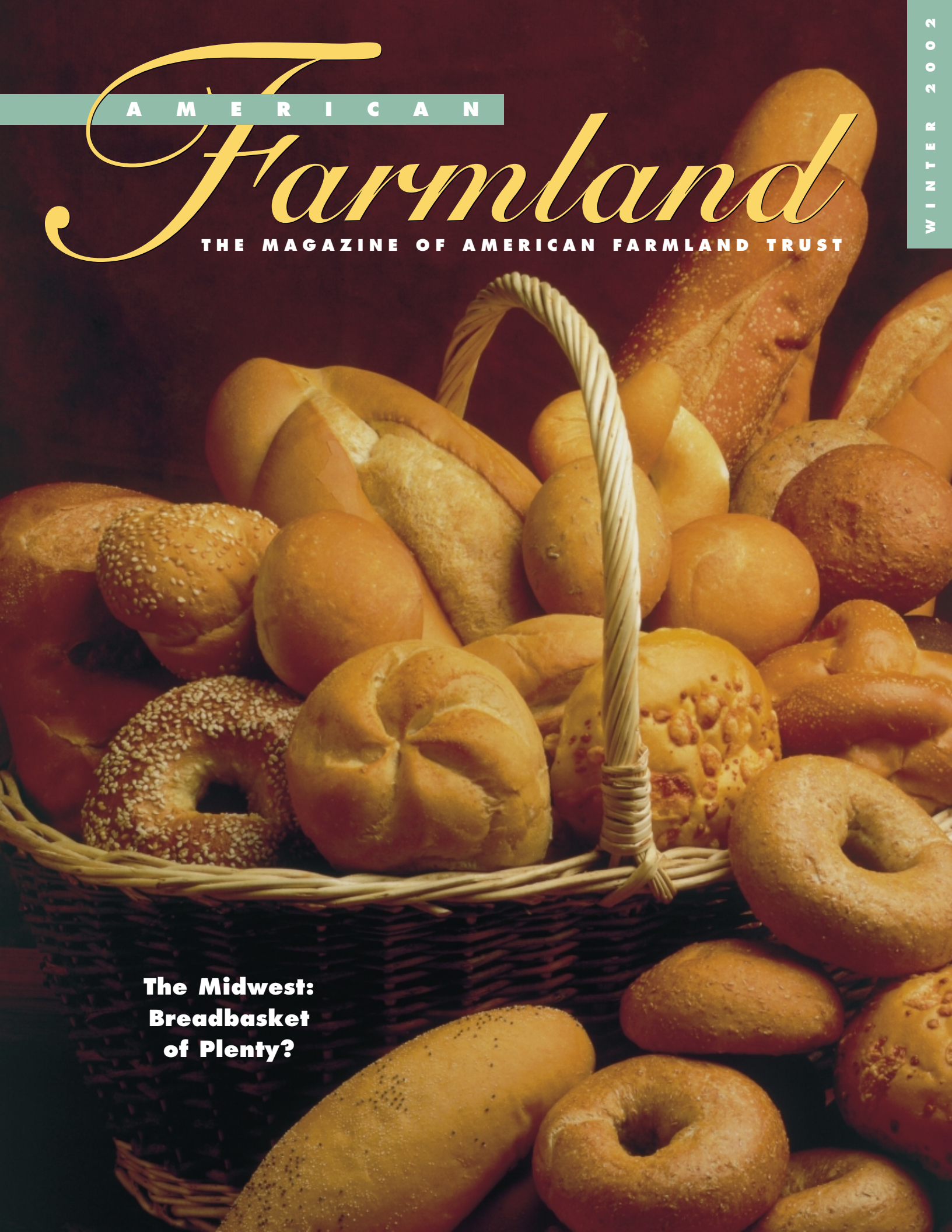


A M E R I C A N

Farmland

THE MAGAZINE OF AMERICAN FARMLAND TRUST

W I N T E R 2 0 0 2



**The Midwest:
Breadbasket
of Plenty?**

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is published four times a year by American Farmland Trust, a private, nonprofit membership organization founded in 1980 to protect the nation's agricultural resources. AFT works to stop the loss of productive farmland and to promote farming practices that lead to a healthy environment.

Basic annual membership dues are \$20. Membership benefits include a year's subscription to the award-winning magazine, *American Farmland*, and a 10-percent discount on all AFT publications and merchandise. Membership contributions are tax deductible to the extent provided by law.

AFT occasionally exchanges its membership mailing list with others. If you wish to be excluded from such exchanges, call Member Services at (202) 331-7300.

A copy of AFT's most recent financial report can be obtained by writing to American Farmland Trust, 1200 18th St. NW, Suite 800, Washington, DC 20036.

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FROM THE PRESIDENT



It would have been nice to be reporting to you that Congress had passed, and the President had signed, a new farm bill before leaving town at the end of the year. But fundamental policy differences, the threat of a filibuster and more than a little partisan bickering have left farmers and conservationists wondering what 2002 will bring in the way of farm programs. Will the support for a significant increase in conservation funding that emerged this past year continue to gather momentum? Or, will Congress once again send billions in taxpayer funds to a small percentage of landowners as thousands of others go out of business—leaving sprawling subdivisions in their wake?

Americans deserve more than we get for our investment in farm programs. At a time when the future of our nation is inextricably linked to the diversity and security of our food production system, we should be providing assistance to those farmers most willing to commit to a future in agriculture and to a way of farming that ensures a sustainable balance between the need to feed a growing world population and the natural resources that make it possible. The good news is that all of the farm bill proposals provide for increases to conservation programs, some more than others. As it stands now, the bill passed by the Senate Agriculture Committee is most reflective of the attitudes AFT found in a national voter poll conducted in mid-2001: Americans think farmers receiving federal aid should be required to apply conservation practices, or, those farmers who already do so should receive more of the money.

When the farm bill is finally signed into law by President Bush some time this year, it could very well represent the most dramatic federal commitment to farmland conservation in history. AFT will continue to work with its partners in the conservation coalition to ensure that happens. Hopefully, by the time you read this, the farm bill will be in conference committee, but it's not too late for you to tell your representatives how important the federal Farmland Protection Program is. You can find your representatives listed at www.congress.org. You can read more about the farm bill on page 14, and you can call or e-mail us if you would like more information on how to help.

Ralph Grossi

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C O N T E N T S



JIM NEWTON

F E A T U R E S

9

LAND OF PLENTY?

Saving the Upper Midwest

By Denny Caneff

14

GROWING THE FARM BILL, PART TWO

A member of AFT's policy team talks about shaping a conservation-minded farm bill.

By Tobey Williamson

18

A DICKENS OF A DEAL

Jim Dickens and his family stand up to sprawl by protecting their ranch with an agricultural conservation easement.

By Shirley Kirkpatrick

D E P A R T M E N T S

2

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

4

LETTERS

5

PLOWSHARES

22

ESSAY/RECIPE

Addressing Farm Policy

I know you have a good organization that is concerned with loss of farmland and urban sprawl. I read recently that here in Iowa we have a smaller population than in 1900 but... we have a problem with concentration and sprawl. We used to have small towns with many surrounding farms. Now the small towns around us are closing down—no school, no grocery store or gas station, etc. Why hasn't AFT addressed the issue of farm policy that has resulted in the loss of family farms and the closing down of small towns? It seems to me unless we do, we are accepting the idea that industrialized agriculture and urban sprawl is the logical form of economic development for our country.

George
Via e-mail

AFT Responds: Your question—"Why hasn't AFT addressed the issue of farm policy that has resulted in the loss of family farms and the closing down of small towns?"—actually goes straight to the heart of what AFT has been doing for 21 years. We work at the local, state and federal levels to identify and correct policies that encourage the paving over of America's best farmland.

