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# California Farmland Conservancy Program

# Focus on Farmland



Volume 6, Number 1

Newsletter of the CFCP  
Winter 2008

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## This edition of Focus on Farmland features:

- Marin Agricultural Land Trust Acquires Easement on Crayne Ranch, Near Tomales
- Ducks Unlimited Easement Project Completed in Sutter County
- Overview of LAO Appraisal Report and AFT Conversion Trend Report
- CFCP Awards Planning Grant to Sequoia Riverlands Trust
- CFCP News Updates
- Other News and Upcoming Events

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## Marin Agricultural Land Trust Purchases Easement on Crayne Ranch

Marin Agricultural Land Trust (MALT), with financial assistance from the Department of Conservation's California Farmland Conservation Program, has purchased an agricultural conservation easement on the 291-acre Crayne Ranch, located on Dillon Beach Road in Tomales. The Crayne family has owned this prominent property for several generations. A former dairy, the Crayne Ranch is now a beef cattle operation and is part of an historic landscape which has remained virtually unchanged for 150 years.

"The Crayne Ranch has been part of the agricultural landscape of Marin County for a very long time," said Robert Berner, executive director of the Marin Agricultural Land Trust. "We're happy that MALT was able to provide the family with a conservation alternative to the sale of the ranch and that it will remain in agricultural use."

When Bill Crayne died, the ranch passed to his two children and several other heirs. The sale of a conservation easement to MALT enables Crayne's son and daughter to buy out the other heirs and continue the ranching business which they have been involved in since the early 1990s. Without the sale of an easement, the ranch would have been sold and most likely subdivided. Because of its panoramic ridge-top views and its proximity to Petaluma, the property might have been targeted by a developer for rural estate homes. The conversion of farmland in this way is one of the greatest threats facing the agricultural community in Marin County.



*Marin Agricultural Land Trust holds an agricultural conservation easement on the Crayne Ranch (shown here) near Tomales in Marin County.*

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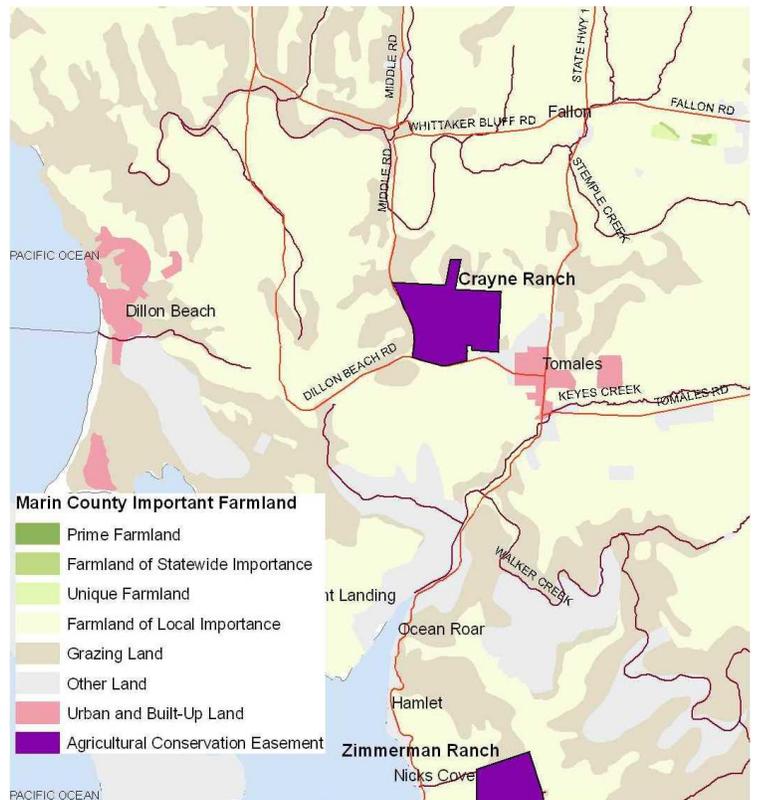
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“Conservation easements make great sense for landowners like the Craynes who are committed to agriculture and the long-term stewardship of their land,” said Brian Leahy, head of the Department of Conservation’s Division of Land Resource Protection. “This easement also helps preserve the history and tradition of agriculture that are unique to the town of Tomales.”

