
California Farmland Conservancy Program

Focus on Farmland



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Special Report – Successes of the Central Valley Farmland Trust

Central Valley Farmland Trust Protects Okuye and Espinosa Farms

Thanks to the efforts of the Central Valley Farmland Trust (CVFT), Merced County has recently been a hotbed of farmland conservation. The CVFT has purchased agricultural conservation easements on the Okuye and Espinosa farms in recent months. Funding to purchase the easements was provided by the state Department of Conservation's California Farmland Conservancy Program (CFCP) and the Modesto-based Great Valley Center.

The Okuye farm is located on 78 acres within a mile of the City of Livingston's sphere of influence. Most of the property – farmed by the Okuye family for more than a century -- is planted in almonds of varying ages. This is the first easement in this highly productive area, and has stimulated significant additional landowner interest. The area consists primarily of family farms on parcels from 20 to more than 100 acres in size.



Espinosa Farm in Merced County near Livingston

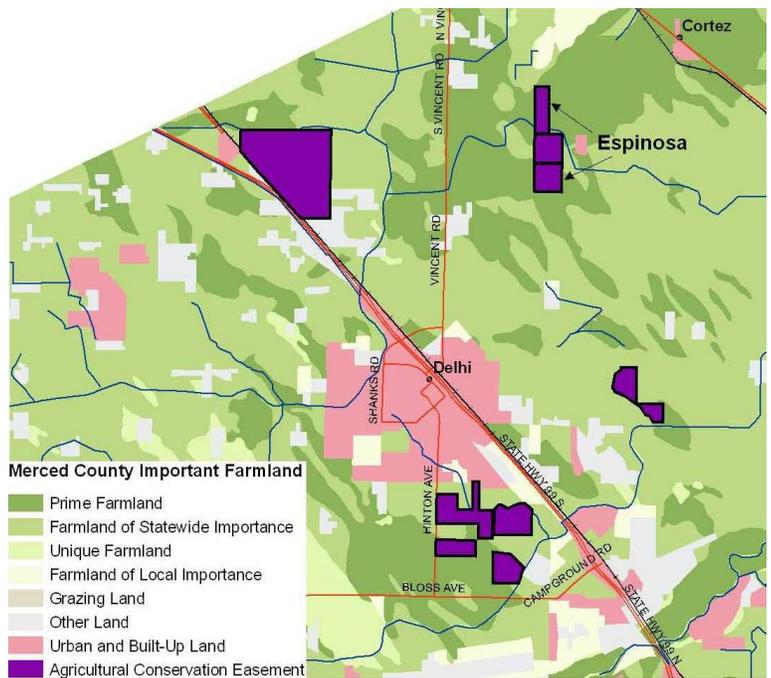
“The Central Valley Farmland Trust is pleased to work with a landowner like Jean Okuye,” said Bill Martin, Executive Director of the Trust. “Her passion for farmland protection runs deep, evidenced by an unwavering willingness to commit her property to productive agriculture for perpetuity.”

Nine miles away, in the area of Delhi – the fastest-growing community in Merced County – the Espinosa farms are on two noncontiguous parcels (separately owned by a father and son) covering 77 acres. One parcel is planted in almonds, the other in almonds and peaches. The easement purchase, in combination

with a forthcoming easement on property owned by a member of the same family, will create a 120-acre contiguous block of conserved farmland.

“I just saw a Department of Finance report that said California’s population will be about 60 million by 2050,” Department of Conservation (DOC) Director Bridgett Luther said. “Delhi’s population has taken off over the last two decades. We’re not against growth, but we are trying to preserve as much of the high-quality Central Valley farmland as possible. These family farms represent small but significant steps in the effort to protect an irreplaceable natural resource.”

As of 2005, Merced County ranked fifth among California counties in total annual agricultural production (nearly \$2.4 billion). According to the DOC’s Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program, 3,078 acres of land were taken out of agricultural use in the

