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California Farmland Conservancy Program

Focus on Farmland

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This edition of Focus on Farmland features:

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Historic Level Lea Farm Preserved in San Mateo County

Located in one of the last remaining commercial agricultural areas in San Mateo County, the picturesque Level Lea farm is now protected and will remain in agricultural in perpetuity thanks to the coordinated efforts of private landowners and local, state and federal organizations.

Meredith Reynolds' family has owned the property since before the Civil War, and she was committed to ensuring it would always be farmland. "This land is very meaningful to me," she said. "My family always taught me that it had to be kept as it was, not sold and parceled out. This easement is a wonderful thing for us."



Level Lea Farm near Pescadero in San Mateo County.

Meredith and James Reynolds received a lump-sum payment and potential tax benefits as part of the easement transaction. The easement extinguishes the property's development potential while allowing the family to maintain ownership and control over agricultural activities on the property. They have lived on the land since the late 1970s, in a house built in 1914 by Asa Weeks, one of Meredith's ancestors. Four Weeks brothers immigrated to California from Maine with Meredith's great, great, great uncle, Lafayette Chandler, who bought the property in 1860.

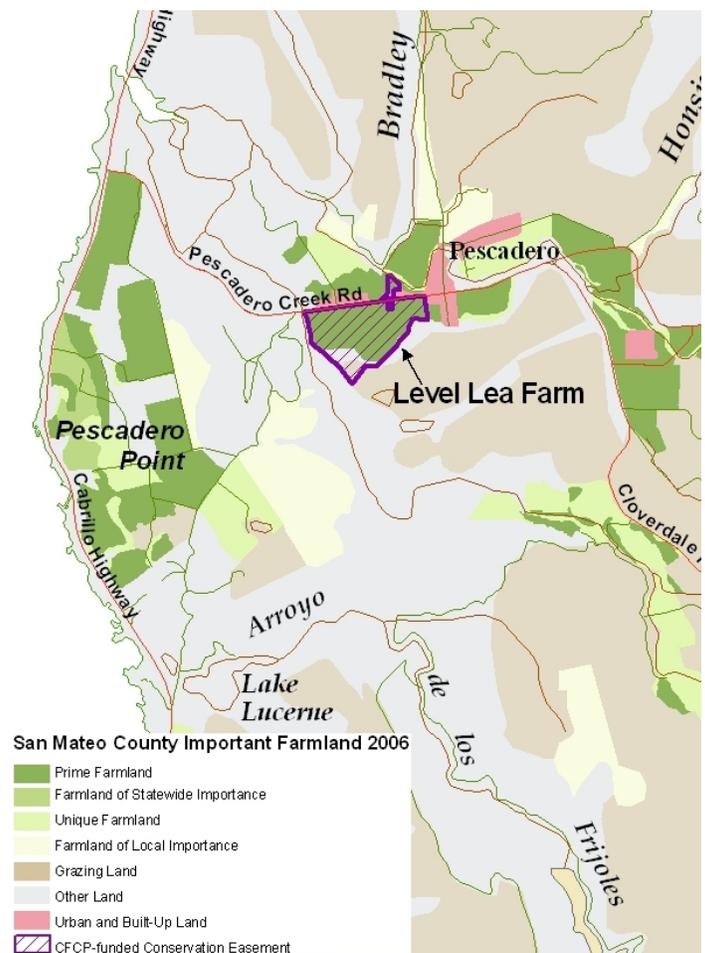
"When Lafayette Chandler and the brothers came west, they weren't gold prospectors. They came here to farm. They must have thought this was heaven – beautiful, productive land with great growing weather."

And what about the farm's name? Explained Mrs. Reynolds: "Lea means newly cleared, level pasture land, which it was to Lafayette. He was used to farming the rocky, hilly terrain of Maine, so the fact that the land was level was significant to him. I would have loved to have been here when they first cleared it."

Mr. and Mrs. Reynolds lease the property to a tenant farmer who grows irrigated vegetable crops. The farm produces nearly \$1 million worth of agricultural products each year.