The Tomales area is experiencing renewed investment in agriculture, including the new Tomales Farm & Dairy (TFD) operation located across the Dillon Beach Road from the property. TFD is in the process of developing a dairy and artisan cheese-making facility on its property and recently sold an easement to MALT. Other easement-protected lands about the Crayne Ranch to the north, south, and, by the end of 2007, the east. By placing an easement on Crayne Ranch, these easement-protected properties are now linked and form an expansive contiguous block of protected land.

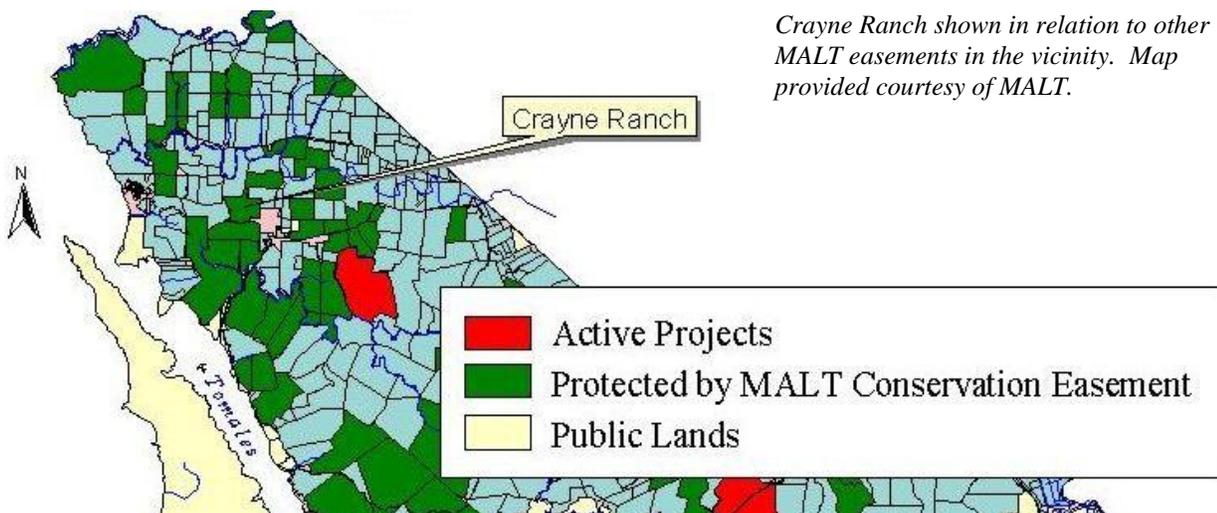
CFCP provided \$800,000 to MALT for the purchase of the agricultural conservation easement. The remainder of the funds were raised by MALT members and supporters.

Marin Agricultural Land Trust is a member-supported, nonprofit organization created in 1980 by a coalition of ranchers and environmentalists to permanently preserve Marin County farmland. Some of the Bay Area's most highly acclaimed dairy products and organic crops are produced on farmland protected by MALT conservation easements, which total more than 40,000 acres on 59 family farms and ranches. To learn more about Marin’s family farms and the food they produce, visit [www.malt.org](http://www.malt.org).



*Crayne Ranch near Tomales in Marin County.*

*Crayne Ranch shown in relation to other MALT easements in the vicinity. Map provided courtesy of MALT.*

