa Clara Valley agriculture by the computer industry, for another – the California Tomorrow authors proved to be adept Cassandras.

They predicted a California population that had grown "toward 35 million" by 1999, missing the mark by only 3 million. In their California One, "cities have spread out and have joined together north and south, taking over thousands of square miles of good land since 1970." (Now, farmland is paved over at an estimated rate of 150 square miles a year.) "The agricultural character of many regions disappears entirely. (Read: Orange County.)

This loss of farmland, along with several other maladies accurately foretold, in part would be the product of agencies and policies working in conflict. For example:

"The state continues to allow tax benefits to owners of agricultural land who agree to keep their land in agricultural use. At the same time, major statewide public works programs, and fiscal and tax policies, continue to encourage the urbanization of farmlands."

In California One, despite tinkering with mass transit, the car culture would remain king and "traffic congestion increases even with additional freeways." (See Los Angeles.) And, "Downtown centers have grown inaccessible even as they're grown tall." (Try San Francisco.)

A familiar land, this California One.

By contrast, California Two, circa 1999, was foreseen as a place of urban boundaries and greenbelts and intelligent, fast-moving mass transit systems. Suburbia would be contained. Cities would be restored from within and absorb the population growth. The phenomenon of rapidly decaying subdivisions known as "slurbs" – the Oxford English Dictionary, incidentally, gives the plan's authors credit for coining the term – would be avoided. There would be strong regional government, and economic development based on something more than generating the fastest buck.

"California Two," as the plan envisioned it, "replaces the antiquated notion of unrestrained growth with a modern concept of a strong economy within an amenable environment. It encourages economic development... but California Two also guides the consumption of energy, space and certain commodities, in order to maintain a permanently pleasant and productive environment in the state."

When it was unveiled – first in public hearings, then in book form – the California Tomorrow Plan was received with enthusiasm, especially among the public policy set. For a time, it influenced Gov. Jerry Brown's urban strategists. In the long haul, though, the document wound up tucked away on bookshelves here and there, with most of its elements still awaiting implementation. In fact, it's uncanny how many of the proposals are kicked around today, as California frets about what the future might bring in the next 25 years.

The moral seems clear: When it comes to planning, good ideas are easier to come by than enactment. Maybe, mused Alfred Heller, the San Francisco businessman who founded the California Tomorrow organization and edited the plan, the problem rests simply with the word "plan" itself. California generally seems to choke on the concept: "For those people who don't like planning," he suggested, "maybe we should call it 'thinking ahead.'"

The Modesto Bee
– Wednesday, December 2, 1998

Rudy Platzek 1930 - 2017

Agrarian Advocate Activist Provides Valley Vision



JACOB KATZ

Born in Oroville in 1930, Rudy Platzek spent his youth in the largely wild and rural landscape of California's Sacramento Valley. The big capitol city of Sacramento had only 75,000 people when he went away to college at Fresno State. Traveling up and down two-lane Highway 99 between Oroville and Fresno, the roads were uncongested. Towns were small and centered around agriculture.

Rudy left the Central Valley to attend UC Berkeley and went on to become a successful, well respected urban and environmental planner. When he moved back to the Valley in 1983, vast changes had occurred in the territory of his youth. The once rural Central Valley had become suburbanized and polluted. Looking at those vast changes, Rudy wondered, "What will the Valley be like after one more lifetime?" His questions led him to create Valley Vision, a project dedicated to saving the Central Valley for agriculture.

Rudy was a charter member of the Farmland Working Group

Rudy's many accomplishments as an urban planner is the award-winning San Francisco Bay Regional Plan. He is active with CAFF's Merced Stanislaus Chapter, which recently elected him to the CAFF Board of Directors.

—Cindy Toy

Pave It or Save It?

BY RUDY PLATZKEK

The Great Central Valley is the richest farming region the world has ever known, producing about 25 percent of the food on the nation's tables. While it is now home to five-and-a-half million people, in 1940 the Valley's population was less than one million. By the year 2040, according to projections, 15.6 million people will make their homes here and almost one-third of the Valley's irrigated cropland will be converted to urbanization. And by 2080, the population could reach 26 to 30 million, with more than half of the Valley floor covered by towns and megacities.

