A Statewide Conference

Farmland Conservation: Reality or Wishful Thinking?

California Case Studies

American Farmland Trust

American Farmland Trust
SAVING THE LAND THAT SUSTAINS US

About American Farmland Trust

American Farmland Trust is a national conservation organization dedicated to protecting farmland from wasteful development, promoting environmentally sound farming practices, and keeping farmers on the land. Founded in 1980 by farmers and conservationists, AFT works cooperatively with the agriculture community, government officials and other partners to advance effective public policies and increase funding for agricultural conservation programs.

For three decades, AFT has been saving farmland and helping farmers protect the environment in California. We pioneered the idea of conservation easements to save agricultural land, helped start and train agricultural land trusts, created state legislation and lobbied for bond money to finance farmland conservation transactions. We also brought millions of dollars in environmental stewardship funds to California through our federal farm bill advocacy. Together with our partners, we have preserved tens of thousands of acres of Golden State farm and ranch lands.

But that isn't enough in a state growing as rapidly as California. So, AFT has turned its attention to the root cause of farmland loss—urban sprawl. Our focus is on guiding development away from the best farmland and encouraging more efficient development that consumes less land per person, job and dollar of economic growth. At the same time, we are doing more to assure that the land is farmed in an environmentally responsible way, so that all the benefits of California's irreplaceable farmland will accrue to future generations.

For more information, visit
www.farmland.org/california

Successful Local Farmland Conservation: California Case Studies

These case studies showcase some of the most successful and promising local farmland conservation programs in California. They demonstrate not only that effective conservation of farmland is possible, but also that there are a variety of ways to accomplish it, if localities summon the political will to do so. The purpose for publishing these is to provide both information and inspiration to other local communities that have not made as much progress at conserving the farmland on which California and people all over the world depend. The conference on August 2, 2013, "Farmland Preservation: Reality or Wishful Thinking" will feature speakers who provide valuable insight and background on local farmland protection efforts. More detailed versions of these case studies, with links to background information, will be forthcoming on the American Farmland Trust (AFT) website after the conference (http://www.farmland.org/programs/states/ca).

Acknowledgments

We wish to thank several individuals and organizations who contributed to the production of these case studies. Ed Thompson, who directs the California office of American Farmland Trust (AFT), provided leadership and direction for the case studies. AFT's California Policy Consultant, Serena Unger, is the lead author of the case studies, with contributions from Mark Shorett from the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG); Greg Gatzka from the Kings County Local Area Formation Commission; Jamison Watts from the Marin Agricultural Land Trust (MALT); Sherwood Darington, Kate McKenna, and Matthew Sundt from the Monterey County Local Area Formation Commission; Volker Eisele from the Napa County Farm Bureau and Volker Eisele Family Estate; David Shabazian from the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG); Barbara Steck from the Fresno Council of Governments; Karen Gaffney from the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District; Debbie Whitmore from the City of Turlock; Karen Schmidt from Save Open-space and Agricultural Resources (SOAR); and David Morrison from the Yolo County Planning & Public Works Department. We also wish to thank the Napa County Farm Bureau for partnering with AFT on the conference.

About the lead author:
Serena Unger is a policy consultant with American Farmland Trust in California and is a city and regional planner by training. Food system planning being her area of expertise, she has also consulted on various projects including market studies and housing needs assessments; economic development and sector strategies; sector-based regional workforce development strategies, assessments on public health impacts of the built environment and on access to food retail in low-income neighborhoods; and innovative agricultural conservation easements. Serena has worked with AFT for four years. She is currently engaged in a project to investigate the need for a regional economic development strategy and financing entity for the Bay Area agricultural and food sectors. She also focuses on the San Joaquin Valley where she advocates for the development of local and regional smart growth policies, conservation practices, and economic development for agriculture. Serena is co-author of three seminal reports on the state of the state's farming and food system, including *Sustaining Our Agriculture Bounty: An Assessment of the Current State of Farming and Ranching in the San Francisco Bay Area*, *and Saving Farmland, Growing Cities: A Framework for Implementing Effective Farmland Conservation Policies in the San Joaquin Valley*, both produced for AFT; and the *Oakland Food System Assessment: Toward a Sustainable Food Plan*, which she produced under the leadership of former Mayor Jerry Brown's office. Serena earned a Masters in City and Regional Planning from UC Berkeley and a Bachelor of Arts in Russian area studies and political theory from Wheaton College in Massachusetts.

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Bay Area Regional Planning and Farmland Protection

Though the Bay Area is a large metropolitan region, with a dynamic economy, a robust public transportation network, and home to over 7 million people, it is also a region with range and farm lands that bring us a bounty of local produce, fresh meats and dairy products, and an abundance of inspiring landscapes and ecosystems that define the Bay Area. Still, since 1984, more than 200,000 acres of agricultural land in the nine-county Bay Area have been lost to development. Much of the region's urban footprint was carved from irrigated cropland, the most productive and versatile land for food production. It is this irrigated land that still remains the most vulnerable to development. Today, only 367,000 acres of this critical resource are still in production and much of it is at risk. With almost two million more people expected to live in the region by 2035, it is imperative that strong local land-use policies and conservation investments assure that the best remaining farm and ranch lands are preserved and that development consumes as little of it as possible if we are to retain the region's character. The Bay Area's regional planning agencies are taking steps to do this.

FOCUS

In 2007, the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC), in partnership with the Bay Area's other two regional government agencies, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD) and the Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC), initiated FOCUS, a regional development and conservation strategy. The goals of FOCUS were to promote a more compact land use pattern for the Bay Area that links land use and transportation by encouraging the development of complete, livable communities in areas served by transit, and by promoting conservation of the region's most significant resource lands. Through FOCUS, regional agencies supported local governments' commitment to these goals by working to direct existing and future incentives to Priority Development Areas (PDAs) and Priority Conservation Areas (PCAs). PDAs are locally identified, infill development opportunity areas near transit. The nearly 200 adopted PDAs are existing neighborhoods nominated by local jurisdictions as appropriate places to concentrate future growth that will support the day-to-day needs of residents and workers in a pedestrian-friendly environment served by transit. A key part of the PDA strategy is to move away from an unplanned "project-by-project" approach to growth, toward the creation of complete communities that meet the needs of existing and new residents and workers. PCAs are regionally significant open spaces for which there exists a broad consensus for long-term protection but nearer-term development pressure. PDAs and PCAs are meant to complement one another since promoting compact development within PDAs takes development pressure off the region's open space and agricultural lands.

Plan Bay Area (the region's Sustainable Communities Strategy)

Establishing these growth and conservation areas early on laid the ground for ABAG and MTC to align consensus-based growth and conservation goals with the region's sustainable communities strategy per Senate Bill 375, "Plan Bay Area." A joint effort led by ABAG and MTC

along with BAAQMD and BCDC, the Plan emphasizes growth in nearly 200 locally identified PDAs along the region's core transit network and accommodates nearly 100% of new growth within existing urban areas. It also emphasizes protection for the region's agricultural, scenic and natural resource areas, including PCAs.

The Plan adopted 10 performance targets against which various land use scenarios and transportation investments and policies can be measured and evaluated. The first two targets are required by Senate Bill 375 and address the goals of climate protection and adequate housing; the additional seven targets are voluntary and address a range of community sustainability concerns. A bold target for agricultural preservation, the Plan aims to "Direct all non-agricultural development within the urban footprint (existing urban development and urban growth boundaries)." The Plan being considered in July 2013 for adoption by the ABAG Executive Board and MTC comes nearly to meeting this goal and will provide stronger protection of the region's open space network than the other alternatives that were up for consideration.

Plan Bay Area Implementation and Investment Strategies

An element of Plan Bay Area is the Job-Housing Connections Strategy—the draft land use element of the Plan—which offers five implementation strategies, one of which is the protection of open space and agricultural land. The first action that this strategy recommends has already been funded and is being implemented. The One Bay Area Grant Program is a pilot program initiated by MTC and is a component of Plan Bay Area that will provide $10 million in grants. The goal of the program is to support implementation of Plan Bay Area by preserving and enhancing the natural, economic and social value of rural lands amidst growing population across the Bay Area. Among other open space protection projects, the program will support the PCAs with funding for planning, farm-to-market projects, and to support strategic partnerships that seek to purchase conservation lands for long-term protection and use.

The Strategy also calls for the development of an "Agricultural and Farmland Protection Plan" to reinforce the strategic importance of the agricultural sector in the region's economy. This will be considered as part of Plan implementation. Should this be implemented, it would involve drawing upon existing proven strategies and partnerships to identify challenges and opportunities to securing the sector's future. This would involve working with local jurisdictions to develop land use, economic development, and infrastructure policies that improve the ability of farmers and ranchers to increase production and remain on the land.