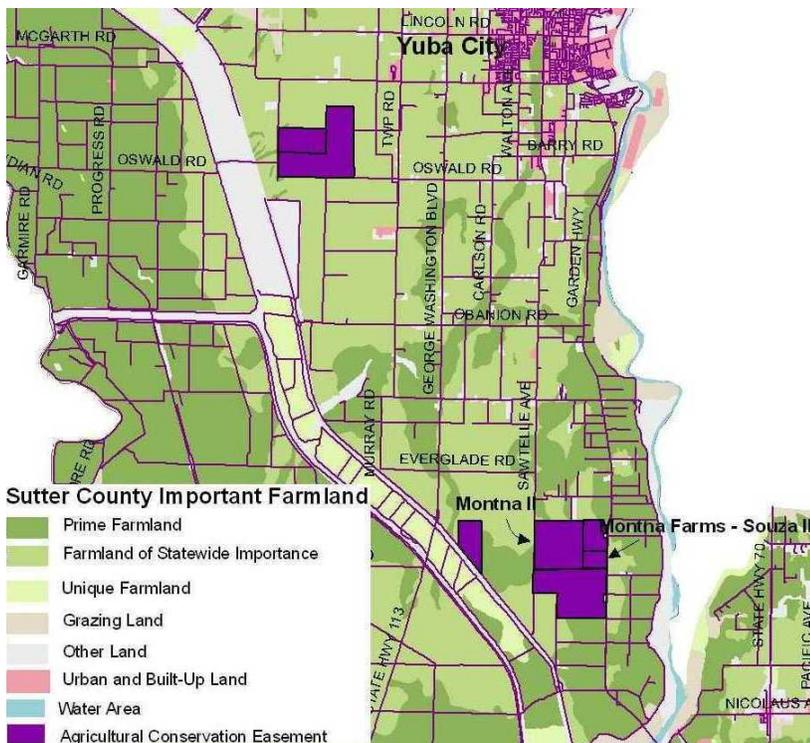


## Ducks Unlimited Purchases Easement on Rice Land in Sutter County

Ducks Unlimited, Inc., (DU), the Department of Conservation's California Farmland Conservancy Program (CFCP) and the Department of Fish and Game's Working Landscape Directed Action partnered to purchase an agricultural easement on property owned by the Montna Farms in Sutter County. Located south of Yuba City, the easement covers approximately 746 acres consisting of three contiguous parcels that form an "L" shape (see map below). The property has approximately 2,000 feet fronting Highway 99 along the east side and is currently in rice production, as are the neighboring properties to the west and south. Prune orchards can be found to the north and across Highway 99 to the east. The eastern edge of the Sutter Bypass over to Yuba City is an important agricultural area that is highly productive and enjoys a stable water supply and efficiency of scale associated with large farming operations. The property was threatened by rapidly expanding urban and rural ranchette growth from Yuba City to the north and Sacramento and Woodland to the south.



*Ducks Unlimited purchased an agricultural conservation easement on the 746 acres of rice land (shown here) in Sutter County.*



*Arrows point to the subject Montna Farms properties. The properties form an "L" shape that links other CFCF-funded easements, creating a 1,729-acre block of easement-protected land..*

Although the property is zoned for general agriculture, with a minimum parcel size of 80 acres, there's a significant amount of parcelization for rural residences occurring nearby. According to DU, the Sutter County General Plan currently allows for ranchettes outside Yuba City's sphere of influence. Agricultural easements can help solidify the agricultural character and stability of the area by maintaining a viable agricultural landmass. There are a number of other agricultural easements in the vicinity, including other CFCF-funded easements. This newest easement is adjacent to and links two existing but discontinuous CFCF-funded easements, creating a 1,729-acre block of easement-protected land.

In addition to its importance as a farming area, the Sutter Basin is a crucial area for waterfowl and other

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wetland dependent species. Located near the Sutter National Wildlife Refuge, the agricultural easements provide key migratory waterfowl habitat and form a buffer zone that benefits the entire ecosystem of the Sutter National Wildlife Refuge. The property itself provides key migratory waterfowl habitat, as well as terrestrial species habitat, for such wildlife as the giant garter snake, the red-winged blackbird, great blue heron, and the Swainson's Hawk.

Over the past 10 years, DU has worked with individual Sacramento Valley farmers to provide the support necessary to preserve and protect productive agriculture through its Conservation Easements for Agricultural Land (CEAL) Program. This program has built strong relationships with farmers; local, state and federal resource managers; county planners; and government representatives to help build long-term strategies to keep the Sacramento Valley's agricultural economy strong. To date, more than 4,000 acres of agricultural lands have been protected by the CEAL program. For more information, visit [www.ducks.org](http://www.ducks.org).