Already Valley farmers are significantly constrained by urban-agricultural conflicts over water and air quality. Even at today's population levels, increasing numbers of Valley farmers are complaining that there are "just too many people." Given the potential for growth, urbanization, farmland conversion, and related

environmental impacts, it is doubtful that Valley agriculture, with its environmental support system, can be sustained. One of the world's prime farming regions could cease to exist.

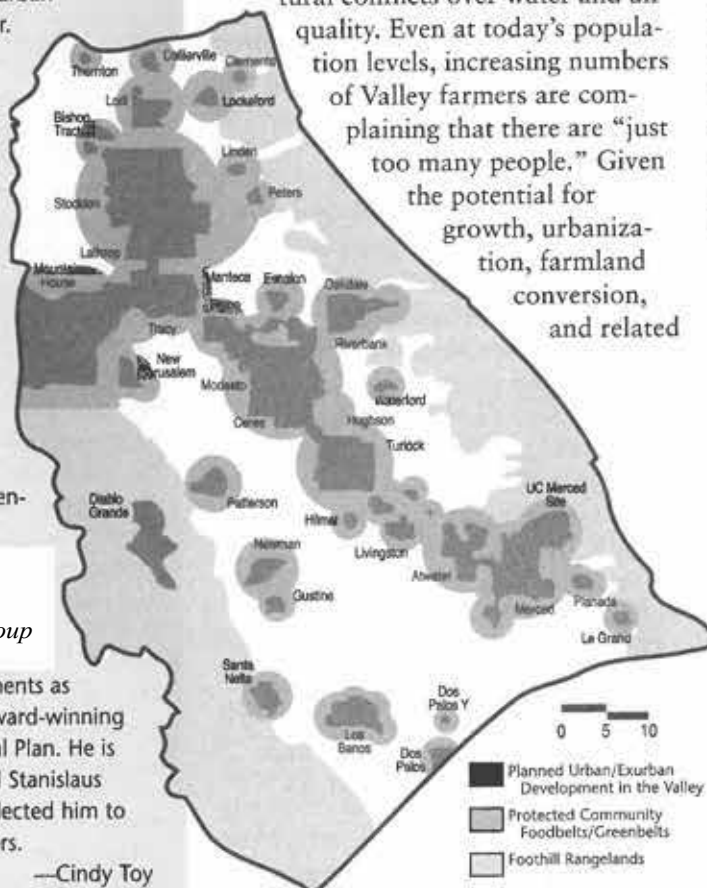
Clearly, California will soon need to choose if it wants an agricultural or an urban Central Valley. The stakes are enormous and the challenge to the state is daunting.

To save the Valley from the fate of urbanization, it is now time to start thinking that the Valley's urban boundaries can eventually be stabilized in order to secure a significant portion of our nation's future food supply.

Agenda to Save the Central Valley

There is no greater environmental, social, economic, or political choice facing California today than: "Does California want an urban or an agricultural Central Valley?" To choose the latter, Californians must embrace the goal of a sustainable future for Central Valley agriculture, communities, and the environment. To implement that goal will require a comprehensive agenda:

- A major research effort by the state's best academic minds to identify the Valley's sustainable population carrying capacity, based on the farmland needed for a secure food supply, and air, water, and energy resources.
- A Valley-wide planning process to develop a vision for the sustainable future of the Valley, including a protected farmland base.
- Mobilization of a broad coalition of Valley organizations and citizen leaders to promote the above strategies and to create new groups, such as a state-funded Central Valley Commission for Sustainable Development, to prepare a Valley-wide land use and growth management plan. ■



Vision for stabilized urban boundaries and protected community foodbelts/greenbelts in the northern San Joaquin Valley.



Still
WE ARE WATCHING...

1986 - 2014

Modesto expansion in limbo

LAFCO ready for arguments on controversial plan, but there is none

By William D. Kane
Bee staff writer

Two months ago, an agency that determines city boundaries rejected the city of Modesto's plans to expand across Highway 99 into the Salida and Wood Colony areas.

