
California Farmland Conservancy Program

Focus on Farmland



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This edition of Focus on Farmland features:

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Easement a Beginning to an Agricultural Buffer Between Davis and Dixon

Through a unique partnership, 300 acres of prime farmland straddling Interstate 80 between Davis and Dixon have been preserved with an agricultural conservation easement. Located in Solano County, the McConeghy Ranch easement acquisition, completed in October, looks to be the first step toward creating an agricultural buffer between the two cities. The California Farmland Conservancy Program (CFCP) provided the bulk of the funding through a \$2,237,500 grant. The Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program, part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service, contributed \$720,000. At the local level, the city of Davis gave \$507,500, and the city of Dixon contributed \$150,000. UC Davis provided \$77,500 for the project.

"This project is an excellent example of inter-governmental cooperation protecting California farmland and wildlife. As a rancher, I understand the high value of preserving our state's agricultural lands," said Secretary for Resources Mike Chrisman.

The McConeghy Ranch spans both sides of I-80 at the Kidwell Road exit. There is currently no development at the freeway exit. The property is located just three-quarters of a mile outside of Dixon's Sphere of Influence and about two miles from Davis. Farmed in hay, sunflowers, and tomatoes, the ranch provides a scenic viewshed along I-80 and the Amtrak commuter route.

"This project is very encouraging for the future of agriculture," said state Senator Michael J. Machado (D-Linden). "Collaboration between state agencies, local governments, and UC Davis was the key to crafting this acquisition, and should lead to other innovative ways of protecting land for agriculture and wildlife habitat throughout the state."



Jean McConeghy and Mitch Sears of the City of Davis look at a map of the property while standing on the overpass connecting the property.

UC Davis and the City of Davis approached the California Farmland Conservancy Program about pursuing an agricultural easement on the property in June 2003. The university had acquired an option to purchase the land from the McConeghy family two years prior. The cities of Dixon and Davis hold the easement, and the Solano Land Trust acquired the fee title. With the conservation easement in place, the property will soon be resold to a private farmer for continued agricultural production, and Solano Land Trust will join the cities of Davis and Dixon as a co-holder of the easement.

CFCP Funds First Agricultural Conservation Easement in Mono County

The Eastern Sierra Land Trust (ESLT) recently purchased an 818-acre agricultural conservation easement on the Montgomery Creek Ranch. Located in the Benton Valley of Mono County, Montgomery Creek Ranch produces high-quality, premium-priced certified organic alfalfa hay on 500 acres. The balance of the ranch includes naturally sub-irrigated grazing land. As the largest and oldest continuously farmed ranch in the Benton Valley, Montgomery Creek Ranch was facing residential development pressure generated by resort development in Mammoth Lakes.



The Montgomery Creek Ranch in Mono County.

ESLT purchased the easement with assistance from a \$500,000 California Farmland Conservancy Program grant, a USDA/NRCS Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program grant of \$500,000, and \$70,000 from other sources. The easement is the first of its kind in the Eastern Sierra. Incorporated in 2001, the ESLT is a nonprofit organization protecting working landscapes and important natural ecosystems of the Eastern Sierra. For more information about the Eastern Sierra Land Trust please visit

www.easternsierralandtrust.org.

Agricultural Conservation Easements Acquired in Merced County

This January, the Central Valley Farmland Trust (CVFT) purchased agricultural conservation easements on 472 acres of the Magneson Farms, with grant assistance from the California Farmland Conservancy Program (CFCP) and the Great Valley Center. Located along the Merced River near the community of Cressey, the Magneson Farms is a dairy operation in an area with increasing pressure for rural residential development. The easement area includes mostly prime soils (75%) that surround the dairy facility and provides silage corn, grains and alfalfa for the dairy operation. The easement will also help to preserve wildlife habitat and scenic vistas along the Merced River.

CVFT purchased the easement with \$1,212,675 in funding from CFCP and \$404,225 from the Great Valley Center's Agricultural Transaction Program. The easement is the first for agriculture along the Merced River and the first in the Cressey/Ballico area. CVFT is a regional land trust dedicated to preserving farmlands in Merced, Stanislaus, San Joaquin, and Sacramento counties. For more information about the Central Valley Farmland Trust, visit www.valleyfarmland.org.

CFCP Releases Advisory Guidelines on Agricultural Conservation Easement Appraisals

The California Farmland Conservancy Program has released its "Guidelines for the Preparation of Agricultural Conservation Easement Appraisals." The advisory guidelines are intended to be a resource for appraisers and grant applicants to use when developing appraisals to submit as part of a CFCP grant funding request.

