
California Farmland Conservancy Program

Focus on Farmland



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Growing the Dixon-Davis Greenbelt: Miles and Kidwell Farms Preserved in Solano County

The Solano Land Trust recently completed a \$4.4 million purchase of the 488-acre Miles/Kidwell agricultural conservation easement. The purchase caps a long-standing effort to preserve the farmland within the Dixon-Davis greenbelt. Partnering in the effort were the California Department of Conservation (DOC), the federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program, the cities of Dixon and Davis, and the Solano Land Trust, which will hold the easement. DOC's CFCP contributed \$572,500 toward the ACE purchase.

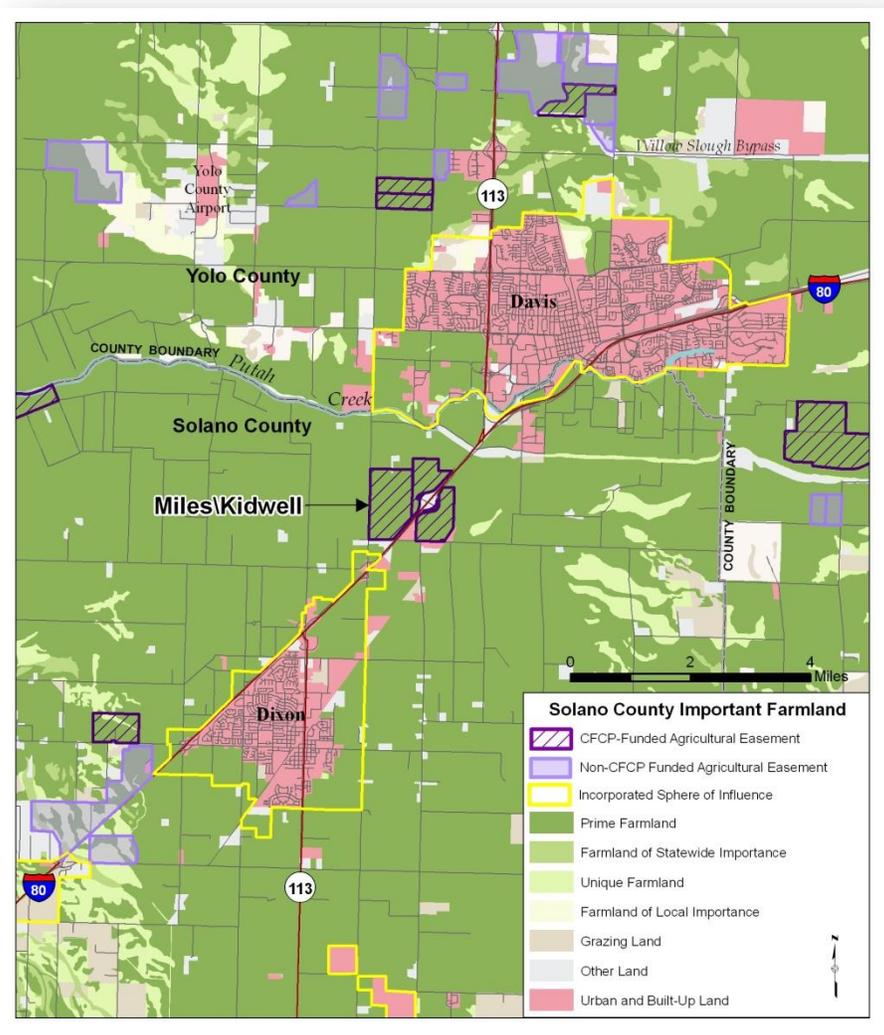
This is the third farmland easement in the greenbelt to be purchased as part of the conservation plan between the cities of Dixon and Davis, in coordination with the Solano Land Trust. Previously acquired were the 196-acre McConeghy North/Ebey Laughton easement and the 254-acre McConeghy South easement. With the Miles/Kidwell easement purchase, the Dixon-Davis greenbelt now includes 938 acres of protected farmland.