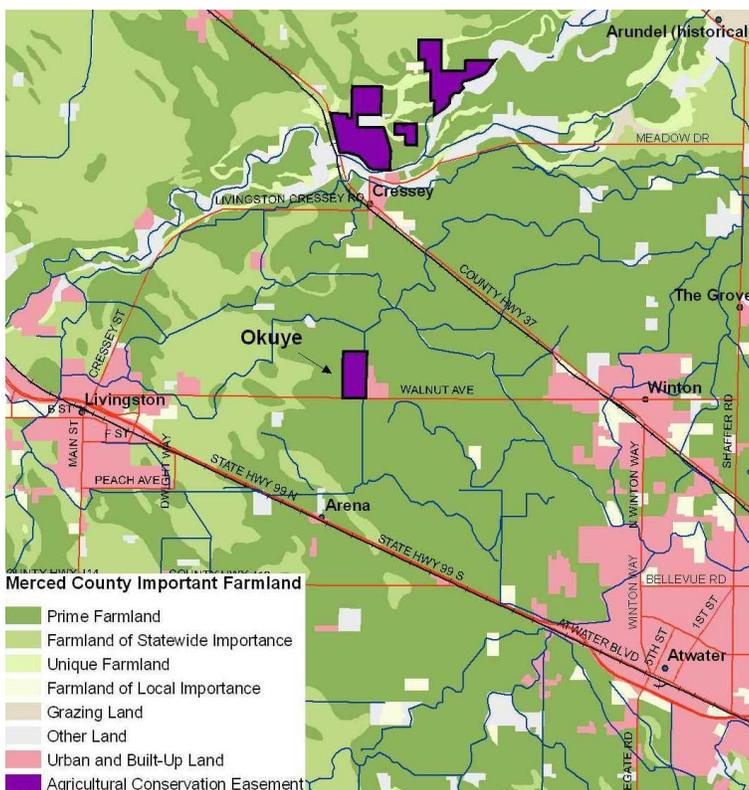


Espinosa Farms shown north of Delhi in Merced County

county between 2002 and 2004, while local governments reported that an additional 866 acres had been committed to future nonagricultural use.

Founded in 1997, the Great Valley Center is a private, non-profit organization that supports activities and other organizations working to improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of California’s Central Valley, in partnership with the University of California, Merced.

“Agricultural easements like the Okuye and Espinosa families placed on their property provide the cornerstones of strategic models that demonstrate the possibilities for successful farmland protection – the type of protection that assures future generations that they will have access to this valuable resource,” said Holly King, director of agricultural programs for the Great Valley Center. For more information on the Great Valley Center, please visit its website at www.greatvalley.org.



Okuye Farm shown east of Livingston in Merced County

Central Valley Farmland Trust as a Mitigation Fee Recipient

CVFT began its agricultural conservation efforts in Merced, Sacramento, Stanislaus, and San Joaquin counties after a 2006 merger between Merced County Farmland and Open Space Trust, the Sacramento Valley Ag Land Conservancy, and the Stanislaus Farmland Trust. The merger was the result of efforts by land trusts, the Great Valley Center, and farmers in CVFT's four-county operating area. Ultimately, a single organization was formed to build capacity towards the goal of effective agricultural land conservation in the Mid-Central Valley. As a result of the successful mergers and community recognition of its capacity to facilitate farmland conservation, CVFT has become the designated recipient of numerous mitigation funds

CVFT was identified as the recipient of Agricultural Mitigation Fees to be collected by the cities of Tracy, Manteca, and Lathrop to be invested in the acquisition of agricultural conservation easements within San Joaquin County. Under terms of multiple settlement agreements with the Sierra Club, which was using the California Environmental Quality Act to bring attention to the significant economic loss due to the conversion of farmland, the cities of Tracy, Manteca, and Lathrop agreed to adopt Agricultural Mitigation Fee programs. These programs will help mitigate the loss of farmland resulting from private development projects approved by those cities. The fees must be paid by the developer prior to the issuance of building permits.



The Central Valley Farmland Trust holds an agricultural conservation easement on the Okuye Farm (shown here) near Livingston in Merced County.

After the mitigation settlement with the cities of Tracy, Manteca, and Lathrop concluded, San Joaquin County passed an Agricultural Land Mitigation Fee ordinance in November 2006. The county ordinance includes guidance to encourage all cities within the County to adopt agricultural preservation policies and ordinances. A 1:1 mitigation ratio is required for agricultural conservation easement or other conservation mechanism to mitigate for conversion impacts. In addition, fees are required to cover administration, monitoring, and enforcing the agricultural conservation easement, as determined by the Board. In February 2007, the City of Stockton adopted a farmland mitigation ordinance that requires developers of projects greater than 40 acres to offset their impacts by acquiring agricultural easements elsewhere in San Joaquin County. Developers must purchase one acre of easement protected farmland for every acre of farmland they develop, and the protected land must have comparable soil quality to the land being developed. Developers of smaller projects have the option of paying a mitigation fee of \$9,600 per acre.

CVFT operates with the assistance of advisory councils from each county, six committees, a Land Planning Consultant, and a Land Transaction Attorney. Many advisory council members are former board members from the merged land trusts. Six committees oversee fundraising, ACE transactions, stewardship and monitoring, budgeting, financing, risk management, education, and board development. CVFT now holds 16 easements totaling 10,525 acres. For more information on the CVFT, please visit its website at www.valleyfarmland.org.