Helping communities plan for and protect their farmland is one of AFT's key strategies. We run workshops, train agricultural personnel, provide fiscal analysis tools and use other means to try to give the full picture of what farmland loss means to communities—fiscally, socially and societally.

Changing policy at the federal level is a complex and slow process. We've had some big successes: we got farmland

protection included in the 1996 Farm Bill, for example. Now the fight is on for the current farm bill. You can read about it on page 14.

When Will We Learn?

We are such fools. How stupid to rid America of our dedicated farmers, who give us good healthy produce. Imported produce: one does not know how or what it is grown in, and pesticides worry me. When will we ever learn?

Vera Yeager
Chesterfield, Missouri

Please send letters to Christina Soto, Editor, American Farmland Trust, 1200 18th Street NW, Suite 800, Washington, DC 20036, or send an e-mail to her at csoto@farmland.org.

Protect Your Farm for the Future ...Plan for Retirement Now

"It would have broken our hearts to see the land subdivided," says Charles Yeiser about his two farms outside Cincinnati. So as his legacy, Yeiser and his late wife Mary donated the farms to American Farmland Trust. "The advantage was tax savings and being able to enjoy the farms for the rest of our lives," says Yeiser. When the estate passes to AFT, the property will be sold, protected by a conservation easement to assure it remains farmland forever. The money generated will help AFT protect more farmland.

AFT works with landowners and their financial advisors to develop customized ways to create retirement income, generate tax savings, and protect the land. To find out how AFT can help, call or send the coupon below to:

Myra Lenburg

American Farmland Trust, 1 Short Street, Northampton, MA 01060

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Conference Offers Ways to Protect Urban-Edge Farms

More than 250 elected officials, community planners, agricultural and natural resource conservation professionals, concerned citizens, farmers, ranchers and others gathered in November 2001, for American Farmland Trust's first *Farming on the Edge: Conservation, Community & Commerce* conference. Held in St. Charles, Illinois, the conference brought together a wide variety of stakeholders to discuss practical solutions for saving agricultural land at the edge of increasingly urbanizing communities.

"People are beginning to recognize that farmland protection isn't just saving acres of farms. It's part of community plans and part of smart growth. The real action on this issue is taking place in commu-

nities around the country," said AFT President Ralph Grossi during his opening remarks.

Over 35 workshops were offered, ranging from case studies on land preservation to new land protection tools. Nancy Pisicchio, a councilwoman for the Hawaii County Council, attended workshops in search of farmland protection tools to use in her community. "Land management is a challenge on an island, and protecting agricultural lands is critical to survival of many Hawaiian industries," she said. "I felt that the conference was an excellent step in terms of pairing farmland protection with urban development. In the end, it all boils down to addressing how we use our land." Pisicchio was particularly impressed with what she learned about the state of Maryland and the steps it has taken towards achieving smart growth.

The conference was designed to provide practical solutions that help participants save land, stop sprawl and strengthen agriculture. People like James Tillman illustrate how the conference spread its message. Tillman, an assistant state conservationist for Natural Resources Conservation Service in Texas, left the conference with new land protection contacts around the country and an

appreciation for the importance of community partnerships. "As a result of this conference, we plan to strengthen our partnerships with various farmland conservation organizations to increase the number of Texas farmers and ranchers able to permanently protect their land."

Will Rogers, one of the keynote speakers and president of The Trust for Public Land, told attendees that this generation will not be remembered for what it has built, but rather, for what it has protected. Gauging enthusiasm of participants like Tillman and Pisicchio, *Farming on the Edge* has indeed played a small part in ensuring that this generation will be remembered for the latter.

—Jessica Love

@ At www.farmland.org you can find a complete list of conference sponsors. Click on the "2001 National Conference" button.

Study Helps Farmers Plan Their Future

Planning for the future of the family farm is one of the most difficult challenges agricultural landowners will face over the next 30 years. In California's Central Valley, population growth, urbanization pressure and uncertainty over access to water have left many with the impression that the future of the Golden State's leading agricultural region is inevitably urban.

Few farmers in the Central Valley, the number one most threatened agricultural area in

the country, have developed concrete, long-term investment or retirement plans that fully tap their land's agricultural potential. Instead, many decisions regarding retirement or farm investments are being made—or avoided altogether—based on a vague sense that the push for urban development will provide a major financial windfall 20 or 25 years into the future.

Not every farm, however, is a winning ticket in the development "lottery," says a new study by American Farmland Trust, funded by the Great Valley Center. *Winning the Development "Lottery": A Landowner's Guide to Agricultural Conservation Easements and the Development Potential of Farmland in California's Central Valley* finds that, while some farmland is clearly in the path of urban development and will command high prices in the future, more than 75 percent of the Central Valley's agricultural land cannot realistically be expected to develop to urban uses within the next 40 years.

For farmers and ranchers who own land within or near the edge of their community's development horizon, selling an agricultural conservation easement offers another option to selling for development. By compensating landowners for the development value of their property, this tool can be effective in securing personal financial goals while also ensuring agriculture's future in the Central Valley.

"The objective of the study was to evaluate whether selling an agricultural conservation easement is truly a market-



PAUL T. MCMAHON

based alternative to selling land for development,” says Greg Kirkpatrick, AFT land protection representative in California. AFT gathered data concerning land markets and growth patterns in six Central Valley communities to understand development potential over the next 40 years. It also developed an economic analysis tool for comparing the returns of investing proceeds from an easement sale against the speculative return that might be expected from selling land for development at some point in the future.

The results of the analysis were used to develop criteria for landowners to use in evaluating the development potential of their own property and planning for the future of their farm or ranch. Several case studies are presented that demonstrate circumstances in which selling agricultural conservation easements did provide a better return on investment and greater liquidity as opposed to selling for development. These criteria can be used by landowners to guide them in making individual decisions or as a means of working with a local land trust or conservation organization to develop a conservation strategy that meets landowner needs.

“Making unreasonable assumptions regarding a farm’s attractiveness for development may make poor use of a farm’s equity,” says Kirkpatrick. “And as more Central Valley communities develop clear, publicly available land use plans, *relying* on those assumptions becomes an unnecessary risk.”

By contrast, he says, landowners who take the time

to determine where their particular property fits within their community’s long-range plans for growth will be ahead of the game. “Acquiring this information takes some amount of initiative, but it will prepare farmers and ranchers to make informed investment decisions that realize the potential of their most valuable asset: their land.”

—Christina Soto

To obtain a copy of the study, contact Greg Kirkpatrick at AFT’s Southern San Joaquin Valley Field Office at (559) 627-3708.

Local Planning Engenders Positive Change

One sometimes-overlooked factor in the farmland protection equation is effective planning on the part of cities, towns and communities to protect their farmland. Paul Farmer, executive director of the American Planning Association, recently spoke at AFT’s *Farming on the Edge* conference: “Futures can be chosen; they are not inevitable. The planning story is about bringing about positive change. Good planning protects resource lands while building better communities within the areas that have been designated for growth.”

The American Planning Association (APA) knows a good plan when it sees one. APA is a nonprofit public interest and research organization representing 30,000 practicing planners, officials and citizens involved with urban and rural planning issues. Sixty-five percent of APA’s members are

Policy Roundup

Results of November Ballot Initiatives

This past November, ballot measures in many jurisdictions around the country proposed increased funding for farm and ranch land protection. Following the trend in recent years, funding for working lands was interspersed with a range of other conservation purposes in many initiatives. Highlights from this year’s farmland protection measures appear below.