The Miles and Kidwell Farms contain excellent soils that make the area ideal for growing a variety of crops, including winter wheat (above). Photo courtesy of Solano Land Trust.

The greenbelt is located in Solano County between the cities of Dixon and Davis along the Interstate 80 corridor. The two cities have been working for several years to preserve land between their borders. This land is classified as Prime Farmland by DOC's Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP), making it ideal for growing various row crops, including alfalfa, ryegrass, wheat, tomatoes, corn, and sunflowers. The Kidwell family historically owned and farmed both the Miles and Kidwell farms. In conjunction with this easement, the current owner of the Kidwell farm repurchased the Miles Farm so it could become part of a single easement-protected farm.

The Solano Land Trust and cities of Dixon and Davis have long recognized the potential for intense development pressure in this area. In recent years, it has been an attractive location for rural residential development due to its close proximity to large population centers in San Francisco and Sacramento.



The 488-acre agricultural conservation easement on the Miles and Kidwell Farms is located directly north of I-80.

“We congratulate both the Solano Land Trust and the landowners on the completion of this project,” Department of Conservation Director Bridgett Luther said in a press release, “and we encourage other Solano County landowners to consider the agricultural conservation easement option for their properties.”

As of 2007, Solano ranked No. 28 among California counties in total agricultural production at about \$268 million. Despite the efforts of local government and organizations to preserve Solano County's agricultural heritage, nearly 2,750 acres of farmland and grazing land were reclassified to non-agricultural use from 2006 to 2008, according to DOC's FMMP.

The Solano Land Trust has protected over 19,000 acres of land in Solano County since 1986, including nearly 7,000 acres of farms and ranches. See the Solano Land Trust website for more information: www.solanolandtrust.org.

Gill and Turri Ranches are Preserved in Monterey County

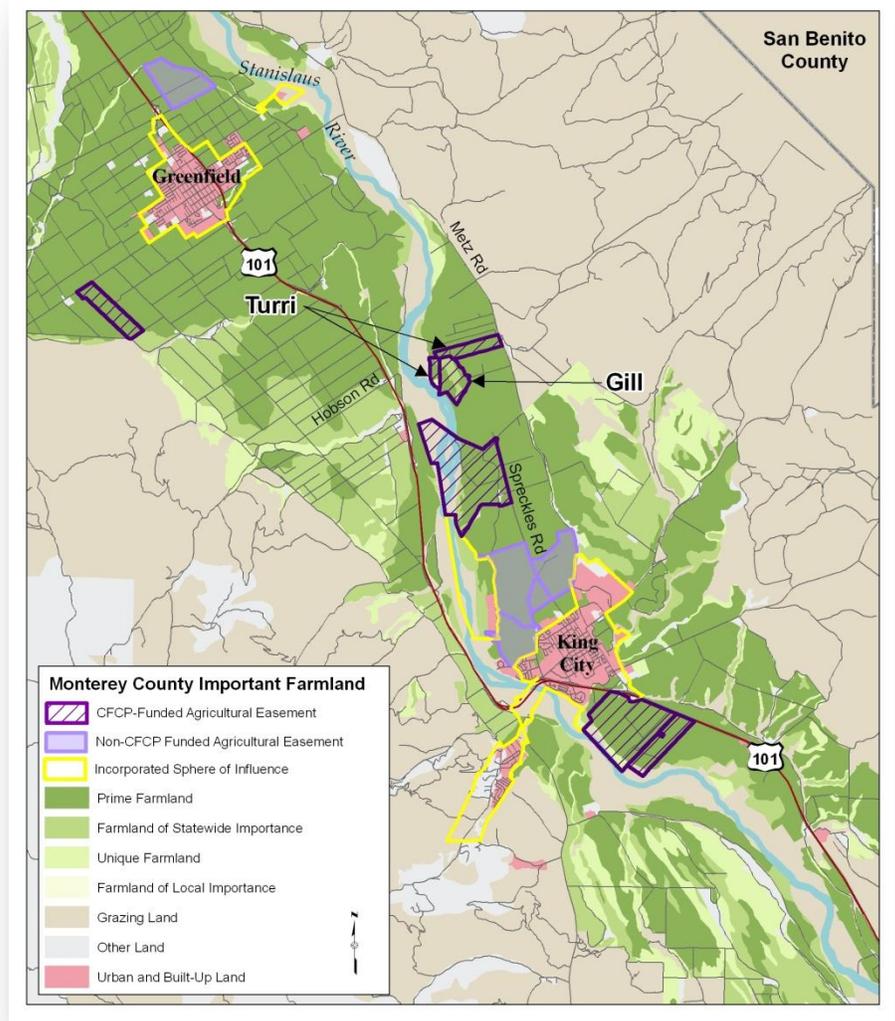
Two productive farms north of King City have been permanently preserved for agriculture by the Monterey-based Ag Land Trust and California Department of Conservation (DOC). The two ranches – Gill Ranch and Turri Ranch -- grow all the typical crops of the area, including lettuce, spinach and carrots. The Gill Ranch is 159 acres; Turri Ranch is 166 acres.