Also under the strategy to protect open space and agricultural land is to extend the expiration dates of existing urban growth boundaries and improve other conservation lands protections policies. This action will help strengthen protections that are in place but are not permanent and over time can become vulnerable to development.

Though not formally adopted as a "conservation element," the actions included in the Jobs-Housing Connection Strategy and an accompanying Policy Background Paper moves

the region closer to integrating open space and farmland into long range regional land use, housing, and transportation planning. The paper highlights the region's conservation and open space network, explores opportunities to leverage regional plans and investments to achieve greater integration with ongoing conservation efforts. Consistent with the Job-Housing Connection Strategy, it includes maps and concrete statistics and presents concrete, specific strategies such as building upon initial efforts that led to the identification of more than 100 PCAs, developing a regional farmland protection plan, and a regional advanced mitigation program for open space and agriculture.

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RESOURCES:

FOCUS
Plan Bay Area:
Job-Housing Connections Strategy (Land Use Element of Draft Plan)
Regional Policy Background Paper - Conservation and Open Space
Priority Conservation Area Grant Program Guidelines, California State Coastal Conservancy.

Kings County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) Reduces its Spheres of Influence

Kings County is located in the southern portion of the San Joaquin Valley where, at the turn of the last century, settlers reclaimed Tulare Lake and its wetlands for agricultural development. As with many other San Joaquin Valley counties, Kings County's economy continues to be based on agricultural production. Ranking 8th in the state, agriculture in the county was worth over $2.2 billion with a total economic impact on the local economy of close to $7 billion in 2011. Though milk is the county's biggest commodity, the region is also known for cotton, livestock, and processing tomatoes. It is home to several tomato processing facilities and the world's largest mozzarella cheese maker.

Of the county's 1,391 square miles, a large majority (approximately 92%) of all land is devoted to agricultural uses which suggest that any new greenfield development will approach or convert agricultural land. Irrigated farmland makes up 63% of the county's undeveloped land. Of the land that was converted to urban uses over the last decade, only 48% of it was irrigated farmland, suggesting that this important resource is being consumed at a slower rate than other land in the county. This slower rate of farmland conversion indicates that local policies have been, to some extent, successful in detouring development away from irrigated farmland.

Reducing the spheres of influence (SOI) is one measure that a county can take to protect farmland. This can be especially effective in the San Joaquin Valley where it is common to see areas around cities designated for future development expand more than necessary to accommodate reasonable future growth. This can create uncertainty that leads to land speculation and price inflation, and to disinvestment in farming operations. All of these weaken the economic viability of agriculture, increasing the likelihood that farmland will be lost. Boundaries that are too large also discourage cities from growing efficiently by creating a sense that there is no need to do so. Valley wide, at status quo densities, the land within existing city limits is already sufficient to accommodate approximately 38 years of projected population growth, and land within existing spheres of influence will accommodate an additional 41 years –for a total of 79 years of population growth. Even after a reduction in the size of its SOIs, Kings County can accommodate 66 years total of population growth.

In 2007, the Kings LAFCo reduced its spheres of influence through its Comprehensive City and Community District Municipal Service Review (MRS) and SOI Update. The LAFCo utilized the MSR requirement from the Cortese Knox Hertzberg (CKH) Act of 2000 to coordinate future urban growth considerations in a more streamlined and accountable manner. In developing their MSRs, Kings LAFCo rewarded the good planning efforts of its four cities by reaffirming well planned areas with planned services, while areas within existing sphere of influences not currently planned for urban growth would require more extensive MSR updates. This approach allowed Kings LAFCo an opportunity to successfully remove almost 11,000 acres from future growth consideration where urban services were not planned and agriculture was the established use.

Under the CKH Act, every LAFCo was required to update each city's sphere of influence by 2008 by considering the following in their update:

1. The present and planned land uses in the area, including agricultural and open space lands.
2. The present and probable need for public facilities and services in the area.
3. The present capacity of public facilities and adequacy of public services that the agency provides or is authorized to provide.
4. The existence of any social or economic communities of interest in the area if the commission determines that they are relevant to the agency.

Responding to this mandate, Kings LAFCo evaluated these factors by gathering and updating GIS data represent the existing and proposed land use, city and community district boundaries, and primary and secondary spheres of influence. Additional information was overlaid to identify areas under Williamson Act or Farmland Security Zone contracts. Potential development areas were also identified with the assistance of each city and noted as areas of interest in the case that additional analysis and CEQA findings were needed.

In establishing the updated SOIs, Kings LAFCo looked at whether the existing SOI was consistent with the planned urban land uses and anticipated growth patterns as per existing general plans, and whether service plans existed for the evaluated areas within the SOI. In areas that were not currently planned for urban uses or that were constrained by Williamson Act or Farmland Security Zone contracts (with no valid city protest or non-renewal filed), the areas were recommended for removal from the SOI unless there was some other justification (e.g. it served logical and orderly pattern of urban growth) keeping them within the sphere. Recommendations were based on existing land use plans and service capacities. If a city wanted to include land in any of these areas but the land was not designated in the general plan nor did the city have a plan for servicing that land, LAFCo required an extensive MSR and an extensive plan for services for any future annexations. Otherwise, LAFCo relied upon existing general plans and plans for service in developing their MSRs for areas that were logical and represented good coordinated planning within existing SOI areas. By simply reaffirming well-planned areas, LAFCo streamlined the MSR process for areas well planned for future urban growth consideration. This approach relied heavily upon existing documents and was therefore easily carried out by in house staff rather than relying upon contracted consultants that carried a higher cost to each jurisdiction. The time and cost savings of streamlined MSR's gave cities an incentive to work cooperatively with the LAFCo and come to mutual agreement on the extent of future growth areas.

This process resulted in an 18% reduction of land within the SOIs. At the same time, it reaffirmed what cities had already planned for and did not take out any land that was critical to any city and community growth and development as planned. To date, there have been no conflicts with the LAFCo SOI reductions and no cities have proposed any substantial changes in land use. Since the MSR and SOI update took place during a downturned housing

market, the LAFCo might expect to see increased pressure for expanding the SOIs as the real estate market rebounds.

Any future substantial change in land use expansion beyond a city or community district SOI will require a more extensive municipal service review update to ensure that municipal service requirements adequately address changes in land use.

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RESOURCES:

Local Agency Formation Commission of Kings County, City and Community District Sphere of Influence Update, 2007.

Marin Agricultural Land Trust (MALT) and Marin County Agricultural Protection Policies

Marin County is a largely suburban area just over the Golden Gate Bridge from San Francisco. But its entire western half, approximately 120,000 acres, remains an agricultural area of rolling hills, interior valleys and coastal bluffs where rich grasslands have been the foundation of a dairy industry dating back 150 years. In2012, the county's agricultural output exceeded $80 million. Milk and livestock have long been the standing commodities for Marin, accounting for 75% of the county's output. However, specialty crops such as wine grapes, olives, organic vegetables and oysters comprise an increasing share.

In the late 1960's and early 1970's, Marin's agriculture was threatened by plans for major highways along the coast and a proposed city of 125,000 on the shores of Tomales Bay. In a then-unique alliance, agricultural landowners, environmental activists and political leaders came together to get involved in planning for agriculture rather than development in West Marin. Encouraged by the state legislature's passage of the Williamson Act, a law encouraging counties to establish "agricultural preserves" in return for tax breaks, Marin began to look at the future of its farmland in a new way.

Founded in 1980 by a coalition of ranchers and environmentalists, the Marin Agricultural Land Trust (MALT) was the first local organization of its kind dedicated explicitly and exclusively to preserving land for agricultural production. With the purchase of its first agricultural easement in 1983, MALT pioneered the concept of compensating farmers and ranchers for relinquishing the development value of their land, while permanently protecting its agricultural value through the purchase of agricultural conservation easements. Using this approach, now widely emulated throughout the United States, MALT has permanently protected approximately 46,000 acres of land on 72 family farms and ranches in voluntary transactions with landowners.