Statewide, Colorado voters approved Referendum A, authorizing Great Outdoors Colorado to issue bonds for \$115 million in land conservation funding, including agricultural land protection. While the state lottery generates significant annual funding for these purposes, the funding stream has not kept pace with increasing demand for conservation funds. Bonding authority allows access to those future revenues now, before important conservation resources are lost or become prohibitively expensive.

Fifty-three local ballot measures throughout New Jersey asked voters to raise taxes or issue bonds to generate conservation funding. These local initiatives provide matching funds for state efforts such as the farmland preservation program and Green Acres, a parks and recreation land conservation program. Among these, 17 initiatives included money for farmland protection (among other purposes) in counties with established County Agriculture Development Boards. These boards are state-authorized entities that administer a variety of farmland protection efforts, including the bulk of agricultural conservation easement purchases.

Nearly two-thirds of voters in the towns of Easthampton and Southold in New York approved bond issues for open space acquisition and farmland protection efforts. Located in Suffolk County, the two towns authorized \$5 and \$2 million in bonds, respectively.

On October 23, the Suffolk County Legislature voted overwhelmingly to borrow against revenue from a tax increase approved in last year’s election. The \$63 million bond issue will generate \$21 million for the county’s farmland protection efforts.

Upcoming Legislation Needs Your Support

AFT is actively pursuing legislation to strengthen agricultural businesses and farmland protection in Virginia. The Virginia Agricultural Vitality Program, passed in the 2000 General Assembly session, will send money directly to localities for farmland protection and develop a farm transition program called Virginia FarmLink, to aid in the transfer of farms and farm businesses from one generation to the next. If you’d like to learn more about the Virginia Agricultural Vitality Program and our efforts to strengthen it, please con-

tact Allison Deets at (540) 829-5220 or e-mail adeets@farmland.org.

In California, AFT needs your help to ensure a vital new source of funding for farmland protection is passed this coming March. Proposition 40 will give critical farmland protection efforts in California a much-needed boost. If passed by the voters on March 5, Proposition 40 will provide a record \$75 million for agricultural preservation. These funds will help purchase easements from willing sellers to protect some of the most threatened farmland in the country from development. If you want to help pass Proposition 40, please contact AFT in California at (530) 753-1073.

Work Begins on Ohio PACE Program

In Ohio, AFT is spearheading the education effort for the state's new purchase of agricultural conservation easements (PACE) program. AFT's Field Representative Jill Clark is managing a team of seven experts from Ohio State University, Otterbein College, the Center for Farmland Preservation and the Ohio Department of Agriculture to develop a guidebook and run training statewide.

PDR Makes its Way onto Political Agenda in Texas

On November 5, the Texas Speaker's office issued charges for interim studies to the various committees of the Texas Legislature. The Land and Natural Resources Committee received the charge to study farmland loss, urban sprawl and how a purchase of development rights program might work for Texas. This is a major milestone for AFT in light of our work with then Governor George W. Bush's Task Force on Conservation. AFT's conservation recommendations emphasizing the "need to purchase development rights on farm and ranch land to preserve wildlife habitat and open space" apparently reached the right ears.

Kudos to Pennsylvania

Through the Pennsylvania Farmland Preservation Board, the state has protected 1,785 farms totaling 215,243 acres in 53 counties, leading the nation in farmland protection (numbers as of December 2001). The board purchases development rights, protecting farms from development or commercial encroachment and preserving them for future generations. Agriculture Secretary Sam Hayes said in a press release: "The preservation of... farms will help maintain the quality of life of our farm families, and will ensure that agriculture in Pennsylvania remains vibrant and continues its substantial contribution to the state's economy." In February 2001, AFT presented then Governor Tom Ridge and the state of Pennsylvania with a national achievement award for farmland protection.

—*Jesse Robertson-DuBois, Joan Deely, Allison Deets,
Peter Moyes*

employed by state and local government agencies. These members are involved, on a day-to-day basis, in formulating planning policies and preparing land use regulations.

Each year, APA honors excellence in planning through its National Planning Awards. Winners range from the plans themselves to the individuals and organizations that create them. Select past winners exhibit how solid planning can further the cause of farmland protection.

In March 2001, the Village of Arlington Heights' (Illinois) Department of Planning & Community Development was awarded the 2001 Outstanding Planning Award for Implementation. In carrying out a central business master plan adopted in 1987, the village achieved a long-term comprehensive revitalization project for a once-deteriorating downtown. Now the area boasts of more than \$200 million in new development within the last several years, including 600 new residential units, the Metropolis Performing Arts Center, a major cinema complex and the development of the village's \$4.7 million mixed-use train station. The village pursued the creation of a pedestrian and transit-oriented community, with major investments in infrastructure, construction of new parking garages, expansion of green spaces, improvement of streetscapes and adoption of design guidelines to retain the historic image of Arlington Heights for the future.

"Arlington Heights provides such a successful, and highly transferable, model of downtown redevelopment for

other communities," said Bruce Knight, chair of APA's Awards Jury.

This type of downtown revitalization can be used as an effective farmland protection tool when coupled with active policies that curtail sprawl and a commitment on the part of the community to identify and protect its best farmland. The U.S. Conference of Mayors, with whom AFT partners, has resolved to "strongly encourage federal and state governments to work with mayors and farmers to further implement smart growth policies and programs that encourage development in existing urban centers and better protect the nation's urban-influenced farmland."

Another type of plan that more directly supported farmland protection won APA's 2000 Outstanding Planning Award for a Project/Program/Tool. Planners in Hancock County, Maine, helped local food growers and small woodlot owners develop niche markets, showcasing how communities can find new ways to strengthen their local economies.

More than 20 restaurants in the county participate in the locally grown foods program, which began in 1995 with the help of a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Two years later, the county got its low-impact forestry program started. In 1999, the county received a grant from the Ford Foundation to help increase cooperation among the areas' small woodlot owners. The Planning Commission then assembled an initial group of 40 landowners for "green certification" through the National Wildlife Federation's Smart Wood Program, to bring

higher value to the area's wood products.

Ron Poitras, project coordinator with the Hancock County Planning Commission, said, "Through the program, we have increased the local sales of locally grown foods and helped develop value-added markets for wood products. This is helping the county keep more dollars circulating within the local economy."

The program is also providing a reason for property owners not to develop agricultural and forest land, said Evan Richert, director of the Maine State Planning Office of the American Institute of Certified Planners. "If we are to avoid sprawl and provide open space, landowners need to have an incentive to keep their land in production in an environmentally responsible way," he said. "As residents see farmland being actively used, they are inspired to buy locally grown products and support the effort to protect local farmland."

You can help protect farmland in your area. Find out if your community, town or city has a plan to protect area farmland and let American Farmland Trust know about it.

@ In April, APA's national conference will include workshops on land protection. For information on the conference and on APA's National Planning Awards, go to www.planning.org.

Grossi Named Man of the Year

Progressive Farmer magazine has named AFT President Ralph Grossi 2002 Man of the Year in Service to Agriculture. With a circulation of more than 600,000, *Progressive Farmer* is the largest single farm publication in the U.S.

"It is because of your steady leadership of an organization which we feel serves well the interests of rural America that you have been

chosen for our highest recognition," wrote *Progressive Farmer* Editor Jack Odle in a letter to Grossi. An original board member of American Farmland Trust, Grossi has led the organization since becoming president in 1985.

In accepting the annual award, Grossi joins the ranks of groundbreaking agricultural scientists, farm organization leaders, legislators and government officials who have been featured on the pages of *Progressive Farmer* for the past 65 years.