The 185-acre Level Lea farm is protected by two separate easements. The CFCP and the federal Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program, part of USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, provided a combined \$1,270,000 in funding to the Monterey County Agricultural and Historical Land Conservancy (MCAHLC) to purchase an agricultural easement on the irrigated portions of the farm. The balance of the farm, comprised mostly of rolling hills, was placed under a separate open space easement that was donated by the Reynolds. The landowners sought out the conservancy to hold the easements.

MCAHLC has participated in over 60 projects that collectively protect over 19,000 acres in Monterey County. These projects include vegetable croplands, vineyards, open space, and rangeland. For more information about MCAHLC, now doing business as the Ag Land Trust, please visit its website at www.aglandconservancy.org.



The 185-acre Level Lea farm is protected by two easements: a 106-acre agricultural easement (outline above) and a 76-acre open space easement (not shown)



The Hayes Farm has been farmed for decades, producing a variety of commodities including rice, wheat and alfalfa.

A Legacy Honored: Hayes Farm Protected

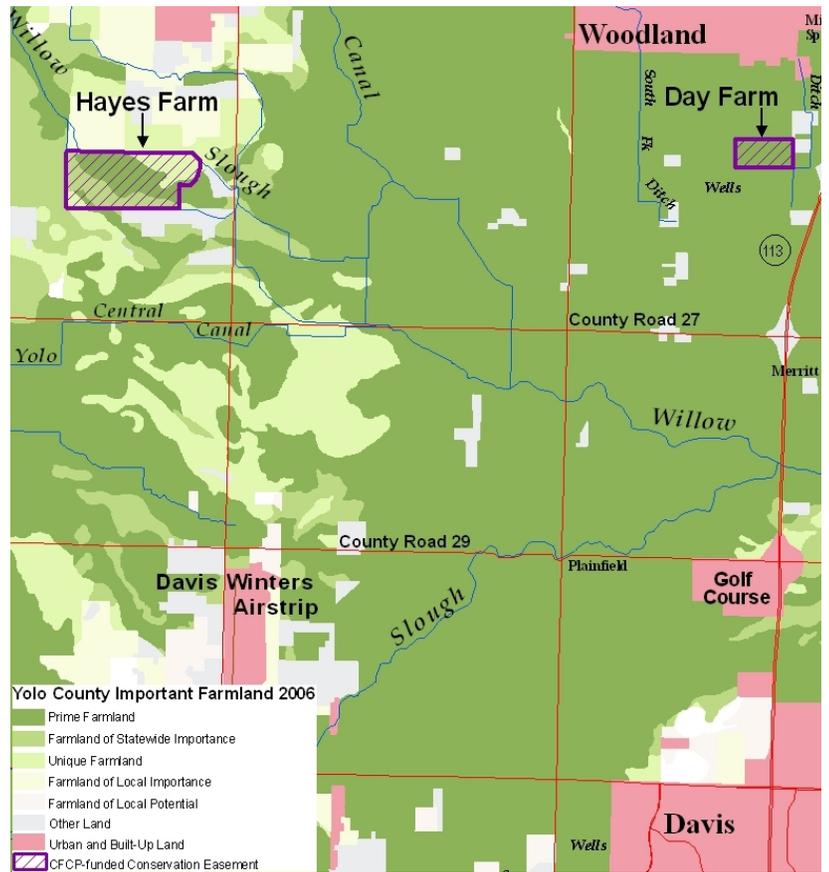
The Yolo Land Trust and CFCP have recently completed an agricultural conservation easement on the 350-acre Hayes Farm southwest of Woodland in Yolo County. The Hayes Farm has been farmed for decades, producing a variety of commodities including rice, wheat and alfalfa. Tom Hayes, a member of a long-time farming family, began farming the land for the previous owner, Russell Bell, about 10 years ago. When Bell died in 2005, he left most of the property to Hayes and a portion of it to his widow. While Hayes plans to continue to farm it himself for as long as possible, he felt it was important to protect the gift he had been given and ensure that it would always be farmed.

“When I heard about the land trust, I thought this is a good way to keep it in farming and that’s what Russell would have wanted,” Hayes said. Hayes is using income generated from placing the farm into a conservation easement to make improvements to the property, including leveling land, putting in new drainage pipes and shoring up ditch banks.