MALT and Marin County's work around land protection has been a coordinated effort. By combining the "stick" of effective land use regulation with the "carrot" of conservation easement purchases, Marin epitomizes the "hybrid" approach used by most of the highly successful local farmland protection programs in the nation. MALT's acquisition patterns closely relate to the county's Countywide Plan which, since the late 1970s, has specified the concentration of urban growth along the transportation corridor in the eastern area cities. In the western areas of the county, agricultural zoning covers about 90% of the agricultural land in the county and requires a minimum lot size of one unit per 60 acres, a critical regulation that has reduced development by limiting rural residences. It is this zoning that initially bought time for MALT to purchase easements and over time, the easement purchases have reinforced the zoning. In addition to this critical zoning regulation, the Countywide Plan requires purchasers of agricultural zoned land, who are not farmers and intend to construct new residences, to demonstrate through a management plan that their parcels will continue to be used for commodity production. The plan also highlights the most productive

regions, such as the Inland Rural Corridor designation, an area that houses virtually all of the local dairies and generates most of the county's agricultural value.

A third and critical ingredient in Marin's success are the county's policies that recognize the importance of supporting the economic viability of agriculture. Since 2002, the county has funded a sustainable agriculture coordinator; and in 2004, added a part-time "agricultural ombudsman," a contract staff person assigned to the county's UC Cooperative Extension (UCCE) office. The ombudsman provides direct assistance to agricultural producers interested in getting approval for value-added enterprises. This position also trains staff in the planning and other county departments on agricultural topics and works on special agriculture-related projects for county government including the Countywide Plan update. The agricultural coordinator conducts seminars for producers, maintains the Grown in Marin website, consults one-on-one with producers about diversifying products or crops, organizes several farmer workshops yearly; and publishes a bi-monthly e-newsletter to producers as well as creating how-to handouts. Farmers and ranchers have eagerly taken advantage of the services and information available from both of these staff members.

Also worth mentioning is the Point Reyes National Seashore and the Golden Gate National Recreation Area in southwestern Marin, areas that have gained particular attention for their potential production capacity, as well as ability to contribute to agritourism and provide ecosystem services. The Park Service's policy of allowing farming to continue there has contributed to the overall agricultural outlook in the county. Dominated by grasslands, agriculture in these national parks represents 17% of Marin's overall agricultural production and 17% of its agricultural land.

Though the iconic agricultural landscape in rural Marin is an asset to Marin's agricultural industry it also attracts a serious threat. The beauty of rural Marin increasingly appeals to non-agricultural buyers who are eager and able to purchase farm properties for luxury homes and non-agricultural uses, escalating land prices far beyond what agricultural revenues can support. Ranching families often cannot afford to transfer property to the next generation and new, young farmers find it nearly impossible to afford housing and buy land to get started. Recently, MALT has addressed this challenge by including a new affirmative provision in its easements called Mandatory Agricultural Use. The provision is designed to ensure that MALT-protected farmland will remain in commercial agricultural use in perpetuity. MALT is among the first agricultural land trusts in the country to include this provision as a mandatory part of an easement program.

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Monterey County Farmland Preservation Partnerships

Located along the central coast of California, few agricultural areas in the world can compare with the Salinas Valley in Monterey County. On just 235,000 acres of irrigated cropland, with an ideal coastal climate, a record of innovation and a supportive infrastructure, local farmers produce over $4 billion worth of agricultural products annually, making Monterey the fourth highest grossing agricultural County in the State. Monterey County produces about 10 percent of the State's agricultural output, on about one percent of the State's irrigated farmland. This output consists primarily of lettuce (which alone accounts for nearly $800 million in output) and other greens, earning the area the title of "Salad Bowl of the World." The County is also a major producer of strawberries, and its wine grape industry has grown dramatically in recent years.

The Local Agency Formation Commission of Monterey County (LAFCO) and its partners have been successful in working together to protect the prime farmlands that underlie the viability of the County's largest economic pillar. Strong partnerships and strong policies are key to this success.

Partnership Policies and Practices

LAFCO of Monterey County is known for reaching out early to cities through a Preliminary Sphere of Influence Review process. This process provides opportunities for direct, informal dialogue between city council members, LAFCO Commissioners, their staffs, property owners and community members.

LAFCO also actively participates in General Plan, environmental, and other local and regional planning processes that may lead to Sphere of Influence amendments or annexation proposals. Early dialogue is an effective way to educate local agencies about relevant LAFCO laws and policies, and to influence local planning processes.

LAFCO of Monterey County places a high value on cooperating with cities, the County, and the local agricultural land trust, with support from state and federal governments. The emphasis is on finding common ground, a willingness to compromise on less important issues in order to accomplish the permanent protection of the most productive farmlands, and reaching consensus on agreements that provide long term guidance for all parties.

Emphasis is given to the City-County consultation process required prior to an application for a city Sphere of Influence amendment. LAFCO encourages agreements between jurisdictions, and may require agreements as a condition of approval. LAFCO may be a signatory party. The agreements address the long term direction of growth, agricultural conservation easements, agricultural buffer easements, agricultural truck routes, agricultural mitigations, compact density patterns, intergovernmental coordination and other elements of local LAFCO policies, including preservation of farmland and open space.

Preservation Policy Regulatory Authority and Tools

LAFCO's authority is to discourage urban sprawl, and preserve open space and prime agricultural lands (Government Code Section

56301). LAFCO is authorized to adopt policies that encourage and provide planned, well-ordered, efficient urban development patterns with appropriate consideration of preserving open space and agricultural lands within those patterns (Section 56300(a)). LAFCO must also balance the preservation of open space and agricultural lands, which is a state interest, against the promotion of orderly development (Section 56001). LAFCO must guide conversion of open space lands away from prime agricultural lands to non-prime lands (Sections 56377(a) and 56668(d)). No island annexation is allowed if on prime agricultural land (Section 56375.3(b)(5)). LAFCO must consider the effect of a proposal on maintaining the physical and economic integrity of agricultural lands (Section 56668(e)). LAFCO may require pre-zoning, but may not specify the zoning (Section 56375).

LAFCO's authority is related to its consideration of various factors related to a proposal, and has the power to say "no." LAFCO cannot directly regulate land use, but may require an applicant to show how the proposal provides for the preservation of open space and agricultural lands. This shifts the burden to the applicant to regulate land use and reach agreement with neighboring jurisdictions on such regulation.

LAFCO of Monterey County's solution is to require proposals to discuss how they meet the policies relating to the preservation of open space and agricultural lands set forth in the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Local Government Reorganization Act, and in local policies adopted by LAFCO. Proposals may be rejected as incomplete if the Executive Officer determines they do not address those policies. The Commission may deny a proposal if it does not satisfy the policies to the Commission's satisfaction.

Agricultural conservation and buffer easements are identified in the local LAFCO policies as important means to address the Act's policies, but how they are used is left to the discretion of the proposer (but the proposal may be denied if the Commission is not satisfied). The Ag Land Trust of Monterey County is a grantee of the easements, along with the County, to ensure longevity. Examples of voluntary agricultural conservation easements are found in the Gonzales Area, not tied to any LAFCO proposal. These easements ensure the permanent conservation of farmland on three sides of the City, and guide the desired direction of growth toward less productive farmland in the east. Examples of a combination of conservation easements and buffer easements are found in the King City, negotiated as part of a LAFCO action. These easements ensure the permanent conservation of farmland on north and south sides of the City, allow no municipal services to pass through the buffer easements on north and south sides of the City, and guide the desired direction of growth toward less productive farmland in the east. Another example of an agricultural buffer easement is the 2nd Street area of the City of Greenfield, negotiated as part of a LAFCO action, allowing multiple uses of the buffer area but preventing municipal services from passing through the area.

Agreements between jurisdictions are encouraged and may be required as a condition precedent to approval. Examples of agreements include the Salinas Area Memorandum of Understanding (2006) and Greenfield Area Memorandum of Agreement (2013). Both

agreements identify an agreed direction of growth away from the most productive farmlands, and establish farmland preservation and mitigation programs.

Through its polices and actions, LAFCO of Monterey County sets broad local standards for the preservation of agricultural lands and open space, shifts the burden to the applicant to regulate land use and show how proposals will comply with those local standards, and reach satisfactory agreements with the County and LAFCO – or be denied. Few LAFCOs have adopted policies that so clearly articulate this decision-making power.

Conversion of Farmland

Even with these successes, Monterey County has had some losses. Between 2000 and 2010, 1,435 acres of irrigated farmland were converted to urban uses. Those losses were offset by dedication of permanent conservation easements and buffer easements for the most productive farmlands in the affected areas, as required by LAFCO conditions of approval. The losses represent 28% of the total 5,095 acres of land that were converted to urban uses in Monterey County during that ten-year period. This rate of agricultural land conversion is much lower compared to several other major California agricultural counties. The low rate of conversion is due to the viability of Monterey County's agriculture industry and the strong political support for public policies and partnerships for agricultural land preservation and compact development patterns in the Salinas Valley.