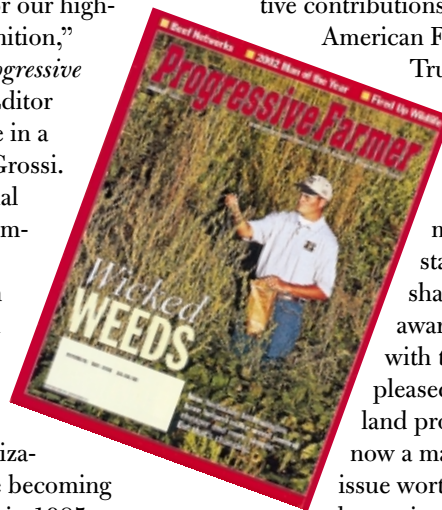
"I am pleased that *Progressive Farmer* recognizes both the difficult land use challenges that America's farmers face, and the construc-

tive contributions that American Farmland Trust is making toward solutions," said Grossi. In an e-mail to AFT staff, Grossi shared the award's honor with them: "I am pleased that farmland protection is now a mainstream issue worthy of national attention, and proud

that AFT is recognized as the national leader that has helped to make it possible. I share this award with each of you who work every day to make it happen. Congratulations to AFT!"

Grossi will accept the award at a ceremony in Washington, D.C. An article about him appeared in the January issue of *Progressive Farmer* and on the Web at www.progressivefarmer.com.

—Robyn Miller



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Land of Plenty?

Saving the Upper Midwest

By Denny Caneff

Stand in the middle of a hayfield in western Minnesota and you feel like you can see to South Dakota. Pause in a pasture in the hills of southern Wisconsin and marvel at the many shades of green in this cow-dotted landscape. Stop at a country crossroads in central Illinois, surrounded by a sea of corn undulating in the humid breeze—it feels like this is all there is in the world.

This is the Upper Midwest, the quintessential Heartland, the “breadbasket” that feeds America.

The productivity of the land is palpable; “feeding the world” does not seem an idle boast here. This expansive landscape awes you in the same way that it awed and humbled the European immigrants who came to tame it. It’s a raw and simple but beautiful landscape—a beauty embodied in the people who live here and reflected in the paintings of artists such as John Stuart Curry and Grant Wood. Their depictions of Midwestern rural life not only captured the hues and shapes of the landscape, but brought into clear focus how land and people have shaped each other in the Midwest.

From that pasture in Wisconsin or that crossroads in Illinois, you could get the impression that this landscape is timeless and unthreatened. But drive toward the region’s big metropolitan areas—Chicago, the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Milwaukee—and the battle of farmland vs. suburbia comes into view. Huge tracts of single-family homes, sprawling shopping malls, office parks and car lots stretch for up to 50 miles beyond the core cities, right up against the farms that define the region.

Real estate experts and economists would call this consumption of farmland “highest and best use,” as market forces place higher value on land for growing houses than for growing crops. They might call this an inevitable transition out of an old economy and toward a more highly

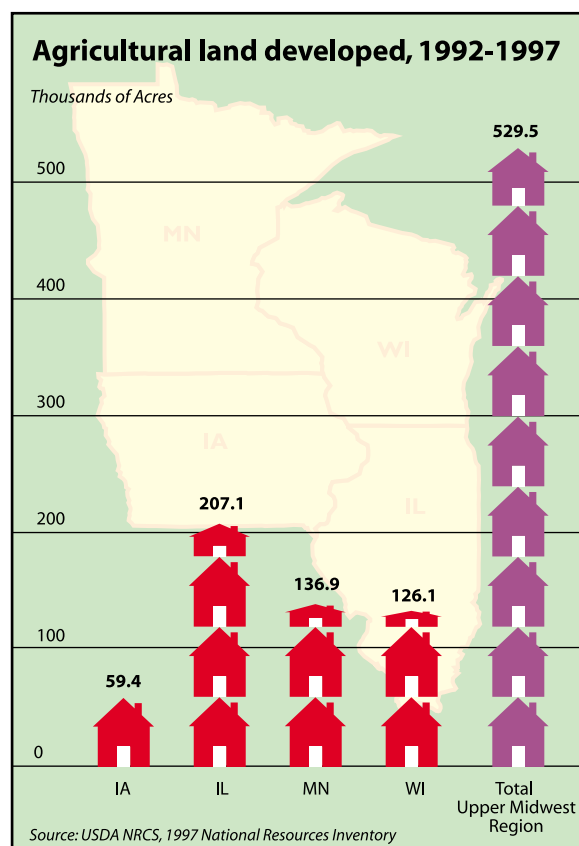
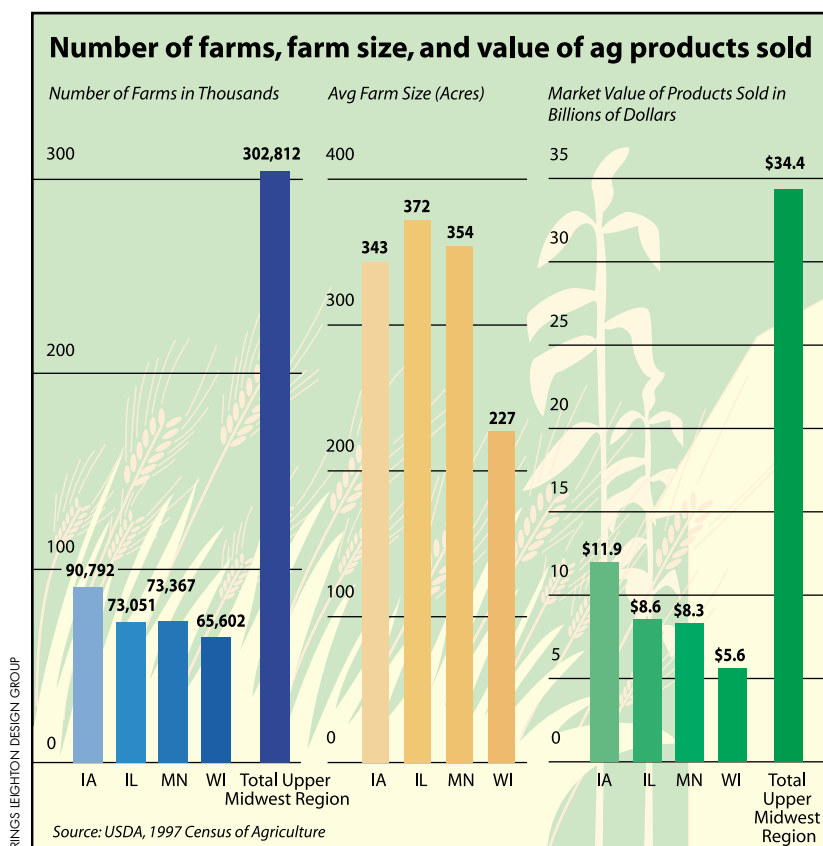
urbanized one, driven, so to speak, by the automobile. Midwesterners nonetheless lament the loss of farmland. They recognize the loss as a menace to the region’s heritage, a scar on a landscape to which they are deeply attached. And they wonder, how long will the breadbasket stay full?

Loving It to Death

Paradoxically, Midwesterners’ attachment to their landscape might be the land’s greatest threat. They may be loving it to death. This trend has been quantified in a study by the Solimar Institute that shows that Midwestern land use patterns are among the most wasteful in the country. This ravenous appetite for land was foreshadowed by American Farmland Trust five years ago, when its “Farming on the Edge” study identified the prime farmland of northeastern Illinois and southeastern Wisconsin as the country’s third most threatened by development.