The Turri and Gill ranches – adjacent but separately owned – were advanced as a single conservation effort by the Ag Land Trust. Separate conservation easements were customized and recorded for each property. DOC's CFCP contributed \$1,057,000 to ensure the properties will never be developed.

Working with the Ag Land Trust, the CFCP has funded 34 agricultural conservation easements comprising 6,739 acres of farmland in Monterey County since 1998. Nearly all of the preserved land is classified as Prime Farmland.

Historically, King City has grown both to the north and south on Prime Farmland. The group of agricultural easements that has been created in the area is designed to encourage future growth toward the east, toward lower-quality farmland.

Formally known as the Monterey County Agricultural and Historical Land Conservancy, the Ag Land Trust was founded in 1984. This nonprofit organization focuses on preserving farmland and benefitting the farmers who make their living from that land. The Ag Land Trust has exceeded the milestone of 20,000 acres in recorded conservation easements. The organization estimates the value of the crops from these protected properties exceeds \$200 million per year. For more information, please visit www.aglandconservancy.org.



The Turri and Gill ranches – adjacent but separately owned -- grow all the typical crops of the area, including lettuce, spinach and carrots

Cypress Lane Ranch Preserved in Marin County

Marin Agricultural Land Trust (MALT), with financial assistance from the Department of Conservation's California Farmland Conservancy Program and the United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has purchased an agricultural conservation easement on the 772-acre Cypress Lane Ranch. Members of the Spaletta family have owned the dairy property since 1932. The ranch is located in the picturesque Hick's Valley along two of the major driving routes into West Marin. Due to its proximity to Petaluma and Highway 101, Hicks Valley is among the areas in West Marin that are most susceptible to conversion to non-agricultural estate properties.



The Spaletta's dairy operation is served by two reservoirs on the property, one of which is visible here.

"Protecting the land so this productive dairy can continue operation is an example of how MALT works with ranching families to find a conservation alternative to the sale or development of the land," said Robert Berner, Executive Director of MALT.

Under the terms of the agricultural conservation easement, the development rights have been extinguished and the land can never be subdivided. MALT paid the appraised value of \$2,495,000 for the easement. The Department of Conservation and NRCS provided grants to MALT of \$831,667 each for the project. The remaining third of the funds was raised from MALT members and supporters.

One of only 28 dairies remaining in Marin County (down from 100 dairies in the 1970s), the Spaletta's dairy is one of the largest in the county, currently milking 600 cows (Marin County average is 409 cows per dairy). In addition to the dairy operation, the Spaletta family raises replacement heifers, silage and hay on the ranch and on 1,400 acres of adjacent land under long-term lease. Approximately 145 acres of the easement property is irrigated and used to produce silage for the dairy operation.

The property has great strategic importance due to its location and high visibility. The eastern property border is defined by the Point Reyes Petaluma Road and the southern boundary is defined by Novato Boulevard. The property is easily visible from both roads and contributes to the agricultural contiguity of the area.

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 41,500 acres on 64 family farms, representing nearly 40 percent of the farmland in the county. To learn more about Marin's family farms and the food they produce, visit www.malt.org.