Major Challenge

A major challenge is to create LAFCO policies that effectively preserve agricultural and open space lands, while respecting the prohibition on directly regulating land use (Government Code 56475). A potential legislative solution is to amend the Cortese-Knox-Hertzberg Act to allow LAFCOs the explicit authority to impose or require buffers, easements and other preservation and mitigation measures, based on the unique circumstances of each County.

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Resources

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Napa County: A Long History of Agricultural Protection

Napa Valley is America's foremost wine making region but beneath its wine country life-style cache, the valley is an intensive working landscape. Napa's 1,600 farms and ranches constitute 255,000 acres, covering 50%of all Napa County. While 70% of Napa's agricultural landscape is grazing land, Napa is truly a place for grape growing. Excluding field crops, almost all cultivated land in Napa is in grape production. Vineyards are planted on 43,000 acres and were valued at over $656 million in 2012. Overall, agricultural production in the county was worth over $665 million in 2012. Other cultivated land is in olives, walnuts, and vegetable crops, which together represent less than 500 acres. What little commercial food production exists in Napa is grown in the fertile valley floors, while vineyards extend upward on the surrounding terraced foothills.

Differing from all other counties in the Bay Area and around the state, Napa has seen an overall increase in acreage dedicated to cropland over the last several decades. In the last decade alone (2000 to 2010), there was no net conversion of farmland to urban uses in the county. This is likely due to decades-old land use agricultural protection policies and an incredibly vibrant and resilient wine industry.

The stability of farmland in Napa owes much of its success to the forward-thinking zoning ordinance passed in 1968, which determined that the "best use" for the land in the fertile valley and foothill areas of Napa County is in agriculture and open space, not homes and industrial development. This ordinance was triggered by the passage of the Williamson Act in 1965 that allowed lower valuation, and hence lower taxes on land kept in agriculture. After a tough-won campaign of vintners and grower, in 1968, the Board of Supervisors approved what became known as the "Ag Preserve," the first of its kind in the county. This instituted the Agriculture Preserve District (AP) that lies primarily between the towns of Napa and Calistoga. Napa's AP, which originally protected 26,000 acres, now covers 40,000 acres of the county.

In 1975, the county adopted its first general plan land use element and created two land use designations to further protect the AP District and large areas of agriculture beyond it. The Napa County General Plan now categorizes all land as either "Urban" or "Open Space." Lands categorized as open space are subcategorized as Agricultural Resource ("AR") (lands on the valley floor) or Agriculture, Watershed, and Open Space ("AWOS") (hillside lands). The AR designation, which supports AP zoning calls for a minimum parcel size of 40 acres for lands. Lands within the AWOS subcategory are designated for a minimum parcel size of 160 acres. Together, the AR and AWOS represent 87% of the county's total acreage.

Napa County continued to establish regulations to protect agriculture in the 1980s and 1990s. In 1980, voters adopted Measure A, which restricted growth via building permit limits, in the unincorporated areas of the county to one percent per year. In 1990, voters approved Measure J, which provides that, until December 31, 2020, changes to the General Plan policies describing intent, minimum parcel size, and maximum building intensity of lands designated AR or AWOS cannot occur unless approved by a

two-thirds vote of the electorate. Measure J also requires voter approval to change the designation of AR and AWOS lands to a new designation unless certain limited exceptions apply. In 2008, Measure J was renewed until 2058.

Along with these policies, the county General Plan and other ordinances continue to prioritize agriculture. This includes the long-standing right-to-farm ordinance and policies that establish agriculture and rural residences as the senior users of ground water aquifers. Land preservation efforts have worked hand in hand with county policies. In 1976, to further support the AP, a group of Napa landowners, many of whom were vintners and growers, formed the Land Trust of Napa County. To date, the Land Trust of Napa County has preserved 50,000 acres of agricultural land and open space through conservation easements and transfer of lands to local, state, or federal conservation agencies.

The outcomes of the AP and successive policies have far exceeded what many had envisioned and have shown that strong protections not only preserve the land base but may also boost the economic viability of agriculture.

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Resources

How 40 years of Agricultural Preservation Transformed Napa Valley, Paul Franson, Napa Valley Vintners

Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG) and the Rural-Urban Connections Strategy (RUCS)

Although most of the Sacramento region's 2.3 million residents live and work in urban centers, the region spans an extraordinary range of landscapes. From farming communities to historic mining towns, from the Sierra forests to fields that feed the world, the region enjoys remarkably diverse lands and natural resources. Across the six counties of El Dorado, Placer, Sacramento, Sutter, Yolo and Yuba, approximately 85% of the region's lands are agricultural, forest, or other open space. The contributions of small towns, farms and open spaces are vital to the success of the entire region. Agriculture has deep roots in the region's history, and future. The Sacramento region has some of the most productive farmland in the world. The $1.8 billion farmgate value and $4.1 billion total agriculture industry, benefits from great soil, high-quality water, and a Mediterranean climate that can grow almost anything.

Protecting rural assets from development and the impacts of a growing population is complex undertaking that the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG) embarked upon in 2008. The Rural-Urban Connection Strategy (RUCS) is a process that required public and private stakeholders from all sectors and all parts of the region and attempts to link the long-term success of farms and ranches to the success of the region as a whole. Building upon the Sacramento Region Blueprint from 2004, the project looks at the region's growth and sustainability objectives from a rural perspective. In the same way that Blueprint is part of an economic development strategy for urban areas, RUCS strives to be an economic and environmental sustainability strategy for rural areas. SACOG identified five areas of study:

- Land Use and Conservation: Policies and Plans that Shape Rural Areas
- The Infrastructure of Agriculture: Challenges to the Production Process
- Economic Opportunities: New Ways to Grow Revenue
- Forest Management: Growing Economic and Environmental Value
- Regulations: Navigating Federal and State Environmental Guidelines

The project involved assembling working groups around core topic areas to help further understand what is currently happening around the region, address rural challenges and cultivate unique regional opportunities. Through the working group process, SACOG has worked directly with rural stakeholders, citizens, businesses, and public agencies to form strategies to enhance agriculture and rural economies, resource conservation, recreation, quality of life, and regional sustainability. This work was intended to broaden the region's understanding of how land use and transportation investments affect rural areas. SACOG's expertise in mapping and computer modeling produced coupled with a rich set of agricultural data has created an unprecedented suite of tools that have been shared and refined with many partners, including Farm Bureaus, local planners, and county agricultural commissioners. The data, tools and analysis conducted include:

- Compilation of crop reports data comparing the volume and value of individual crops over 15 years
- Parcel-level crop maps showing what is grown and where in generalized agricultural "landscape types"
- Cost and revenue data for various crops to better understand agricultural viability
- Land needs for locally grown food
- Loss of farmland, actual and projected, given change in population and possible growth patterns
- Research of general plan policies and zoning that support agriculture
- Mapping of Williamson Act lands and analysis of potential land conversion impacts on air quality
- Loss of ag processing and impacts from resulting changes in cropping patterns, land use, and truck travel
- Mapping of traffic volume, safety data and key farm-to-market routes for rural roads
- Mapping of environmental data such as vernal pool locations and other protected lands
- Assessing rural communities development scenarios, to help rural residents and planners evaluate and shape the long-range future of land use
- Assessing various possible futures for agricultural production to provide indicators on agricultural viability and demand for inputs such as labor, water, trucking, etc.

Estimates of changes in cropping patterns given changes in input cost or commodity prices

Having this wealth of data and analysis has been particularly useful to SACOG in developing their Metropolitan Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (MTP/SCS) per Senate Bill 375. SACOG includes a dedicated "Environmental Sustainability" chapter to the SCS, with large portion devoted to the Rural-Urban Connection Strategy (RUCS) and natural resources and farmland. In addition to a discussion on the impacts of climate change to the environment, this chapter includes a number of maps and data relating to the impacts of health, agriculture, and open space. RUCS provides a powerful set of analytical tools to the region's local governments and stakeholders engaged in implementation of the MTP/SCS. In recognizing the competing pressures between growth and conservation in the interest of economic sustainability, the MTP/SCS has called out RUCS as an implementing activity: Implement the Rural-Urban Connection Strategy (RUCS) which ensures good rural-urban connections and promotes the economic viability of rural lands while also protecting open space resources to expand and support the implementation of the Blueprint growth strategy and the MTP/SCS (Policy 7).