This “love it to death” paradox comes in part from the fact that many Midwesterners grew up with a lot of space around them. They bring that tradition and appetite for space into their suburban neighborhoods, where they build big houses on half-acre lots surrounded by large expanses of grass.

This appetite for open space translates into other land



consumption patterns. Families and vacationers building second homes and developers putting up resort condominiums reflect the region's traditional urge for space and for access to the glaciers' gift to this region: fresh, clean water. But this particular appetite also represents a sobering challenge to the region's farmers as the new residents drive up land values, choke the roads with cars, and complain about manure smells wafting over their holiday picnics. And this is nowhere near any big city.

AFT Joins the Fight

Getting Midwesterners to change their land consumption patterns is one of many challenges on the agenda of AFT's Upper Midwest Regional Office in Verona, Wisconsin. But there are organizations, elected officials, farmers, landowners and professional conservationists in the region ready to work with AFT to apply sound land stewardship to land use decisions across the region.

For example, AFT is partnering with the Ozaukee Washington Land Trust to educate landowners and township officials in Washington County, on the suburban fringe of Milwaukee, about how protecting farmland for agriculture can be cheaper in the long run than developing land for houses. And AFT has been hired by two counties in northern Illinois to help them find options for protecting their farmland. In part because of the technical assistance that AFT provided, one of those counties, Kane, created the first county-based farmland protection program in Illinois. Janice Hill, a Kane County planner, says that the county is just a couple of months away from permanently protecting several hundred acres of farmland. She also just received good news: Governor George Ryan's office notified her in December that the farmland protection program was selected to receive an Illinois Tomorrow Award, given to programs and projects that support balanced growth.

AFT has discovered, through its work with communities like Kane County, that saving farmland on a large scale requires the commitment of a whole community—elected officials, farmers, citizens, planners. But protecting farms one at a time provides demonstration projects that both teach others how to do the same and show farmers that they have options for saving their land. The Upper Midwest Regional Office is working with four landowners in west-central Minnesota, all of whom are donating conservation easements to permanently protect their farmland. Scott Johnston, an attorney who is donating an easement for a farm he owns plus representing two other landowners

doing the same, calls himself “an old North Dakota farm kid who grew up with the value that we shouldn't cut farmland up for development. It's why I want to save this land.”

“No More”

Because of their proximity to farmland, it's not a stretch for most Midwesterners to see the connections between farmland and food. In a recent national survey, AFT found that a majority of urbanites in the Midwest have bought food directly from a farmer in the last year. The survey also found that the Midwest supports federal funding to protect farmland more strongly than any other region of the country.

One typical Midwestern sensibility is that paving over farmland is simply wasteful, an affront to that ingrained Midwestern value of thrift. This value doesn't come any more eloquently than from the soul of Ed Klessig, octogenarian dairy farmer, patriarch of Saxon Homestead Farm, in Manitowoc County, Wisconsin, and a member of American Farmland Trust.

“We're treating our farmland like dirt,” he says, “rather than the precious, irreplaceable resource that it is. People didn't connect the availability of food and farmland, but they're starting to see that now. I'm so glad American Farmland Trust is teaching people about this.”

Klessig has always “gotten it.” Though no big cities threaten Saxon Homestead Farm, Klessig clearly understood back in the mid-1970s how a proposed interstate highway might harm farmland in his area. He took his grievance against Interstate 43 to the state capital, where he camped out for nearly a month—complete with a few heifers grazing on the Capitol lawn—to protest what he saw as an assault on not just land, but on his and other farmers' values and principles.

The interstate was eventually built, and now shuttles travelers to Wisconsin's Door Peninsula on Lake Michigan—Chicagoans' version of “up north,” where fruit and dairy agriculture have almost completely succumbed to golf courses and tourist development. I-43's concrete course through eastern Wisconsin has brought the usual land use patterns associated with a big highway, and there are constant threats to the farmland in Ed Klessig's community. The highway's impacts have also acted as reminders about what can happen if at some point you don't say, “No more.” Local officials recently denied a proposal for a 60-acre paintball complex amidst the dairy farms, where urbanites would have flocked to shoot paint at each other.



Ed and Margret Klessig were married beneath the black walnut tree, seen over Margret's left shoulder, in 1941. The tree was planted in 1860 when the farm was homesteaded.

Above right: John Conzemius with his son, Mike.

Putting Programs to Work

If you ask them, Midwesterners will not only say, “Save the farmland,” but will indicate they are even willing to pay more in property taxes to save it, as recent citizen surveys in Washington and Dakota counties (Minnesota) indicated. Not only have they said so, they’ve actually paid to save farmland in Peninsula Township, Michigan, the first community in the Upper Midwest to put a purchase of development rights program in place; and in the town of Dunn, near Madison, Wisconsin, whose residents have approved a tax increase and a bond issue in the past five years to permanently protect farmland.

The residents of three Illinois counties—McHenry, DeKalb and Kane—surveyed by AFT four years ago, showed the same inclination, saying they were willing to pay up to \$500 more per year over five years to save farmland in their communities. Kane County has answered the call, recently instituting a purchase of development rights program, in which Kane County farmland owners can be compensated for agreeing not to develop or subdivide their farmland. Kane County planners and elected officials encapsulated the many values that come into play with saving farmland in the region. Their 1996 land use plan refers to the “stable economy,” “valued livelihood and way of life,” “private open space and its rural aesthetics,” and “environmental benefits” of farming and agriculture. And they put real wheels under those values with their new farmland protection program.

If he has his way, John Conzemius will make the same thing happen in his area. Conzemius brings a potent combination of heartfelt passion and hardheaded Midwestern pragmatism to his crusade to protect farmland in the Twin Cities region of Minneapolis-St. Paul. Operating a cash grain and livestock farm on the urban fringe, he is well placed to make things happen for farmland protection as the only farmer-member of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Council, a regional land use planning organization. AFT’s Upper Midwest Regional Office is working with a local consulting firm and a committee of the Metropolitan Council, of which Conzemius is a member, to determine what farmland to protect in the sprawling Twin Cities area, how, and at what cost.

Conzemius can reel off several practical, nuts and bolts reasons for protecting farmland on the urban edge, but in a way that evokes another Midwestern sensibility—neighborliness. It’s not just self-interest on his part: he sees the benefits that protecting farmland affords other people and



MITCH KEZAR

organizations—for example, hunters and fishers who appreciate the open space and habitat, and residents who want locally produced food.

“And I think of the school kids who would have to travel 30 miles round trip to school every day if we have people putting houses up all over the countryside. Who wants that for their kids,” he asks, “or what school district wants that expense?”

People will support farmland protection, Conzemius insists, and they may not even know of all the reasons why. One interesting example he cites demonstrates how urban life and agriculture can complement each other: municipal water treatment plants want farmland nearby to use the large quantities of lime the plants generate from the water softening process. A byproduct of urban life becomes a useful resource for farmers.

Efforts by John Conzemius and others like him, from planners to elected officials to land conservationists, will decide the fate of America’s breadbasket as the circle comes around toward Midwesterners saving the land they love. ❧

@ To contact the Upper Midwest Regional Office, call (608) 848-7000 or e-mail Denny Caneff at dcaneff@farmland.org. Also read about the regional work at www.farmland.org/regions/upperMW/.



Growing the Farm Bill (Part two)

A member of AFT's policy team
talks about shaping a
conservation-minded farm bill.

by Tobey Williamson



PHOTOS THIS PAGE: VALESKA POPULOH

Since last spring, American Farmland Trust has been busy cultivating what is turning out to be a bumper crop—and in the nation’s capital, of all places. It comes in the form of the farm bill approved by the Senate Agriculture Committee on November 15, that if approved by the full Congress, would provide upwards of \$1 billion for the federal Farmland Protection Program over the next five years.