These appraisal guidelines are not intended to be the final word on the conduct of agricultural conservation easement appraisals, but rather address some of the unique issues associated with appraising easements on California farmland. Other resources such as the *Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practices* (USPAP) of the Appraisal Foundation and the Land Trust Alliance's publication, *Appraising Conservation Easements* serve as important resources for appraisers and entities seeking to acquire conservation easements.

A number of independent appraisers critiqued and contributed valuable input to the appraisal guidelines. The "Guidelines for the Preparation of Agricultural Conservation Easement Appraisals" is currently available on the CFCP's Web site. The document is available as an Adobe Acrobat file, and it can be found at www.conservation.ca.gov/DLRP/cfcp.

Legislative and Budget Updates

The Governor released his proposed 2006-07 Budget on January 10, 2006. The budget proposes a final increment of nearly \$9 million from Proposition 40 for agricultural land conservation grants within the California Farmland Conservancy Program. In addition, within the Department of Conservation's Division of Land Resource Protection, the Governor has proposed additional staffing to enhance Williamson Act contract review and oversight in response to a number of audit findings concerning local administration of the Williamson Act program.

An array of different park/water/flood control/open space/infrastructure bond acts has been introduced or proposed for the 2006 legislative session. Negotiations in the coming months will determine which of these proposals are to advance for consideration by voters in the November 2006 general election. In addition to the Administration's own infrastructure bond proposal, these include SB 153, SB 1024, SB 1166, and AB 1783. Several of these proposals include consideration of agricultural land conservation among the diverse resource and infrastructure issues.

California Council of Land Trusts Works to Increase Funding Opportunities for Agricultural Land Conservation

In May 2005, the California Council of Land Trusts (CCLT) formed an Agricultural Conservation Working Group. Composed of over 25 agricultural land trusts, the working group aims to increase the funding available for farm and rangeland conservation, to advocate for changes to existing programs to better meet the needs of agricultural conservation, and to identify, advance and/or support other initiatives needed to increase the pace of agricultural conservation.

In July 2005, the working group released a case statement, "Conserving California's Farm and Rangelands." The statement discusses the challenges to agriculture in California, suggesting that the most fundamental challenge is perhaps the development and fragmentation of farm and ranch lands. The statement lauds conservation easements as a feasible alternative for farmers and ranchers. Furthermore,

the case statement argues that the State of California must make a major investment in agricultural land conservation. According to the case statement, this could be done through increased funding to existing state programs that make grants to land trusts and local agencies to purchase agricultural conservation easements.

To that end, CCLT has been tracking the Legislature's proposed 2006 resource bond (SB 153). Currently, the bill allocates \$100 million total for farmland, rangeland, and oak woodlands conservation. The working group has advocated that amount should be doubled to \$200 million, based on the funding needs of ag land trusts over the next five years.

In addition, CCLT is tracking the Governor's infrastructure bond to "rebuild California." CCLT is advocating that any infrastructure funding package must invest in the protection of California's natural resources as we invest in the physical infrastructure and to keep pace with the state's population growth. CCLT suggests that this can be accomplished by including a significant component for land and water conservation in an infrastructure package, such as by fully incorporating SB 153.

Upcoming Events

The **California Council of Land Trusts** will hold its annual meeting on **April 3-4** in Sacramento. The meeting will feature sessions on policy, media and communication, fundraising, advocacy effectiveness, and the popular "Conservation Around California" presentations. A keynote speaker will be Sacramento Bee's editorial writer, Tom Philp, winner of the most recent Pulitzer Prize for his series on Hetch Hetchy. Mr. Philp will speak about legislative and public attitudes toward, and challenges for, land and water conservation. For more information, call 916-497-0272 or visit www.calandtrusts.org.

The **Great Valley Center's** 2006 annual conference will be held on **May 10-11** in Sacramento. This year's theme, "At the Tipping Point," acknowledges that decisions related to transportation, the economy, health, education and our communities will play a significant role in determining whether California's fastest growing region evolves into a prosperous region. For more information, visit www.greatvalley.org/conference.

The **Bay Area Open Space Council** will hold its annual meeting on Friday, **June 2**, in San Francisco. For more information visit www.openspacecouncil.org.

The California Farmland Conservancy Program, administered by Department of Conservation's Division of Land Resource Protection, is designed to ensure that the state's most valuable farmland will not be developed. Through the program, local governments and nonprofit organizations can receive grants to purchase development rights from willing landowners, thus creating permanent conservation easements.

We hope you've found this issue of *Focus on Farmland* useful and informative. Please contact us with any questions or ideas you have for future editions. Feel free to forward this email to other interested parties.

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