Nothing has changed.

The Stanislaus Local Agency Formation Commission was prepared to hear more arguments Wednesday but nobody fired a shot. Both sides — the save-Wood Colony people and pro-development — withdrew from the battlefield.

The Wood Colony preservationists had wanted more explicit language keeping developers out of their rural area. But Ron Freitas, LAFCO executive officer, said that wasn't needed.

"The commission has clearly stated its intent to discourage the city of Modesto from expanding into this area," Freitas said, "and has indicated to the property owners the future agricultural use for this area."

The decision preserved Wood Colony in the Beckwith-Dakota area, calling it a community of interest. That interest is especial-

ly strong among the German Baptist Brethren, many of whom have lived in the area for decades. The area's rich agricultural soil also was a consideration.

That was a victory for the newly formed Wood Colony Community Association which had pleaded to preserve their rural, agricultural lifestyle.

Modesto's request to expand its sphere of influence was denied without prejudice, and most observers anticipate the city returning to the commission be-

See Back Page, LAFCO

Colony makes Modesto unique

Having lived for 13 years in Europe, we cringe coming back to the U.S. where every town looks the same from the freeway — strip malls consisting of the same stores, or empty stores. Our humble Modesto has the wonderfully unique reality of green farmland on the west side of the freeway, from Pelandale to Briggsmore.

How odd, how unique, how encouraging to pull up Modesto on Google maps and see the lopsided green area on the

left side of the diagonal that defines Modesto. We hope Modesto's citizens will join the citizens of Wood Colony to protect Modesto's unique map against developers. Once it is gone, it is gone forever.

Todd and Sarah Hunnicutt
Slovenia

January 16, 2014

The Modesto Bee



LETTERS

Protect farmland

Building contractor and developer Joseph Trombetta argues (Viewpoints, Feb. 11) that paving over farmland brings steady, high paying employment in contrast to "farming (which) creates . . . seasonal low-paying jobs . . . causing our 19 percent unemployment rate." The same argument can be made against land development. Construction workers are frequently laid off. Is the building industry undesirable simply because development attracts workers who often face long periods of unemployment? Certainly, both farming and building are necessary in the Central Valley, but we must make wise policy decisions regarding both industries.

Trombetta makes many excellent observations, but none of them truly justifies massive rapid development. We need to keep in mind that development leads to more development, and farmland lost to development is lost permanently. Meanwhile, the world's population keeps on growing. We must protect good farmland even if it means that developers must look elsewhere to provide houses and jobs for people.

RANDALL HUTH
Turlock

April 23, 1996

Dear Modesto Bee:

It has been 40 years since Vintage Faire Mall was proposed in a rural area north of Modesto. The pitch was that the project would create jobs, lower our high unemployment, boost sales and property taxes and be a "stand alone" shopping center with no surrounding development allowed.

Well, we all know what has occurred since then - similar high unemployment and an explosion of housing and strip malls. Every zoning change and growth proposal beats the same mantra of more jobs, jobs, jobs and local economic growth. It's a carrot on a stick. Are we still naïve enough to believe that by allowing our beloved Wood Colony to be opened up for city expansion that our area will actually improve? There is a newer generation of city council members and staff — yet, the same old song is being sung. The second verse is same as the first.

When will we ever realize that this old approach to planning and development is not the answer? When will we wake up and acknowledge that the area's farmland, with water supply, climate and related infrastructure is the best our world has. (The Wood Colony area is our local resource for national food security that must be preserved forever.)

Current predictions are that the world's food production must DOUBLE by 2050 to meet the population growth and income demands. This is going to be a real challenge for us all. Are we ready?

David Couchman and Mary Couchman

January 23, 2014

CONTINUED from A-1

fore the end of the year with another proposal.

The city's 30-year growth plan west of Highway 99 was needed to pave the way for a major development — a Modesto A's baseball stadium and shopping center. Developer John Dosey has said that project remains on track. And there are more property owners ready to move than otherwise and who have signed options to sell, he said.