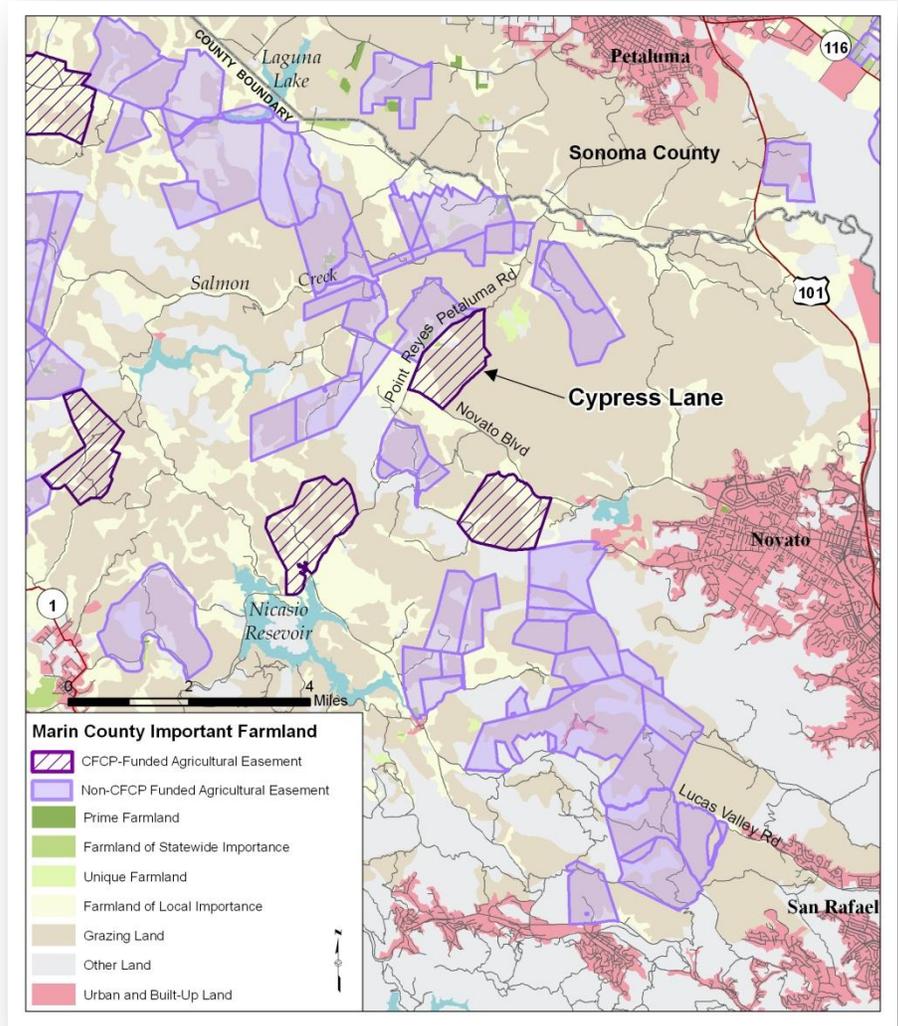
Laying the Groundwork Through CFCP Planning Grants

The California Farmland Conservancy Program has recently completed a number of planning grants with land trusts. The grants facilitated local agricultural land conservation initiatives and are summarized below.

Central Valley Farmland Trust: Agricultural Conservation Easement Planning for the Mid-Central Valley

The Central Valley Farmland Trust (CVFT) recently completed a two-year planning grant that had three objectives: updating strategic agricultural conservation easement (ACE) priority plans for Merced, Sacramento, San Joaquin, and Stanislaus Counties; providing outreach to targeted landowners in these priority plan areas; and developing ACE projects with landowners in the high priority areas.

After the landowner outreach was complete, 20 farm properties were inspected for future project potential, and of these 20 properties, CVFT brought forward 12 potential ACE projects for further consideration by funders. In all, 10 grant applications were submitted to CFCP and other funders. Of these 10 applications, six ACE projects, totaling 660 acres, were funded as a result of the efforts put forth in this planning grant. Several of the remaining projects are pending approval.