The property’s location makes it a particularly important easement. Hayes Farm is a half-mile south of the Monument Hills subdivision in an area often eyed for development because of its proximity to Woodland, Davis and Winters. The site is adjacent to Willow Slough which is known to provide nesting sites for Swainson hawks. Other wildlife, such as turkeys, pheasants, rabbits, and ducks benefit from the cover and water features on the property.

“We’re very pleased to have worked with the Yolo Land Trust on this project and commend Tom Hayes on taking the initiative to shield this great farmland from future development,” said Brian Leahy, Chief of the Department of Conservation’s Division of Land Resource Protection. “Our California Farmland Conservancy Program offers a partnership between landowners, land stewards and government agencies that helps balance the needs of a growing population and agriculture. We hope other Yolo County farmers will take note of what Mr. Hayes has done and explore the agricultural conservation easement option for their property.”

The conservation easement was purchased with \$675,500 in funding from the CFCP with match funding via landowner bargain sale. The Hayes Farm brings the total number of acres that the Yolo Land Trust has protected over the last decade to more than 6,729. The Yolo Land Trust is a private, non-profit corporation founded in 1988 by farmers, community leaders and conservationists dedicated to protecting the land resources of Yolo County. To learn more, visit www.yololandtrust.org.



The 350-acre Hayes Farm shown near Woodland in Yolo County

W.F. Cook Cattle Ranch Preserved Under Agricultural Conservation Easement

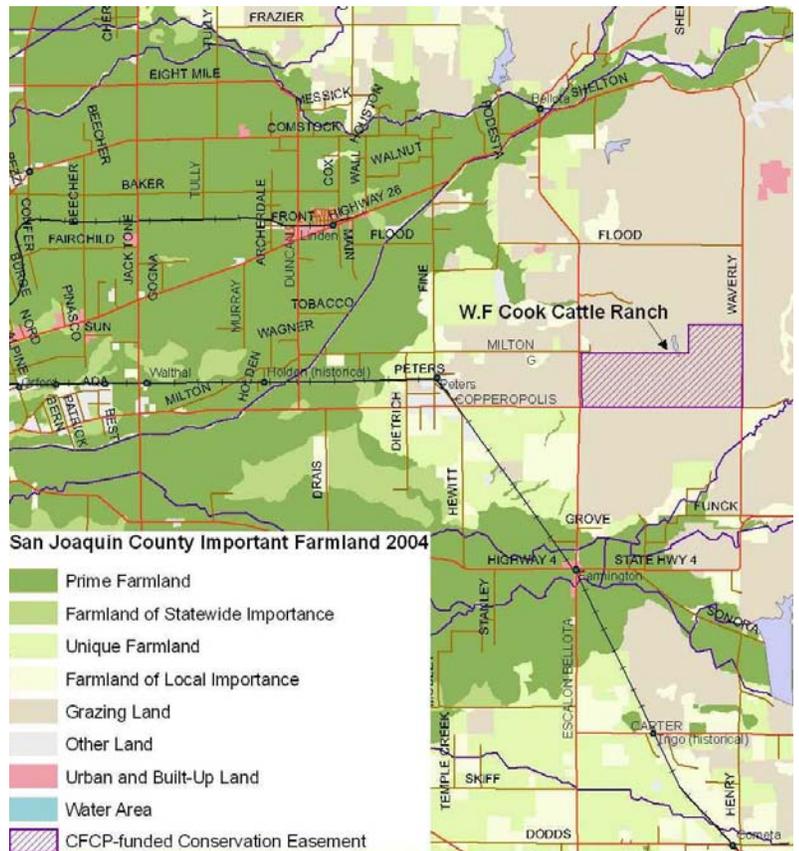
The Trust for Public Land worked with the CFCP, U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program, and the California Rangeland Trust to place an agricultural conservation easement on the W.F. Cook Cattle Company ranch. The 2,235-acre ranch is located just 13 miles east of Stockton, where similar properties are being subdivided and sold as ranchettes. A conservation easement ensures this family operation will be spared that fate, and preserves its highly productive grasslands for grazing and other agricultural use. The W.F. Cook Cattle Company easement will be managed by the California Rangeland Trust.

The Cook family has been raising cattle just outside of Farmington for generations. It has witnessed tremendous change during the past 20 years, as the Central Valley's population has grown by 20 percent. Much of that growth is happening in cities, but there is also a trend toward parcelization of large farms and ranches. Neighboring properties have been divided into 40-acre lots.