Attorney Steve Herum went to the LAFCO meeting Wednesday with a thick sheaf of petitions signed by property owners, farmers and residents west of Highway 99 opposed to keeping the Beckwith-Dakota area undeveloped.

But commission Chairman Tom Mayfield said there was nothing to discuss.

In an unrelated matter, the commission interviewed three candidates but delayed until May 22 the selection of a public member to replace Ken Entin of Turlock.

April 26, 1986



Message from the Chair

E. Timothy Parker

What should the Central Valley floor look like in 2050? What if we didn't think to preserve prime farmland? Would our region become another Los Angeles County?

Let's imagine, for instance, we didn't care and allowed the proponents of momentum growth, with the promise of jobs, jobs, jobs, to cover the ground, at will. What would that look like?

Would we achieve a housing-jobs balance?

And, what about the traffic congestion we have been trying to mitigate for years?

Any thought about the employment that agriculture supports for a job-housing balance?

What will future generations think when it comes to their food choices, the cost to put safe and healthy food on their tables?

FWG Executive Board

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WHAT IS WOOD COLONY?

(And why does it need to be saved?)

Wood Colony is more than just a location on a map. It is a rural community of working family farms, smaller ranchette properties and homes much like many others that dot the landscape of the great State of California. It is a collection of families, community traditions and activities, churches, schools, farms, a cemetery, weddings, funerals, birthdays, baptisms and thriving enterprises all around. You might even call it a slice of Americana!

For well over 100 years, generations of families have lived, worked & worshipped there. Many have the good fortune to farm on some of the most productive and fertile soil in the world. The residents of Wood Colony have transformed this land into a pristine, thriving area whose heritage and contributions to the Valley have long been a source of pride to the citizens of Modesto. Wood Colony people have always proudly identified themselves as Modestans. All have Modesto addresses. But as a community, they have a distinct and unique lifestyle and culture.

The City of Modesto, in an effort to incorporate "shovel ready" land into their city limits and led by the Mayor and City Council Members, have set their city expansion sights on the Wood Colony region. Unfortunately, the residents of this targeted area have little or no voice in the matter due to the fact that since their homes, businesses and farms are not within the confines of the city they do not vote for those people who are making decisions about the future conversion of their homes and agricultural land to commercial property or industrial parks.

The loss of prime farmland is a tragedy in and of itself. The loss of community, heritage and positive lifestyles is unacceptable.

If the city leaders succeed in their efforts to annex any part of Wood Colony something good will be lost forever. The land cannot be unpaved and returned to the production of food. Generations of rich heritage cannot be restored and a cherished livelihood to displaced families will disappear over time. We appreciate the support we have from the residents of the City of Modesto who elect our city officials, and have stood with us and helped us fight this attempt to annex Wood Colony. This loss will impact the families and the future of Modesto to the detriment of all.

Wood Colony Community Association
by Scott Turner

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FWG Board
Lisa Braden,
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Elizabeth Mullen,
Timothy Parker,
Ana Ringsted
Erica Stewart,
Lani Turner and
Lori Wolf*

Farmland Working Group

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www.farmlandworkinggroup.org



“...Clearly, California will soon need to choose if it wants an agricultural or an urban Central Valley. The stakes are enormous and the challenge to the state is daunting.

To save the Valley from the fate of urbanization, it is now time to start thinking that the Valley's urban boundaries can eventually be stabilized in order to secure a significant portion of our nation's future food supply...”

Rudy Platzek (1930 - 2017)

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	
	Los Banos	Grazing land	1999	6,983.00	
	Livingston	Almonds, olives	2008	62.52	
	Delhi	Peaches, almonds, walnuts	1999	73.60	
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	

When does Stanislaus County begin Protecting Farmland?

“ ...Envision a future that accommodates more people and that creates more jobs by reinforcing the agricultural economy, rather than destroying it. Too often, urban growth and agriculture are at odds. Urban growth caters to commuters, rather than local residents.

Not only does this destroy farmland, it also creates social and economic alienation between the agricultural and nonagricultural sectors. By promoting economic growth around agriculture, rather than commuters, valley communities can create a future that includes both farms and houses...”

- William Fulton