Much of the RUCS work to date has focused on policies and plans that protect rural lands and support agriculture and forestry industries. This work is helping the region improve the economic viability of rural industries which, coupled with smart urban growth strategies, is a critical component for conserving land. It is being accomplished through understanding challenges and opportunities, and using SACOG's cutting-edge technical tools to assess current and future conditions and compare scenarios. This same approach will be applied to

open space and environmental services topics. SACOG and its partners recognize that the rural landscape not only produces food and fiber, but also provides a range of environmental services including: carbon sequestration, energy production, flood protection, groundwater recharge, habitat, and a wide range recreational uses. SACOG intends to work with stakeholders to develop a richer understanding of these services and build data and modeling tools that help the region use better information for better decision-making. With funding from the California Strategic Growth Council, SACOG is beginning work with stakeholders to develop a scope of work for a regional working landscapes plan that will compliment strategies to enhance economic viability included in the region's Next Economy initiative. SACOG will be seeking additional funding to implement the scope of work when it is completed in late 2013.

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RESOURCES:

Rural-Urban Connection Strategy
Adopted Metropolitan Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (MTP/SCS)

San Joaquin Valley and Regional Planning

The San Joaquin Valley is California's leading agricultural area, responsible for more than $30 billion in annual food production. It is also one of the fastest-growing areas in the country, losing 6 square miles of farmland every year to urban development since 1990. And by 2050 its population is expected to grow to 6.7 million people. With this kind of growth, the future of agriculture in the San Joaquin depends on how well the region plans to accommodate new development.

Until 2004, planning for growth in the San Joaquin Valley was being done by the region's eight counties and 62 cities that have authority over land use. There was minimal coordination among them and localities, all seeking to grow their economies, seemed to compete for new development by approving projects that resulted a building boom in the late 1990's, early 2000's. In an effort to understand how local and regional planning has addressed farmland conservation in the midst of the Valley's building boom, American Farmland Trust released a report in 2013, *Saving Farmland, Growing Cities*. This report analyzes efforts by Valley communities to preserve farmland and makes concrete recommendations to help stop farm and ranch land in the Valley from conversion to urban sprawl. The report reveals that overall, almost two-thirds of all land developed in the San Joaquin between 1990 and 2008 was irrigated farmland.

Blueprint

Regional planning was reinforced in the San Joaquin Valley in 2005, when the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley recommended in its Strategic Action Plan that the Councils of Government (COGs), representing eight separate counties, come together to lead a process that would produce an "integrated framework for sustainable growth," including a strategy for growth and conservation for the next 50 years. A collaboration of the region's COGs launched the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint as eight parallel but separate planning processes. Four years later in April 2009, the San Joaquin Valley Regional Policy Council, comprised of two elected officials and an alternate from each county COG, adopted 12 smart growth principles and recommended a "preferred growth scenario" for the Valley that would, if implemented, reduce the amount of land consumed by urban growth between now and 2050 by 34% compared with the *status quo* trend. In 2011, Blueprint prepared an implementation plan and a planners' toolkit, designed to help local governments turn the recommended goals into policy and, ultimately, to on-the-ground results.

Sustainable Communities Strategies

In 2008, the passage of SB 375 introduced a new planning orientation for California's metropolitan planning organizations (including COGs), requiring that housing and transportation plans be integrated into Sustainable Communities Strategies to meet greenhouse gas reduction targets set by the California Air Resources Board (CARB). The targets might be met by building more compact communities served by public transit, thus reducing vehicle travel and, if done well, could

save farmland. In September 2010, the California Air Resources Board adopted emissions reduction targets for the entire San Joaquin Valley for the years 2020 and 2035. The targets are a 5% reduction in GHG emissions by 2020 and a 10% reduction by 2035, compared to 2005 emissions.

While each county has its own timeline, public participation plan, and set of resources and priorities for the RTP/SCS, the eight MPOs have elected to collaborate to develop and implement a Valley wide public outreach strategy. In recognition of their shared interests and collaboration, the MPOs received a Proposition 84 grant from the Strategic Growth Council to assist with SCS modeling and public outreach.

Smart Valley Places

In 2010, 14 San Joaquin Valley cities formed a formal compact for sustainable growth called Smart Valley Places. It is based on the premise that a partnership among cities, rather than counties, COGS or other governmental entities, is "the best and most effective way to create and coordinate a pool of resources, templates, models, technical expertise, and utilize the local land use and zoning authority required, that will lead to the practical and measurable implementation of long-term San Joaquin Valley sustainability." It is intended to build on the California Partnership recommendations and the Blueprint to integrate some, if not all, of the planning processes taking place in the Valley. One of its explicit objectives is to help local governments modify their general plans to achieve the SB 375 GHG reduction targets. Another is to promote the livability principles articulated by the federal HUD-EPA-DOT Partnership for Sustainable Communities which has awarded a $4 million grant to the Smart Valley Places consortium.

Greenprint

One of the Blueprint's benefits is that it encourages more efficient development that conserves open space, farmland and environmental resources. But the Blueprint does not address the significant resource management opportunities and challenges in parts of the eight-county region that remain green and open. How we care for and manage these land, water and living resources will influence the economy and quality of life in the entire region just as much as how and where cities grow. Recognizing this, in 2010, the Strategic Growth Council allocated funding to do a Greenprint for the future of farmland, habitat, floodplains and other resources in the Valley.

The San Joaquin Valley Greenprint Phase I, is a collaborative project that will compile information describing the lands, waters and living resources of the San Joaquin Valley region and the trends affecting them, and that document their public benefits. It will identify and document resource management challenges and opportunities. These strategies will be developed with extensive public input, will be based on sound science and economics. The goal of the resulting "Greenprint" is to reinforce local efforts and serve as a guide to local, state, federal and private sector decision-makers as they make choices about the future of the Valley's resources. However, the Greenprint will not establish public policy or override local land use decision making.

Implementation of Regional Plans

The multiplication of regional planning processes in the San Joaquin Valley is a welcome development in a region where communities, such as Modesto, Fresno and Bakersfield, are no longer as distinctive and isolated as they once were and the impacts of growth in one county increasingly affect its neighbors. Communication and cooperation among cities and counties has never been more robust. Ultimately, the success of any regional plan or growth strategy will depend largely on how cities and counties implement it.

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RESOURCES

American Farmland Trust, California
California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley
San Joaquin Valley Blueprint
San Joaquin Valley Regional Policy Council
Smart Valley Places
California High Speed Rail Authority

Sonoma County Urban Growth Boundaries

For generations, Sonoma County ranchers and growers have used Sonoma's varied microclimates, rolling rangeland, and rich river valleys to raise sheep, dairy and beef cattle, goats, grapes and other crops. The mild climate, beautiful vistas and rural charm have also made Sonoma County one of California's most popular tourist destinations. About 7 million people visit the County annually to tour the vineyards, appreciate award-winning wines, hike the hills, and take part in an artisan food culture. One of California's leading wine producing counties, Sonoma's agricultural production grossed $821million in 2012 (not including the value of the wine industry made from its grape crop).

Located in the northern Bay Area, the County has been subject to growth pressures for decades and has one of the highest levels of parcelization in the state. In the early 1990's, as population growth and development were soaring in Sonoma County, a group of residents began to looked to the success of Portland, Oregon's urban growth boundaries as a model for separating urban growth from the cities' surrounding farmland and open space. In 1996, the citizens of Santa Rosa, Sebastopol, and Healdsburg adopted urban growth boundaries with more than 65% voter approval in each city. Between 1998 and 2000, voters overwhelmingly approved boundaries in Windsor, Cotati, and Rohnert Park, Petaluma, and Sonoma. By 2010, with voter approval in Cloverdale, growth boundaries surround all nine cities in Sonoma County. With the exception of Cloverdale, all growth boundaries have 20-year expirations (Coverdale's expires after 15 years).

Sonoma has a history of strong citizen engagement and planning aimed at ensuring that the growth boundaries are a part of a larger planning regime that works in conjunction with policies to strengthen downtowns with mixed use and high density development, provide affordable housing, protect farmland and open space, and avoid the unnecessary development of new infrastructure. Sonoma's urban growth boundaries are drawn fairly tightly and, thus, appear to be quite effective at conserving farmland. The total area within the urban growth boundaries is 6,132 acres, only 929 of which (15%) are important farmland. The important farmland within the UGB's constitutes only 1.2% of all the important farmland in the county.

Due to the deep citizen involvement, voter initiative was preferred over city council action to ensure that the boundaries are locked in for the long-term. Boundaries cannot be changed or prematurely terminated without voter approval. In determining where boundaries should be placed, cities elected to make them coterminous with the city's sphere of influence. The only exception is Cloverdale where the sphere of influence is larger than the growth boundary.

Citizen engagement has been important in developing the concept and implementing the growth boundaries. In Sonoma County, Greenbelt Alliance and Sonoma County Conservation Action were instrumental in educating and helping to organize local citizens in actively supporting the growth boundaries.