Bill Cook wanted to keep his ranch intact and in agriculture, and approached the Trust for Public Land for help. "I wanted to stop development at our boundary line," he said. The W.F. Cook Cattle Company ranch is located just eight miles west of Orvis Ranch, which was protected in 2006. As development pressure increases in the Valley, more and more ranchers are turning to easements to protect their land.

"The preservation of farm and ranchlands is crucial to maintaining California's agricultural vitality," said Bridgett Luther, Director of DOC. "The grant we provided to help support this easement is designed to protect the resources on W. F. Cook Cattle Company ranchland also to protect our agricultural heritage."

"We are proud to complete this conservation easement agreement on the W.F. Cook Cattle Company's ranch and forever conserve this working landscape and the environment the existing ranching practices support," said Nita Vail, executive director of the California Rangeland Trust. "Our mission is to conserve rangeland such as this so generations to come will benefit from its resources, come to know its Western legacy and enjoy its beauty."



W.F. Cook Cattle Ranch encompasses 2,235 acres in San Joaquin County. It is located 13 miles east of Stockton near Farmington.



The scenic rangeland of the W.F. Cook Cattle Ranch is used for cattle grazing

The conservation easement was purchased with \$1,700,000 in funding from the CFCP, \$1,300,700 in funding from the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program, and \$499,300 via landowner bargain sale. The Trust for Public Land coordinated the transaction and funded associated costs.

For more information on the California Rangeland Trust, please visit www.rangelandtrust.org. For more information on the Trust for Public Land, please visit www.tpl.org.

Other News:

Measure E: Voters in Stanislaus County made Measure E, also known as Stamp out Sprawl, the first successful growth initiative in Stanislaus County. For the next 30 years, supervisors cannot change agricultural zoning for residential uses in unincorporated areas without ballot permission from county voters.

CFCP / DOC News Updates:

Department of Finance Completes Scheduled Audit of CFCP: As part of its role as administrator of bond funds, the CFCP underwent a comprehensive audit of its grant functions and processes this past fall. The audit was conducted by the Department of Finance and was comprised of both financial and programmatic analysis and assessment. The overall conclusions of program performance were quite positive. However, the Department of Finance is recommending the CFCP should be more directly involved in the ongoing monitoring and oversight of agricultural conservation easements it funds, including regular property inspections. The Department of Conservation is currently exploring options to address this recommendation. In the meantime grantees are requested to continue to submit to the CFCP their own summaries of annual easement monitoring, which are requested by June 30 each year. A one-page letter describing the method of monitoring and the condition of the property is sufficient. A [sample form](#) is available on the CFCP website.

Department of Conservation Going Green: The first step in this effort came when the DOC joined California's Climate Action Registry (CAR), which provides a framework for organizations to measure and report emissions from their vehicles and electricity used in their buildings. For more information on the Climate Action Registry, please visit www.climateregistry.org.

O'Bryant Moving On: Long-time DOC employee Dennis O'Bryant has left the Division of Land Resource Protection (DLRP) to take a position with the California Air Resources Control Board. Prior to his departure, O'Bryant was serving as the program manager of the Williamson Act Program and the Resource Conservation District Assistance Program.

Limpach Joins DLRP: Scott Limpach has accepted the position of deputy chief of the DLRP. He will report to Assistant Director Brian Leahy, head of the DLRP. Limpach brings to the position strong management skills, including several years of management responsibility in the Division of Recycling, another branch of the DOC.

Upcoming Events:

The **Great Valley Center's 11th Annual Conference**, "Green Momentum: Prospering in a New Economy," will be held on May 7th and 8th in Sacramento. Featuring more than 45 breakout sessions and 100 expert speakers, this is your chance to learn how the Valley's economy, communities, and environment will be shaped by the emergent ideas of sustainability, long term planning and collaboration. Topics include transportation, land use, green building design, the economy, air quality, water, health care, and education. For more information, please visit www.greatvalley.org/conference.

The annual meeting of the **California Chapter of the American Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers**, April 10th in Bakersfield. For more information, please visit www.asfmra.org/meetings/index.cfm?fa=disevent&id=102.

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.

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