Prominently located on Point Reyes-Petaluma Road at its intersection with Novato Boulevard, the Cypress Lane Ranch is now part of a greenbelt of protected historic farmland on the road leading to Petaluma.

California Council of Land Trusts: Capturing Opportunity, Facilitating Farmland Preservation Project

The California Council of Land Trusts (CCLT) completed this planning grant in coordination with the Sierra-Cascade Land Trust Council. Conducted at the statewide level, this planning grant had two primary objectives. The first objective was to provide outreach and education on the new federal tax incentives under the Pension Protection Act (PPA) of 2006. To that end, CCLT and legal experts in the field of tax incentives provided outreach and education to interested land trusts, attorneys, financial advisors, and appraisers throughout California. The land trusts in turn provided outreach to landowners in their area to develop donated or bargain sale agricultural conservation easements.

The second objective was to provide support for the transaction costs associated with facilitating donated or bargain sale conservation easements benefiting from the federal income tax incentives that increase the tax deductibility of qualified donations of interest in land. With CFCP funding, CCLT's facilitated six donated or bargain sale agricultural conservation easements with a total of 3,055 acres protected in 2007 through 2008. All six conservation easements took advantage of the new federal tax incentives.

Although the bulk of CFCP grant awards are for agricultural conservation easement acquisitions, the program also offers planning and technical assistance grants that support agricultural land conservation and easement acquisition work. Activities and costs that may be supported through overall conservation planning work may include appraisals, surveys, title review, staff and consultant costs, and other costs directly related to bringing agricultural conservation easements to the acquisition stage. CFCP planning grant funds are one of the few sources of seed money to translate landowner interest in agricultural conservation easements into actual conservation projects. For more information about CFCP planning grants, please visit our [Website](#).

Other News:

California **Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) Sign-up Announced**. Proposals for 2010 funding consideration under FRPP are being accepted until February 15, 2010. This voluntary program assists eligible organizations to purchase conservation easements that ensure agricultural lands remain in production and are not subdivided. The highest-quality parcels will be selected for funding to the extent FRPP resources are available. Ranking and selection of parcels will take place immediately after the February 15 sign-up, and funds will be obligated by April 1, 2010. For further information contact Jessica Groves, Easement Programs Specialist, at 530-792-5604 or e-mail Jessica.Groves@ca.usda.gov. Information is also available on the NRCS website at: <http://www.ca.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/frpp.html>.

Internet Resource: The Land Trust Alliance has temporarily posted on its website materials, presenters, and speeches from the National Land Conservation Conference: Rally 2009 in Portland, OR. For a direct link to the materials click [here](#), or click through Rally 2009/Rally in Review/Materials.

CFCP / DOC News Updates:

Budget Update: The Governor's release of his proposed 2010-11 Budget includes \$7.9 million in local assistance funding for the CFCP. These funds represent a reauthorization of Proposition 40 funds that had previously been appropriated for grants by the CFCP. The ongoing prohibition in making new bond-funded grants prevented the program from being able to commit these funds prior to their June 30, 2009 sunset date, and therefore necessitates gaining new funding authorization.

Upcoming Events:

The California Council of Land Trusts is hosting the **Annual California Land Trust Conference** on March 2 & 3 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.

Save the Date: The **Great Valley Center's Annual Conference**, "Valley Up: Ideas, Innovation, and Inspiration" will be held on May 6 & 7 in Modesto. This year's theme focuses on regional change and real life solutions that will help the Central Valley's economy as it begins to rebound. To learn more about this event, please visit www.greatvalley.org/conference.

The **2010 Spring Ag Outlook Conference** of the California Chapter of the **American Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers** will be held Thursday, March 25th at the Marriott Visalia. "A New Era for California Agriculture" will bring an informative program and roster of speakers to the south valley in addition to the release of the 2010 Trends in Agricultural Land & Lease Values publication. A complete program and on-line registration will be available in early 2010. For more details, please visit www.calasfmra.com.

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.

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