They also engaged the broader community of builders and real estate groups, who are often skeptical of growth containment policies, around the benefits of urban growth boundaries, by pointing to studies on demographic shifts and the changing housing preferences of older and younger generations for walkable, mixed-use communities.

Two other components that comprise the County's growth policies include the Community Separators policy, which aims to avoid corridor-style urbanization, and the Scenic Landscape Units policy, which maintains scenic resource areas to provide important visual relief from urban densities. The combined goal for these policies is to keep the visual identity and rural character of the communities by promoting low-density development in between urban centers. However, while the goals of these policies deserve merit, pressures of urban development and rural ranchettes continue to threaten agricultural production in some areas.

Sonoma is one of the few jurisdictions in the nation to use a sales tax for the purchase of conservation easements and fee title to protect agricultural lands and preserve open space. In November 1990, with the passage of Measures A and C, voters created the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District and authorized a 1/4% sales tax over a 20-year period to fund acquisition of agricultural land and open space. The Board of Supervisors, which serves as the District Board of Directors, created the Sonoma County Open Space Authority to collect and manage the sales tax under Measure C, and as of 2006, this group has transitioned to a fiscal oversight commission to review expenditures. The tax currently provides approximately $17-20 million annually for the District's land conservation program, which to date has permanently protected 100,000 acres of land. A Citizens' Advisory Committee appointed by the District Board of Directors provides advice on policy matters and makes recommendations on acquisitions. The District acquires conservation easements through voluntary transactions with landowners. In 2006, residents voted to continue this tax by a margin 0f 76%

Cities are also looking to infill policies to take development pressure off of unincorporated county land. With the Sonoma Marin Area Rail Train (SMART) due to open for service in 2013, many cities have received station area planning grants from the region's metropolitan planning organization, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC), to plan for mixed use, high density clusters around the SMART stations. Grants also include funding to ensure that ample affordable housing is located near the stations. This type of planning is a crucial to mitigate any negative effects that the urban growth boundaries might have on housing affordability.

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RESOURCES

A Decade of Preservation, Sonoma County Agriculture and Open Space District, 2002.

Urban Growth Boundaries, Greenbelt Alliance

Stanislaus County Growth Initiatives, Mitigation, and General Plans

Stanislaus County is located in the northern portion of the San Joaquin Valley, one of the most bountiful agricultural regions in the world. Ranking 6th in the state, agricultural production in the county was worth over $3 billion with a total economic impact on the local economy of over $9 billion in 2011. The area is watered by an extensive irrigation system fed by the Stanislaus, Tuolumne and San Joaquin rivers. The irrigation water is considered among the cleanest, least expensive and reliable irrigation water in the Valley. These rivers were harnessed over 100 years ago to provide water to a limited variety of crops on the valley floor. Though milk is the county's biggest commodity, the region's fertile soils, abundant water supply, a rare Mediterranean climate now produce over 200 different crops, with almonds, walnuts, grapes, and peaches among the top producers. Nine of the top ten employers in the manufacturing sector are agricultural related businesses in the county. Agricultural related businesses account for one out of every three jobs in the county, and every 10 acres of agricultural land supports one job.[1]

Similar to other population centers in the San Joaquin Valley, the cities in Stanislaus County have faced unprecedented growth over the last half century. Between 2000 and 2010, 87% of the land that was converted to urban uses was high quality irrigated farmland. Since this farmland makes up only 45% of the county's undeveloped land, the high rate of conversion suggests that this important resource is being consumed at a disproportionately greater rate than other land in the county. The reason for this is that most development occurs immediately around the cities and most cities are located in the midst of high quality farmland. Over the last three decades, citizens in the county have made a consistent effort to balance urban growth with agricultural protection policies, and as result Stanislaus County has seen some of the most progressive farmland protection policies anywhere in the San Joaquin Valley.

Growth Initiatives

The first effort was an undertaking from the citizens of the City of Modesto who passed Measure A in 1979, requiring a vote of the public before the city council can approve, authorize, or appropriate funds for extending sewer service. Twenty years later, Modesto citizens passed Measure M which requires an advisory vote of the public before the city council can approve an extension of sewer services for residential use. Thirty years later, in 2008, citizens approved what was called the "Stamp Out Sprawl" measure for the county (Measure E). Similar to Napa County's vaunted Measure J and the SOAR initiatives in Ventura County, it requires voters to decide the rezoning of agricultural land for residential development in the county's unincorporated areas. This measure contrasts with Modesto's growth initiatives, approved in 1979 and 1997, which require citywide votes but are not binding on the City's leaders. Supporters of Measure E believe that it should channel growth into the county's nine cities. A 30-year land use restriction now in its fifth year, it is difficult to conclude whether Measure E has

[1] Stanislaus County Agricultural Commissioner Crop report, 2011.

had any effect on ceasing development given the Great Recession's slowdown on new housing construction throughout the Valley.

Farmland Mitigation

In 2007 (a year before Measure E was passed), the county updated its Agricultural Element that had been in place since 1992. The new element included a Farmland Mitigation Program requiring developers to mitigate the loss of farmland by acquiring agricultural easements at one acre for every acre that their projects convert or by paying fees to enable land trusts to do so. For development proposals converting 20 or fewer acres, the mitigation program allows for either direct acquisition of a conservation easement on comparable lands, or the purchase of banked credits. If a developer of a parcel of fewer than 20 acres can demonstrate that no comparable land was available for conservation easement and no credits were available, a fee in lieu of purchase can be paid. For parcels of greater than 20 acres, purchase of a conservation easement on comparable lands is required. The developer is solely responsible for negotiating and settling the easement purchase.

In 2010, the Building Industry Association challenged the Stanislaus County's mitigation policy but the State Supreme Court upheld the law, setting a precedent for other localities in California. The California Farm Bureau Federation and others were interveners in support of the county.

Since the ruling, the City of Hughson's City Council unanimously passed the most ambitious farmland mitigation programs in the Valley, requiring permanent preservation of two acres of farmland for every one acre of land that is converted for residential use. Conversions of land for commercial or industrial development do not have the same offset as those for residential use.

The county's Local Agency Formation Commission has also incorporated mitigation into a new policy. The LAFCo policy, adopted in 2012, requires cities to prepare a Plan for Agricultural Preservation before they annex more land or expand their spheres of influence. To get LAFCo approval, plans may propose actions such as reducing the size of spheres, farmland mitigation, and urban growth boundaries. Additionally, cities must demonstrate that they have not allocated more farmland to development than is necessary for the amount and type that is likely to occur. Though similar policies have been adopted in Napa, San Luis Obispo, Santa Clara, Ventura and Yolo, this is first such LAFCo policy in the San Joaquin Valley.

Local Policies and Programs

All of the cities and the county address agricultural preservation and protection in their General Plans, typically in the Conservation Element. Perhaps the most important decision that a local agency can make to preserve agriculture is to use the quality and availability of farmland as a basis for determining where to grow. Although this is a consideration of every city in Stanislaus County, it is difficult to achieve because the cities were established to support agricultural industry and are surrounded by important farmland. The most common policies adopted in Stanislaus County support the growth of agricultural industries, support either local or countywide "right-to-farm" ordinances, ensure that "urban-rural edge" development is designed in a manner to reduce conflicts, and

allow agricultural operations and Williamson Act contracts to continue after annexation until land is converted to urban use. Many of the jurisdictions have active farmers' markets and allow for the cultivation of food for personal consumption within City limits.

All of the General Plans incorporate principles of sustainable land use planning in developing their long-range plans. For most jurisdictions, this means that future development will be more compact (i.e., higher density) than the existing City, resulting in the conversion of few acres of farmland. As General Plans are updated within the county, local agencies will be required to evaluate their plans within the context of regional plans such as the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint and the StanCOG Sustainable Communities Strategy. These regional plans are encouraging higher density development to achieve transportation and air quality goals, but have the indirect benefit of reducing pressure to expand City boundaries.

Annexation policies and/or ordinances are an important tool used by the cities to ensure that agricultural land is not prematurely converted to urban use, as summarized above. For example, the City of Turlock has established a policy in its General Plan requiring 70% of the building permits within the existing City and annexed master plan areas to be developed before the City will begin the master planning process to bring additional farm land into the City. These tools are reinforced through policies adopted by the Stanislaus Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo). LAFCo now requires that cities demonstrate the need to annex land by evaluating the existing land inventory and a newer policy requiring the submittal of a Plan for Agricultural Preservation with each annexation or sphere of influence expansion application, as described above.