Central Valley Farmland Trust Awarded Planning Grant

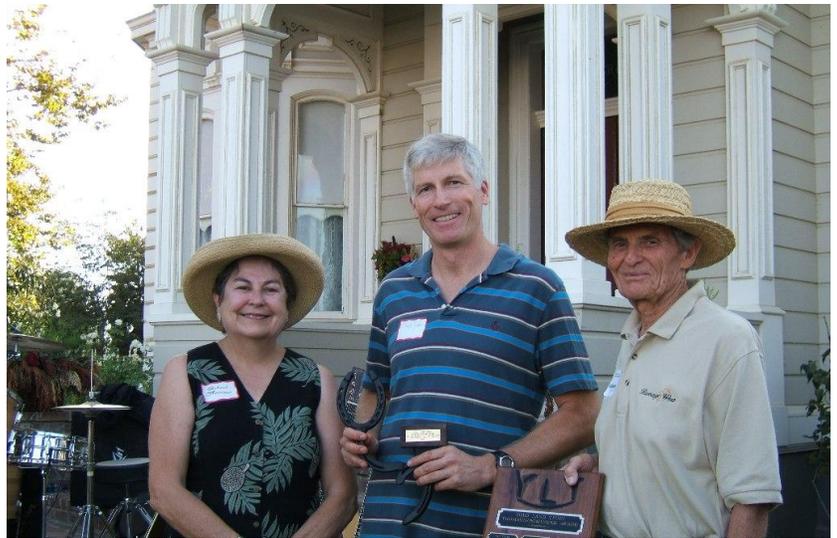
The CFCP recently awarded CVFT a planning grant to begin the Agricultural Conservation Easement Planning Project for the Mid-Central Valley. The project endeavors to protect prime agricultural lands facing significant urban growth in the counties of Merced, Stanislaus, San Joaquin, and Sacramento. CVFT plans to continue landowner outreach, easement pre-acquisition projects and update strategic priority plans started under a previous CFCP planning grant with the Great Valley Center. The planning grant will assist CVFT to continue its mission of working with landowners and conservation partners to preserve agricultural lands in the Central Valley for future generations.

Other News:

Sierra Nevada Conservancy: The Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) announced that it is accepting Category 2 and 3 Strategic Opportunity Grants applications for funding under Proposition 84. Funds will be authorized for projects consistent with the SNC Guidelines. Eligible projects shall demonstrate a contribution to the protection or restoration of rivers, lakes and streams, their watersheds, and associated land, water, and other natural resources within the boundaries of the SNC service area. Public agencies, nonprofit 501 (c)(3) organizations and eligible tribal organizations may apply. For more information, please visit the SNC's website at www.sierranevadaconservancy.ca.gov.

CFCP News Updates:

Chuck Tyson Receives Award: At its annual "Day in the Country" event, the Yolo Land Trust named Chuck Tyson as the 2007 Thomson-Rominger Award recipient. Tyson was honored for his conservation work in Yolo County and beyond. As Program Manager for the California Farmland Conservancy Program, he is responsible for providing conservation easement and planning and technical assistance grants to local governments and non-profit land trusts. Tyson was involved with the Yolo Land Trust's first CFCP easement in 1997, a 216-acre property that grew into a protected area of more than 1,000 acres east of Highway 113 and between County Roads 27 and 29. In all, he has helped facilitate the protection of more than 3,300 acres of farmland in Yolo County. Yolo County Supervisor Helen Thomson and former U.S. Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Richard Rominger, for whom the award is named, presented Tyson with the award. It is designed to honor an unsung hero of land preservation. Former recipients include Robert Ramming (2006), Patty Bogle (2005) and Hank Stone (2004).



Chuck Tyson (center) shown receiving the Thomson-Rominger Award at the Yolo Land Trust's annual "Day in the Country" event. Yolo County Supervisor Helen Thomson (left) and former U.S. Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Richard Rominger (right) presented the award.

CFCP Request for Grant Applications: CFCP updated its RFGA to reflect legislative and other changes that were previously captured in a supplemental RFGA insert. Look for the updated RFGA on CFCP's website this October. CFCP reviews grant applications on an on-going basis; applications may be submitted for consideration at any time.

CFCP Legislation Advances: The Department of Conservation is sponsoring AB 1180 (Blakeslee), which is intended to provide the Director of the Department with the authority to make CFCP grants for agricultural conservation easements from sources other than the CFCP Fund, when appropriated by the Legislature. While the primary purpose of such easements must continue to be the preservation of inherent agricultural values, this provision would allow greater consideration of additional resource values that can also be preserved within agricultural conservation easements. A common example where such a provision may become applicable is where a farm property includes a riparian corridor that can be protected at the same time that the easement preserves agricultural uses on cultivated portions of the farm. AB 1180 was not acted upon in the final days of the current session, so it will be taken up again in 2008.



Cover page of CFCP's forthcoming updated RFGA

Upcoming Events:

The **Land Trust Alliances's Rally 2007:** The National Land Conservation Conference is scheduled for October 3-6 in Denver, Colorado. Come to the largest gathering in the country for conservation leaders. Join more than 1,700 land trust professionals, volunteers, board members, public agency staff, attorneys, appraisers and land conservation advocates at this four-day conference. For more information visit www.lta.org/training/rally.htm.

The Central Valley Land Trust Council will present the 7th annual **Land Trust Summit** on November 1st and 2nd in Sacramento at the Sierra Health Foundation. For more information and registration materials please visit www.greatvalley/agprograms/ag_events.aspx or call Theresa Kiehn, Council Coordinator at 209-522-5103.

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 can be preserved. 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.

If you wish to be added to or removed from this mailing list, email cfcf@conservation.ca.gov.

California Farmland Conservancy Program



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