



# DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION

## PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

801 K STREET • MS 24-07 • SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA 95814

PHONE 916 / 323-1886 • FAX 916 / 323-1887 • TDD 916 / 324-2555 • WEB SITE [conservation.ca.gov](http://conservation.ca.gov)



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### Contact:

Teresa Schilling/Don Drysdale

(916) 323-1886

## NEW PROGRAM PRESERVES AG LAND FOR CLIMATE BENEFITS

*Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program Provides \$4.6 Million for Easements, Planning*

SACRAMENTO – Seven California properties may be permanently set aside for agriculture thanks to a first-of-its kind state program that invests in farmland conservation for its climate benefits. The Strategic Growth Council launched the Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program (SALC) in January and has committed more than \$4.6 million in Greenhouse Gas Reduction Funds to agricultural conservation easements and planning grants.

The program is part of the California Climate Investments initiative. State agencies are investing cap-and-trade auction proceeds in projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions while providing a variety of additional benefits to California communities.

“This modest investment in protecting California agricultural lands has been highly leveraged, and will bring over 14,000 acres under permanent protection,” Resources Agency Secretary John Laird said. “This keeps important farmland in production, while helping to manage growth within discrete boundaries.”

The Department of Conservation’s Division of Land Resource Protection (DLRP) developed guidelines for the SALC Program, conducted public workshops, and reviewed 10 agricultural conservation easement proposals, recommending seven for funding. Keeping farms and ranches from being converted to more intensive land uses, such as urban or low-density sprawl, will avoid increases in greenhouse gas emissions that would occur because of the developments. The approved projects, most of which have commitments for the required matching funds, are:

- ◆ A 134-acre farm near Salinas that grows row crops such as strawberries, lettuce, broccoli, and celery that will help expand the farmland perimeter and greenbelt west of that Monterey County community.
- ◆ A 2,475-acre cow-calf operation near Bridgeport in Mono County that includes about 1,800 acres of

irrigated pasture and 683 acres of non-irrigated grazing that federal officials have designated as Grassland of Special Environmental Significance.

- ◆ A 582-acre cow-calf operation near Susanville that has been part of Lassen County's working landscape since the 1860's, and has been managed by the current owners since 1975. The threat under current zoning is for large lot rural development.

- ◆ Two cow-calf ranches encompassing 1,558 acres east of Lake Berryessa in Napa County. The creation of this easement may become the first phase in permanent protection of several thousand additional acres. The ranches are considered Important Rangeland by the California Rangeland Conservation Coalition.

- ◆ A 230-acre Sonoma County property currently leased for year-round grazing of beef cattle. The land has been owned and operated by the same family for about 50 years and would function as a community separator at the south edge of the City of Petaluma.

- ◆ Two adjacent cow-calf ranches that straddle the Butte and Tehama county line. The ranches, near Chico, total 8,847 acres. The ranches are considered Critical Rangeland by the California Rangeland Conservation Coalition, and preserving them for agriculture will provide a buffer area to the east of the city.

- ◆ A 330-acre property near Point Reyes Station that has been owned by the same family since the 1870's and is among Marin County's historic dairies. The property is currently leased to a local dairy farmer and is in an area important to the local land trust's efforts to protect corridors of agricultural land from development.

DLRP also reviewed 10 proposals for Agricultural Strategy Grants, which allow communities to develop agricultural-conservation plans that will result in greenhouse gas reduction. Half of those projects were recommended for funding totaling \$492,495, in Butte, Mendocino, Mono, Santa Clara and Santa Cruz counties.

"The Agricultural Strategy grants provide local jurisdictions the opportunity to be proactive in conserving land while reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing carbon sequestration," said John Lowrie, who heads DLRP.

The SALC grants are part of the much larger effort by the state to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The Strategic Growth Council recently awarded nearly \$122 million in competitive grants and loans toward that goal using proceeds from the state's cap-and-trade auctions. These grants and loans help reduce emissions by supporting more compact, infill development patterns, encouraging active transportation and transit usage, and protecting agricultural land from sprawl.

DLRP also administers the bond-funded California Farmland Conservancy Program. Since 1996, that program has funded more than 175 conservation easements, permanently conserving more than 57,000 acres of the state's best farmland with more than \$83 million in funding. DLRP is also working with the High Speed Rail Authority on securing permanent agricultural conservation easements to offset the loss of farmland associated with construction of the bullet train.



*California Climate Investments are programs funded by the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund using proceeds from the State's cap-and-trade auctions.*

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