For years, AFT has worked steadily to advance the goal of agricultural land protection at the state and local levels nationwide. Meanwhile, we were hopeful that these successful local and state purchase of agricultural conservation easement programs, which have spent more than \$1.7 billion to purchase easements since the mid 70s, were also planting seeds that would eventually grow into a federal program that would provide matching funds.

The creation of the federal Farmland Protection Program in the 1996 Farm Bill was evidence that those seeds had begun to germinate. But it was clear that this was only the beginning, since the \$35 million appropriated for the first five years of the program, though quite substantial, could not begin to meet farmer demand nor the growing threat of development. The pending commitment by the Senate of \$1.75 billion would be a significant step towards satisfying the increasing interest in the sale of conservation easements. This is especially true because state and local governments as well as land trusts nationwide could use these federal matching funds to leverage at least an equal amount of public and private money. The movement to protect farmland would rise to new heights. In fact, federal funding at the level proposed by the Senate, combined with an equal amount of state and local funding, would double the amount of public funding spent to date on preserving farmland threatened by sprawl.

Key USDA Conservation Programs in the Farm Bill

Farmland Protection Program (FPP)

- ✦ Provides cost-share funds for state and local farmland protection programs.
- ✦ Has protected 70,380 acres and 364 farms.
- ✦ Initially leveraged more than \$230 million in state and local funding.
- ✦ Demand for FPP funds by farmers exceeds supply by 600 percent.

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

- ✦ Pays farmers to take highly erodible land out of production for 10 to 15 years.
- ✦ Almost 34 million acres enrolled as of fall 2001.
- ✦ Erosion reduced from 21 to 2 tons per acre on enrolled lands.
- ✦ USDA estimates that the benefits in habitat and water quality are worth \$1 billion annually.

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)

- ✦ Enhances CRP by authorizing higher payments for environmentally sensitive land.
- ✦ Participation increases in "key" states because states with higher land values can now enroll sensitive lands in the program.

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)

- ✦ Restores drained wetlands and protects them with permanent or 30-year easements.
- ✦ 1,074,245 acres enrolled as of September 30, 2001.
- ✦ The program has reached its acreage cap and awaits an increase in the new farm bill.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

- ✦ Provides cost-share funding for conservation practices.
- ✦ Livestock water pollution problems take 50 percent of funds.
- ✦ Program is oversubscribed by a 5 to 1 margin.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)

- ✦ Private lands provide 80 percent of America's wildlife habitat; WHIP helps landowners restore wildlife habitat.
- ✦ Program includes 10,729 contracts on 1.6 million acres as of September 30, 2001.
- ✦ The current funding level for WHIP is inadequate.

The funding levels for federal conservation programs currently awaiting action at press time by the full Senate were by no means a foregone conclusion at the beginning of the farm bill debate. As the first article in this series went to press, action in the House of Representatives was in high gear. Though Senate actions are what the conservation community is currently focused on, the groundwork laid in the House by AFT in conjunction with a coalition of conservation organizations was crucial to the success anticipated in the Senate. Faced with a bill passed by the House Agriculture Committee that shortchanged conservation programs in favor of increases in payments to support commodity crops, the coalition rallied behind an amendment offered by Representatives Boehlert (R-N.Y.), Kind (D-Wis.), Gilchrest (R-Md.) and Dingell (D-Mich.). Though this amendment failed by a narrow margin (200 to 226) in its attempt to shift funds away from recipients of the largest commodity payments to pay for drastically under-funded conservation programs, it succeeded in proving that there was significant interest in reforming farm policy so it promotes private land stewardship.

One of the most resonant arguments for shifting funds from commodity programs to voluntary, incentive-based conservation programs was that the latter benefit all regions of the country more equitably. Many of the 200 bi-partisan representatives who voted for the Boehlert-Kind amendment did so because they realized that conservation programs benefit their home districts more than the business-as-usual commodity approach to agricultural policy. This is because more farmers in more regions are eligible for conservation programs than for commodity payments. Any farmer, regardless of the crops he or she grows, can apply for the voluntary programs that preserve land from development, restore and protect wetlands, enhance wildlife habitat and improve water quality. In contrast, the vast majority of commodity crops eligible for federal support are cultivated most successfully in only a few regions of the country, leaving producers of much of the food we eat without equal access to federal support payments.

Despite the clarity of this message, time ran out before the coalition could build the necessary momentum in the House to reform the farm bill in favor of conservation and regional equity. On October 5, the House of Representatives passed a \$170 billion, 10-year farm bill (H.R. 2646) that includes only \$35 billion (20 per-



son with the House version. AFT has endorsed S.1731, which is championed by Senators Harkin (D-Iowa) and Daschle (D-S.D.), the chair of the

cent) for conservation programs, while spending \$120 billion (70 percent) on commodity payments. The other 10 percent of the funds are spent on forestry, research, nutrition, credit, trade, rural development and other miscellaneous programs.

While the House version of the farm bill increases spending on conservation over previous years, AFT and other conservation organizations are not satisfied. Solid proof exists, in the form of backlogged applications, that the demand for these growing programs already far outpaces the modest funding increases. For instance, though the backlog of applications for the federal Farmland Protection Program totals \$255 million, with demand projected to continue growing, H.R. 2646 would fund it at only \$50 million per year. The House farm bill provides other conservation programs with similarly small sums compared to their large backlogs and their increasing popularity among farmers (see sidebar opposite page).

Fortunately, the Senate is poised to approve a farm bill (S.1731) that includes greatly improved figures for all conservation programs. On November 15, after extensive negotiations on all titles, the Senate Agriculture Committee reported a farm bill that spends approximately \$44 billion on conservation and approximately \$110 billion on conservation over 10 years. While the Senate bill is actually only authorized over five years, it is budgeted over 10 years to facilitate compari-



Agriculture Committee and the majority leader, respectively.

The Senate reconvened in late January, and once it agrees on its version of farm policy, a House-Senate conference committee will need to be convened to reconcile the differences between the two bills. The work of safeguarding the proposed increases is still far from over, so during the final stages of this legislative process, AFT's policy team will continue to carry the message of conservation to key members of Congress with the same purposeful conviction of a farmer working to get a crop in before the rain. Then, by the time the next issue of this magazine comes to your mailbox, we should have a conser-

vation-minded farm bill that we can celebrate. *✍*

@ To follow progress on the farm bill, go to www.farmland.org/policy/index.htm.

Tobey Williamson is AFT's federal policy program manager.



A DICKENS OF A DEAL

Jim Dickens and his family stand up to sprawl by protecting their ranch with an agricultural conservation easement.

By Shirley Kirkpatrick



A David vs. Goliath drama was played out recently in a small valley of vegetable farms lying between oak-studded hills along California's Central Coast. It pitted the citizens of the Village of Arroyo Grande—population 16,426 on 5.45 square miles—against advocates for runaway development.

The essential ingredient in this conflict is the 40-acre Dixon Ranch on Branch Mill Road, established in 1905. It is the story of a historic farming family's dedication to conservation, their increasing frustration with city hall and their ultimate solution to the age-old battle between bulldozer and plow.

AGRICULTURE PROVIDES ARROYO GRANDE'S economic base, just as it did when the city was first settled. In fact, Arroyo Grande is unique among California cities in that it

contains prime farmland within its borders. But the same conditions that encourage year-round production of high value crops—rich soil, mild climate, good water supplies, pollution-free air and stretches of level ground—also encourage commercial and urban development.