Since the early 90's, Stanislaus County has had revenue sharing agreements with each city to address growth pressures in the areas immediately outside city boundaries. However, due to the shrinking size of city Spheres of Influence, the existing revenue sharing agreements are only marginally effective in preserving agricultural land at the urban fringe. While Measure E limits the conversion of farmland for residential purposes, it does not apply to commercial and industrial development in the unincorporated area. This heightens the competition between the cities and the county, prompting cities to consider annexing urbanizing corridors to avoid the leakage of sales tax and other important revenue sources. In addition, while the county's General Plan Agricultural Element is an important tool to allow agricultural industries to grow within the county, it can and has been used as a "bait-and-switch" tactic by some developers. A good example is a veterinary business located north of the City of Turlock that was approved as a large animal vet (and does have that aspect to their current business) that is predominantly focused on treating dogs and cats. Now that the use is established, the owner is requesting a major expansion of the use to provide short- and long-term kenneling of dogs and cats.

A few of the jurisdictions have adopted policies or ordinances requiring agricultural mitigation. The City of Riverbank has adopted a policy in its new General Plan establishing a Sustainable Agriculture Strategy that will be overseen by a special committee to ensure that farmland mitigation occurs and that the agricultural goals

of the General Plan are achieved. The City of Hughson has adopted a Farmland Preservation Program by ordinance that requires 2:1 mitigation for all new residential subdivisions. A few of the projects, master plans and specific plans adopted in the region have farmland mitigation programs.

On the Horizon

Farmland preservation remains a high priority within Stanislaus County, but the region struggles with how to most efficiently and effectively accomplish it. There is general recognition that work still needs to be done. Elected officials continue to meet and discuss strategies to protect agriculture as an industry and as a resource. Farmland advocates continue to press for additional land use controls. There is an understanding that farmland mitigation, by itself, will not control urban expansion unless it is accompanied by land use policies and/or urban growth boundaries that reinforce sustainable planning policies and practices. Planners generally agree that a contiguous area needs to be designated for permanent agricultural use within the county and that this area must be supported with the services, infrastructure, related industries, and resources to allow farming to thrive and expand. Regional planning efforts are underway, both within Stanislaus County and at the larger Valleywide (eight-county) level, to address Global Climate Change laws and regulations. These efforts will advance sustainable planning and resource conservation practices that should help to preserve agriculture. A Valleywide "Greenprint" planning process has been launched as a companion effort to the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint that will discuss strategies to protect valuable resources, including agriculture, in the eight-county Valley area.

At the local level, an informal body of city mayors initiated a process to develop a 50-year Agricultural Preservation Plan that would have identified urban growth limits for each of the nine cities and for the unincorporated communities in the county. The effort failed due to a lack of support by a few cities and, interestingly enough, farmland preservation advocacy groups. The effort was derided as a land grab by the cities because the boundaries drawn by the mayors were very large compared to the existing City boundaries. Fortunately, discussions have continued and it appears that there may be renewed interest in establishing a program that would allow cities to expand but establish specific limits for each city. The goal of this effort is to guarantee preservation of roughly 75% of the existing important farmland and designate the remaining agricultural areas as permanent "food belts" where the infrastructure and resources required to sustain agriculture would be provided.

Such a process would help to reinforce the newly adopted LAFCo policy that requires a Plan for Agricultural Preservation for each agency. It would establish a framework for adopting urban growth boundaries for each agency and provide a "receiving area" for agricultural mitigation funds collected from urban development within the cities and the unincorporated area.

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Ventura County Urban Growth Boundaries

Ventura is one of California's leading agricultural counties, encompassing the fertile land and unique climate of the Oxnard Plain and the Santa Clara River Valley. In 2011, Ventura County ranked 10th in the state for value of agricultural production, grossing more than $1.8 billion. The top five crops by value were strawberries, raspberries, lemons, celery, and tomatoes. Irrigated farmland makes up 23% of the county's non-urban land base. Over the last decade (2000-2010), 36% of the land that was converted to urban uses was irrigated farmland. Though this is a lower rate of conversion than many other agricultural counties in the state, this important resource is still being consumed at a disproportionately greater rate than other land in the county.

Ventura County's proximity to Los Angeles has led to a population in 1950 of 100,000 growing to more than 800,000 in 2010, a dramatic 700% increase over 40 years and a pace of growth that threatens the county's agriculture and open space. Between 1995 and 2001, this rapid growth prompted voters in eight of the county's cities to approve ballot measures creating urban growth boundaries and lock in strong agricultural protection policies. Coinciding with a series of successful measures aimed at stopping sprawl and protecting farmland and open space among the county's cities, voters in Ventura County passed their measure to stop sprawl in 1998.

Unlike similar initiatives in other California counties, the Ventura effort, named SOAR (Save Open-space and Agricultural Resources), was coordinated to establish the cities' growth boundaries and the county's agricultural protection measure all within a short period of time, which prevented city annexations from undermining the overall strategy. The SOAR initiatives, including the county's SOAR ordinance and the cities' CURB (City Urban Restriction Boundaries) ordinances, were the culmination of decades of county policies directed at restricting the number and size of incorporated cities and retaining agricultural lands and open space as community separators. SOAR remains the most comprehensive and successful effort in California to delineate clear urban-rural boundaries.

How it Works

In county unincorporated areas, the 1998 SOAR measure requires countywide voter approval of any change to the county General Plan involving the "Agricultural," "Open Space," or "Rural" land use map designations. In the cities, a ballot measure to change a SOAR boundary – either tightening it to limit development or expanding it to allow more development – can be brought to voters by the city council or by anyone who gathers enough signatures to put in on the ballot. If a property is inside the boundaries, development is subject to the approval of local cities councils and planning commissions. If a property outside of a city CURB line is annexed, the property cannot be developed for urban purposes unless it is approved by vote of the city electorate. The urban growth boundaries have built-in 20- to 25-year expiration dates. The SOAR ordinances do not change zoning or general plan regulations, nor do they affect the process of buying or selling land. However, to address concerns that the measures may prevent cities from building necessary housing within the growth boundaries, some general

plans have been updated to promote urban infill development through density bonuses, relaxed parking ratio requirements, and form-based codes.

By preventing encroachment on existing agricultural, open space and rural land uses in the county unincorporated areas, in combination with growth boundaries in the cities, the measures collectively protect 600 thousand acres of land in agricultural uses, thereby stabilizing the land use in these areas.

Drawing the Boundaries

The boundaries were drawn to correspond with the footprint of the existing cities, plus their associated spheres of influence and designated "expansion areas." The actual placement of the boundaries depended to varying degrees on the political effectiveness of the grassroots movement in each community. As a result, some cities have relatively "tight" boundaries while others are quite broad, leaving significant latitude for urban expansion.

Is SOAR working?

The urban growth boundaries can be challenged at any time through the ballot initiative process. To date there have been ten ballot initiatives attempting to expand the SOAR boundaries, and one to tighten a boundary. Of the ten expansion efforts, six were approved by voters and four were rejected. Four of the six that passed covered relatively small areas, and three of the six were for community, church, or senior facilities. The four defeated measures were for large residential developments on large tracts of open space. Certain types of development, such as affordable housing and publicly-owned facilities such as water reservoirs are exempt from the SOAR provisions. To date, no developers or cities have sought exemption from a SOAR ordinance for the purpose of building affordable housing.

While the SOAR measures have been largely unchallenged and successful, some issues remain. The demand for development has given rise to parcelization and fragmentation of open space and farmland to create large-lot rural estates outside of the SOAR boundaries as well as a rush to pave over remaining open lands inside the boundaries. Furthermore, rural residential development, lands subdivided down to 10 acres (the smallest parcel permissible), have proliferated as this type of development does not trigger a SOAR vote. Also known as ranchettes, this type of development causes fragmentation of agricultural land, and threatens farm viability due to the non farming neighbors who often pose economic and legal risks and challenges for farmers.

It is important to note that, with the exception of the City of Ventura, farmland within the growth boundaries of cities is not protected by SOAR. In cities where SOAR boundaries were drawn more broadly, these lands (which include prime agricultural land) are being converted to sprawling housing developments far more rapidly than called for in their general plans. Much of the threatened agricultural land within cities is at the city's edge. When these lands are urbanized, they impact neighboring SOAR protected agricultural lands that are in the unincorporated county by removing a valuable buffer between agricultural and urban land uses.

SOAR, Inc.