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## LAO Issues Report on Land Acquisition Appraisals

The Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) released a report in October 2007 entitled, "Improving the Appraisal Function in Resources Land Acquisitions". The report investigates the use of public funds to acquire land for resource conservation purposes, and concludes that there are fundamental flaws in the manner in which appraisals for land acquisitions are conducted and overseen by the State. The report provides a series of recommendations to improve overall appraisal processes. Among these LAO recommendations are the following:

Legislation should be enacted to require the development of a specified set of appraisal standards for resource conservation acquisitions of land.

The independence of the appraisal review process should be improved to promote greater objectivity of the appraisals, with central oversight responsibilities given to the state's Department of General Services.

Information concerning appraisals should be made more readily available to the public. Steps should be taken to avoid unwarranted tax benefits in conjunction with resource conservation land acquisitions.

The full text of the LAO's report is available [here](#).

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## American Farmland Trust Releases Report on Farmland Conversion Trends

American Farmland Trust (AFT) has recently released a report titled "Paving Paradise: A New Perspective on California Farmland Conversion". The purpose of the report is to provide data at the statewide, regional, and county levels that readers can extract for their own analysis. The report uniquely combines data from California Department of Conservation's Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program; California Department of Finance's Demographic Research Unit; and the United States Bureau of Census. AFT has included innovative interactive spreadsheets that qualify California farmland conversion according to quality and efficiency of development. Some of the major findings of the report include:

One sixth of all the land urbanized in California since the Gold Rush was urbanized between 1990 and 2004.

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Urban development is disproportionately targeting the state's best farmland and is very inefficient, consuming an acre of land for every 9.4 people.

In the state's most important agricultural regions, a larger percentage of high quality farmland is being developed, and development is less efficient, than in the state as a whole.

Rural "ranchettes," the most inefficient kind of development, may account for a quarter of all the land devoted to developed uses in the Central Valley, the state's premier agricultural area.

For more information, the report can be found [here](#).

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## Sequoia Riverlands Trust Awarded Planning Grant

The CFCP awarded the Sequoia Riverlands Trust (SRT) a planning grant to initiate work on its Farmland Conservation Program. The planning grant funds will assist SRT's expansion into the southern San Joaquin Valley with the primary goal of creating the first agricultural conservation easement program for Kern County. SRT plans to develop strategic priority plans, begin landowner outreach and implement easement acquisition projects for this previously underserved area.

SRT was founded in 2000 and has since assisted landowners in protecting 2,594 acres from the Sierra foothills to the Tulare Lake Basin. Additionally, SRT owns seven preserves comprising 4,382 protected acres in the same region. SRT ultimately seeks to expand its farmland conservation work to protect prime agricultural lands facing significant growth in Kern, Tulare, Kings, and Fresno counties. For more information on the SRT, please visit its website at [www.sequoiariverlands.org](http://www.sequoiariverlands.org).

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## Other News:

**Internet Resource:** The **Land Trust Alliance** has posted on its [website](#) materials, presenters, and speeches from the **National Land Conservation Conference: Rally 2007** in Denver, CO.

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## CFCP News Updates:

**DOC Website:** A new version of the DOC public [website](#) has been released. It incorporates some of the latest web portal technology and complies with the new State of California Web template guidelines. The new website also features improved site layout and navigation, and improved compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility standards for websites.

**CFCP Request for Grant Applications (RFGA):** CFCP has updated its RFGA to reflect legislative and other changes that have taken place. The updated RFGA is available on CFCP's [website](#). The updated RFGA should serve as the basis for future grant applications to CFCP. CFCP reviews grant applications on an on-going basis; applications may be submitted for consideration at any time.

**CFCP-related Legislation:** [Senate Bill 1051](#) (Committee on Natural Resources and Water) became law in September (urgency statute) and amended various sections of the Public Resources Code relating to conservation. Those amendments include making minor changes to the CFCP statute.

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## Upcoming Events:

The California Council of Land Trusts is hosting the **California Land Trust Conference** on February 4 – 6<sup>th</sup> in Sacramento. The annual conference features conservation news, information, advocacy and networking opportunities with land trust and public agency colleagues. For more information please visit [www.calandtrusts.org](http://www.calandtrusts.org).

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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](mailto:cfcf@conservation.ca.gov).*

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