In the mid-1990s a building boom was underway in this coastal region midway between Los Angeles and San Francisco. Cities welcomed builders of vast shopping malls, business and industrial parks, golf courses and upscale homes. Arroyo Grande was no exception. It held the distinction of being the fastest growing city in San Luis Obispo County.

Agland preservationists became alarmed. They conducted a citizen survey and discovered most of Arroyo Grande's voters shared their views. A total of 86 percent agreed that the city should protect its viable farmlands. The group

Opposite page: Jim Dickens, at far left, with the Dixon descendents. At right, the original house still stands.

raised \$5,000 in campaign funds and urged Jim Dickens to run for city council. He was 37 years old and the fourth generation member of the Dixon family to live on the ranch. When results of the November 1998 election were tallied, Dickens had garnered the highest number of votes and the citizenry had ousted the city's pro-development majority.

WHEN PATRIARCH AMASA DIXSON arrived on the scene, the center of the township was not far away in the area now being rediscovered and promoted as the Arroyo Grande Historic Village. He recognized the productive value of this land centered in a valley enriched by the flow and occasional flooding of the Arroyo Grande Creek. Included in his \$12,000 purchase was a four-bedroom Victorian home built in 1896 next to a buggy trail that led to farming neighbors up valley.

This was before busy Highway 101, the interstate route linking coastal cities from Mexico to Oregon, cut a swath through the city and dominated the landscape. It was before Lopez Dam, which was built eight miles upstream on the Arroyo Grande Creek to control flooding.

The pace of life quickened for the Dixon family when the U.S. entered World War II. Japanese-American farmers and families who helped work the land were sent to internment camps in 1942. Amasa's son, Gordon Dixon, left his construction business in San Jose and returned to the farm. With him were his wife, Wilma, and two young daughters, Sara and Molly. Gordon farmed the property until his death in 1970. Like his grandson, Jim Dickens, Gordon was a civic leader. He served as a city councilor from 1948-56, including a stint as mayor.

After Gordon's death, the farm property was leased and Wilma Dixon continued to live in the stately

farmhouse. She was a staunch supporter of maintaining the family's agricultural heritage and keeping viable farmlands in the city. Twenty-five years ago, at the age of 76, she went through considerable effort and paperwork to enroll the Dixon Ranch into the Williamson Act—California's land preservation law.

Some cities condemned the Act, but Arroyo Grande chose to embrace it. In her letter of appreciation to the city fathers for their decision, Wilma Dixon wrote, "For as long as it is possible, we wish to keep it [our property] in agriculture. To sell it for any price is not in our thinking.... We hope to keep Dixon Ranch green and uncovered with cement for as long as we live and hope it will continue to be 'The Good Earth.'"

In 1989, Wilma was recognized by Coastal San Luis Resource Conservation District for her leadership role in preserving agriculture.

In the meantime, the Dixon daughters had gone away to college, married and settled in Southern California to raise their families. There were many trips back to the farm for holidays and family gatherings. Sara Dickens and Molly McClanahan inherited the property when their mother died and held it in trust for their six children (three each).

Jim Dickens, youngest of the clan, and his bride, Stephanie, moved into the historic farmstead after their marriage in 1990. Dickens loved living in the historic old home, but was not interested in farming. He was already

well established in his career of working with youth and is now a counselor at Arroyo Grande High School. But the land continues to be productively farmed through a lease arrangement.

Dickens considered himself an outsider to Arroyo Grande politics but he began to hear an undercurrent of discontent from others about the city's pro-development policies. He didn't become personally involved until the city's sprawl threatened the Dixon estate. It hit home when a tract of 43 homes was proposed to replace a walnut orchard just across the road from the farm's western boundary.

"We tried to buy the property but we just couldn't compete with urban development prices," said Dickens. His family spoke out at public hearings, seeking at least some setback, buffer or fence between the homes and the farm. Dickens admits he was naive about city politics, and he soon realized nothing would be done. Today the subdivision is built out with only a two-lane road separating the houses from the farm's vegetable crops.

The final straw came when Dickens learned of a large development looming in the wings. It would be located on the ridge just over the hill adjacent to their property's south side. "The city came after us for one acre they said was for drainage. But I played 'connect-the-dots' in my mind and realized they wanted to cut a road through our



GREG KIRKPATRICK



Housing developments stretch along the western side of the Dixon Ranch.

GREG KIRKPATRICK

property to provide access to the new development.”

Angered, Jim Dickens sought means to protect his family’s historic farmstead. He learned about American Farmland Trust from a friend of his grandmother’s, Ella Honeycutt. A longtime board member of the Coastal San Luis Resource Conservation District, Honeycutt had been honored by AFT in 1987 for her conservation and education efforts. Dickens searched the AFT Web site and contacted Greg Kirkpatrick, AFT’s land protection representative in California.

“Although AFT seldom facilitates protection of farmland in cities, I immediately recognized the Dixon Ranch as a pivotal property that could stem the flow of growth eastward to the many small vegetable farms that stretch out along Arroyo Grande Creek up to the Lopez Reservoir,” said Kirkpatrick. As AFT set in motion the steps necessary to accomplish the conservation easement transfer, Dickens arranged workshops and meetings with neighbors to explain what he was doing. He received overwhelming support from his relatives and, after a change of officials, the city unanimously approved the easement application.

Purchase of the \$550,000 agricultural conservation easement was made possible through grants from the California Farmland Conservancy

Program and the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Farmland Protection Program. The easement is being held and administered by the Coastal San Luis Resource Conservation District.

Reflecting on her mother’s philosophy, Sara Dickens said, “I feel confident we did the right thing.” These sentiments were echoed by her sister Molly McClanahan. Both have fond memories of growing up on the ranch. “We’re hopeful that other farmers in the valley will follow our lead and consider selling agricultural conservation easements,” Sara said. “Together, we can ensure that this land will continue to provide the bountiful harvest that has been such an important part of Arroyo Grande’s history.”


Vard Ikeda is also pleased with the family’s decision. Doing business as Ikeda Bros., Vard, his brother and two cousins are third generation Japanese-American farmers who lease the Dixon Ranch property. “Knowing it will remain in farming forever helps us make solid, long-range business decisions,” he said.


The Ikeda brothers were interned with their parents during World War II. But, according to Vard, they owned a small farm to come back to. Today, the family business owns and leases over 100 acres that help generate the \$26.5 million in gross agriculture income the Arroyo Grande Valley produces annu-

ally. There are still approximately 2,500 fertile acres of land producing strawberries, vegetable crops, seeds and other specialty crops in the valley.

The Dixon heirs praised American Farmland Trust for its help. “AFT was the perfect organization for us to work with,” said Jim Dickens. “It is moderate and not too extreme. We found them to be above board and equitable in their approach.”

He noted the Arroyo Grande general plan had all the right policies to protect agriculture, but those could be changed by a majority vote of the city council on any given Monday night. The city had endorsed Williamson Act participation and adopted a right to farm ordinance. “But the missing ingredient in their farmland protection arsenal was endorsement of agricultural conservation easements,” Dickens continued, “Now, thanks to AFT’s leadership, we have that too.”

The next step, as Dickens sees it, is to get more farmers to take an interest in the process and help to form a local farmland trust to further the work underway in Arroyo Grande. 

 For land protection options, go to www.farmland.org/protect/index.htm.

Shirley Kirkpatrick is a freelance writer specializing in agriculture.

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A Hayloft for the Heart

The following is excerpted from an article published in The New York Times on August 23, 2001. Copyright ©2001 by The New York Times Co. Reprinted by permission.