The success of these initiatives stems from the momentum started by SOAR, a nonprofit

organization whose mission is to limit urban sprawl, protect open space and agricultural lands, and promote livable and sustainable communities in Ventura County. The organization began in 1995 and influenced change by launching and organizing grassroots campaigns to create and pass the SOAR ballot initiatives, involving substantial fundraising, recruiting and managing a large volunteer corps to gather petition signatures and run phone banks, and the creation and distribution of newsletters and campaign brochures to households. With its mature grassroots, the organization continues to defend SOAR boundaries.

As the 20-year expiration dates approach, the organization is focused on mounting a major campaign to renew the SOAR initiatives before they sunset. They also actively advocate for a number of policies to support the viability of agriculture, such as increasing the minimum parcel size for the subdivision of farmland and open space to limit the proliferation of ranchette development.

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RESOURCES

Save Open-space and Agricultural Resources (SOAR)

Yolo County: A Long History of Agricultural Protection

Located in the Sacramento Valley in the Northern most area of California's Central Valley, Yolo County has a deep-rooted history of farming and a culture protective of its rural way of life. In 2011, the value of agricultural production in the county climbed to nearly $550 million. Processing tomatoes remain by county's leading commodity, followed by rice, wine grapes, alfalfa hay, and walnuts. Though farming plays a key role in Yolo County's economy, farmland continues to be at risk. Between 2000 and 2010, 60% of the land that was converted to urban uses was high quality irrigated farmland. Since high quality farmland makes up only 50% of the county's undeveloped land, this high rate of conversion suggests that this important resource is being consumed at a disproportionately greater rate than other land in the county. The reason for this is that most development occurs immediately around the cities and most cities are located in the midst of high quality farmland.

Early on the citizens and leaders of Yolo County and its four cities have consistently made efforts to protect the county's agricultural heritage from urban encroachment. From 1940 to 1950, the county's population doubled and by the early 1950's urban growth, expanding outward from Sacramento County, was beginning to show its first effects on the assessment rates of farm properties, particularly those adjacent to urban development. Yolo County, which had only three small cities and was composed primarily of fertile agricultural land, was by this time, firmly set in its agricultural ways. In fact, in 1958 it was the Yolo County Farm Bureau, backed by a largely college-educated farming community, that instigated and led the process to create the county's first general plan, making it clear that farming was to be the primary activity on the county's land and that farming was to remain as the county's economic and cultural mainstay. Today, with 90% of its population living on 5% of its land, the county continues to demonstrate a strong tradition of resisting urban development in its unincorporated areas, as urban development has largely been welcomed in existing cities.

With a rich history of guiding development to its cities, it is the combination of decades of strategic growth policies alongside widespread consensus for farmland preservation among the county's and cities' voters that has resulted in Yolo County standing out as one the most successful in preserving its farmland. This has been accomplished through a comprehensive suite of complementary county and city policies as well as tax sharing agreements, LAFCo policies, and the presence of an active and innovative land trust. The county's current policy and program inventory includes:

- Yolo County Zoning – 4 Agricultural Zones with minimum lot sizes
- General Plan Agricultural and Economic Development Element
- General Plan Policy and Ordinance to establish Agricultural Buffers
- General Plan Policy to establish Greenbelts
- Agricultural Mitigation/Easement Program
- City-County Pass-Through and Tax-Sharing Agreements

- Special Agricultural Districts (Capay and Clarksburg)
- Clustered Housing Ordinance
- Right to Farm Ordinance
- Active Williamson Act Program (67% of the county's total land is in Williamson Act contracts)
- Agricultural Tourism & Economic Development
- Open Space/Conservation General Plan Policies
- Habitat Conservation Ordinance
- Affordable Housing Requirements (addresses farm worker and migrant worker housing needs)
- Sacramento Association of County Governments Blueprint
- Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Strategies for Agriculture
- Yolo Land Trust - 10,000 acres of farm and ranch land under conservation easements (as of May 2013).

County and LAFCo Highlights

Though there are many policies and programs that make Yolo County a leader in farmland protection, some are worth highlighting as models for other jurisdictions to follow. The county's clustered housing ordinance, adopted in 2010, addresses one of the greatest concerns for agriculture in the state—ranchette development. The intent of the ordinance is to encourage clustering of home sites for agricultural family members and for farm workers on smaller parcels than allowed by the current zoning, while ensuring the long-term preservation of adjoining agricultural resources in larger parcels that benefit from economies of scale. The ordinance was carefully drafted to allow a limited number of landowners to take their existing development rights and concentrate the resulting home sites into one small area. The owner can use those home sites for his/her own family, farm workers, or sell them to others who desire a rural lifestyle. In return, the owner would be required to place the remainder (equal to at least 85% of the land within the proposal) into a permanent conservation easement.

With the county representing the majority of farmland and open space, ongoing cooperation between the cities and the county is one of Yolo County's best mechanisms for avoiding farmland conversion. The county executed agreements with its four incorporated cities in the time span of 1980 to 1992. In 1980, the Woodland Area General Plan incorporated an "Urban Development Policy" confirming the city's agreement with the county to avoid development within unincorporated territory. Within the urban limit line, development is prohibited, with the specific exception of agricultural uses, single-family dwellings on existing parcels and expansions of existing non-residential uses (if certain findings are made).

Another critical component of the county's overall farmland preservation framework includes pass-through agreements and annexation revenue-sharing agreements, a mechanism to resolve the "fiscalization" of land use that drives urban sprawl. In 1986, 1990, and 1992 respectively, Davis, West Sacramento and Winters made pass-through agreements with the county that obligated the cities to share tax revenue with the county when accepting development within the city planning area. This has permitted the county to realize a portion of the cities' tax base and has allowed the avoidance of competition over lucrative

development, thereby letting the county continue its focus on protecting farmland.

Both the county and its Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) require the mitigation of farmland for new development that takes place on farmland. The county requires conversion at the rate of one acre preserved for every acre developed and is currently (2013) considering a rate of two acres mitigated for every acre developed. The county is also in the process of implementing a policy that establishes greenbelts to which mitigation lands will be directed. The LAFCo mitigation policy reinforces the Davis' mitigation policy by requiring mitigation for new development that takes place inside city limits and for proposed annexation beyond city limits. The policy requires that any annexation of prime agricultural lands not be approved unless mitigation has been instituted, at not less than a one-to-one replacement ratio. The Yolo County Land Trust acquires and holds the easements and is also eligible to receive in-lieu fees for future easement purchases.

The county's zoning ordinance includes four agricultural zones, and restrictions on both use and parcel sizes within agricultural areas. Establishing minimum parcel sizes can ensure that parcels are large enough to sustain themselves while minimizing incompatibility between adjacent land uses. The Agricultural Preserve Zone (A-P) requires a minimum parcel size of 80 acres for cultivated, irrigated land; and 160 acres for cultivated but non-irrigated land; and 320 acres for rangelands. The Agricultural Exclusive Zone (A-E), Agricultural General Zone (A-1), and the Agricultural Industry Zone (AGI) require a 20-acre lot minimum.

Highlights of Yolo County's Cities

In 1986, voters in the City of Davis approved an advisory measure for the city "to grow as slowly as legally possible." Subsequently the city included in its general plan policy the establishment a "Planned Urbanized Edge" which was defined as an open space, hedgerow, agricultural ring or buffer. Later Davis adopted its right to farm and farmland mitigation policies both of which became models for and were subsequently adopted by the county. For both the city and the county, the right to farm ordinance limits the circumstances under which agricultural operations may be deemed a nuisance, thereby providing farmers with a greater right to farm and discouraging urban encroachment.

Supported by a community-wide vote in 1995 (and amended (strengthened) in 2003), the City of Davis adopted its Farmland Preservation Ordinance, a mitigation program requires that applicants seeking to change the zoning or other discretionary entitlements of agricultural land to nonagricultural use, to provide agricultural mitigation. Mitigation can be accomplished by the granting of a conservation easement to the city on a two-to-one basis, or by the payment of a fee to the city for the purchase of a conservation easement, also on a two-to-one basis. The city implements the mitigation measure at the time of development approval. The Yolo County Land Trust acquires and holds the easements and the city acts as the mitigation bank for in-lieu fees.

In 2000, Davis voters approved Measure O, a parcel tax intended to generate funding for a buffer zone and open space targeted in areas around sloughs and parcels within agricultural transition areas adjacent to the city limits. Also

approved by voters in 2000, Davis' Measure J is an ordinance requiring a public vote on all city council approved projects to be built on peripheral agricultural and open space land.

In West Sacramento, the city's General Plan gives preference to development adjacent to the city to minimize the disruption on agricultural land. In Woodland, the city declared its commitment to agricultural preservation when an urban limit line boundary and high-density development policy was established as a part of the 1979 General Plan.

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