In March, I moved back to the old family farm in Maryland, a place drenched in memory. My great-grandfather built the house and an early barn in 1890, out of white oak, the front porch and barnyard walls out of stone, pulled by his horse and mule, from the red clay fields. And we grew up on this place, though my father, who knew the drudgery of farm work, got an education and a job in the city. He rented the land to his cousin, so we had all the joys of smoking hams in the old smokehouse and picking peas right out of the field, without having to get up before dawn to milk the cows.

I left at 17 and thought I'd never look back. But there it sat, slumbering in my heart. When my father died of a heart attack in 1991, I would come home to visit my mother. With my friends from New York City, it was easy



VALESKA POPULOH

to build fantasies: organically grown soybeans to feed the voracious tofu market, a farm camp where kids would gather eggs, milk the pet cow and find out where hamburgers and milk and plastic-wrapped sugar snaps come from. But come Sunday, we always went back to the city.

Like many New Yorkers, I managed to keep those visions intact while riding the subway and working in a community garden with other transplants from the country. It was a kind of convenient fantasy that required no commitment or risk...

Now I am 52. I feel like that cartoon woman staring out of the birthday card: I wanted to have children, but I forgot.

So I have come home again, if for no other reason than this place has been sitting on my chest, like some brooding dog, for too many years.

With the help of an architect, Miche Booz, and a builder, Jonathan Herman—local people I found through friends—I am creating a sunny big loft space here in my grandfather's bank barn.

A bank barn has a little hill, or bank, that runs up to great sliding doors, 18 feet high and 9 feet wide, which roll open to allow a wagon piled with hay bales to pull up onto the wide-planked second floor. The animals live in the stables below, which are kept cool by their thick stone walls.

When my grandfather died, we kept his old work team, Kit

Blue Ridge Mountains Cider-Braised Pork

One 4-pound boneless pork loin, tied with twine
4 cups fresh apple cider
Salt and pepper
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
2 shallots or 1 small onion, minced
1 sprig fresh rosemary
1 sprig fresh sage
2 cups chicken or vegetable stock
1/4 cup dried apples
2 fresh apples, washed and cut into 8 wedges
Sprigs of fresh rosemary and sage, as garnish

Pour apple cider into medium saucepan and bring to boil, boiling until cider is reduced to half. Remove from heat and set aside.

Preheat oven to 350°F. Season pork to taste with salt and pepper. Heat oil in sauté pan or metal casserole; brown pork on all sides. Remove pork; sauté shallots and fresh herbs in same pan, stirring until golden. Pour in cider and stock; add dried apples and fresh apples, stirring to combine. Put pork back in casserole, cover and roast in oven for 30 to 50 minutes or until an instant-read thermometer reads 145°F to 150°F.

Lift roast from casserole and put on serving platter; cover with tin foil. To finish sauce, skim off excess fat, bring liquid to boil, and stir and scrape sides of casserole to incorporate all browned bits. Boil until sauce is thick and syrupy. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Pour sauce into sauceboat. Slice pork loin, arrange apples on either side and pour some sauce over it. Garnish with fresh herbs and serve. Serves 6.

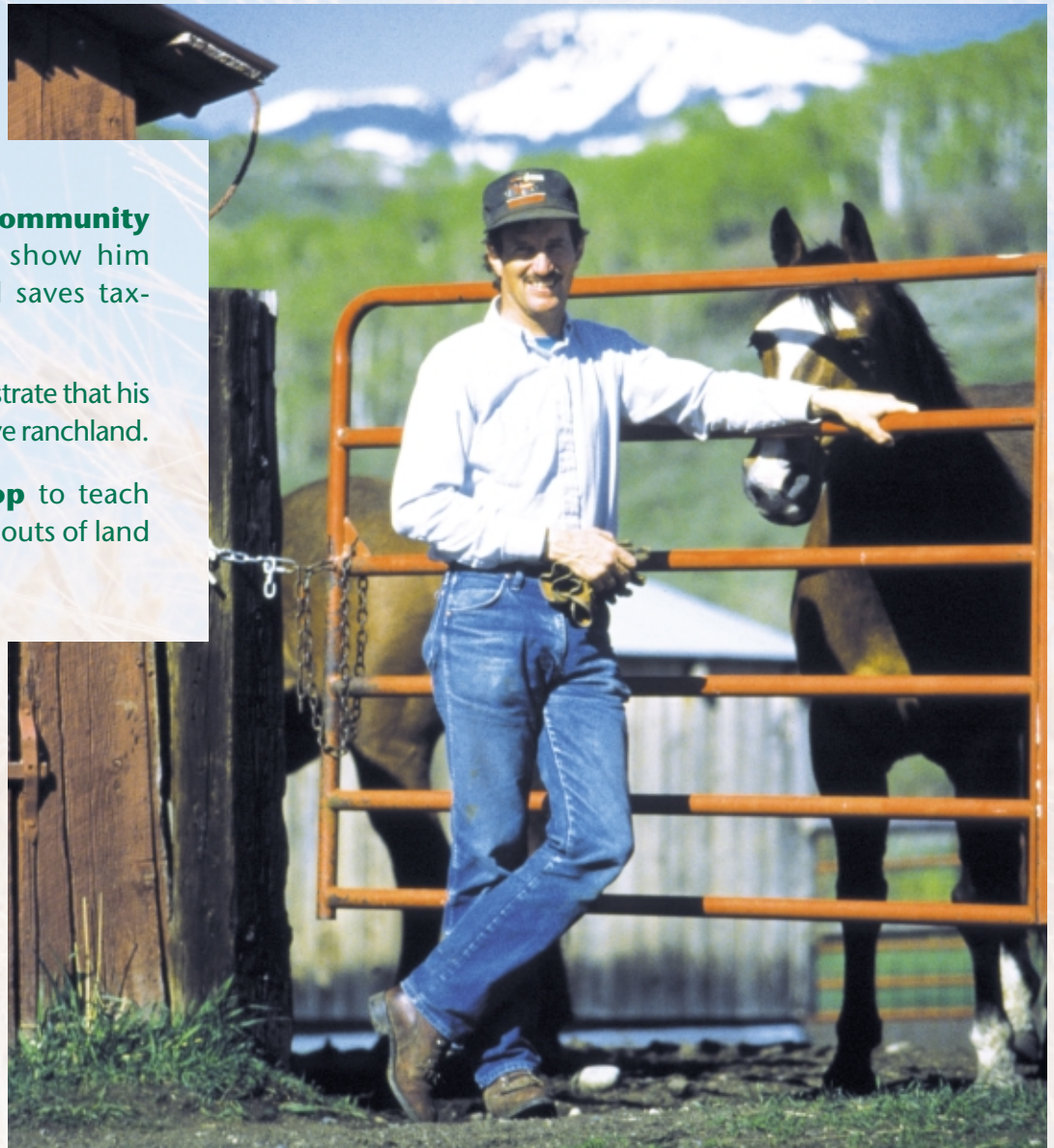
—Ann Harvey Yonkers
Freshfarm Market Manager

and Maud, as pets, and their stalls are worn from their heavy necks leaning over the wooden troughs. Upstairs, my sister Martha and I built tunnels in the hay with my oldest brother, Carroll, who engineered intricate mazes through the bales that led to golden rooms, where dusty shafts of light fell through the cracks between the boards of the walls. We would jump off those cliffs of hay, on a trapeze rigged from a wagon tree and a rope, and swing joyfully past the haze of green trees and fields framed by the great open doors.

—Anne Raver

How can I convince my councilman to save our farms and ranches?

- ▶ Conduct a **Cost of Community Services study** to show him that saving farmland saves taxpayers money.
- ▶ Do a **survey** to demonstrate that his constituents want to save ranchland.
- ▶ Organize a **workshop** to teach him about the ins and outs of land protection programs.



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