



# DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION

*Managing California's Working Lands*

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## **SEQUOIA RIVERLANDS TRUST TEAMS WITH STATE, FEDERAL AGENCIES TO SHIELD HANFORD-AREA FARM FROM DEVELOPMENT**

HANFORD, Calif. – In December 1825, pioneer George Hobler sailed from Great Britain to Australia, where thousands of English prisoners had been sent. His trip was by choice, not compulsion. His family operated a successful sheep ranch down under until there was a depression, at which time his son, George II, sailed to California and basically became a squatter on Mexican land grant property in Alameda.

“Then he heard about this marvelous crop that grew on trees in the Hanford area, so he decided to move there in 1872,” said Stuart Clark, Hobler’s great-great-grandson.

The crop George Hobler II had heard about was cotton. Although he got the part about it growing on trees wrong, he got many other things right. These days, Stuart Clark and his wife Lena indeed have some wonderful crops on trees – almonds and pistachios – on land the family purchased in the early 1900s. Their property, known as the Howe Ranch, will stay in agricultural use forever after the Clarks worked with the Sequoia Riverlands Trust to place it in an agricultural conservation easement, shielding it from development.

“My family has a real tie to that land and the valley,” Stuart Clark said. “We just didn’t want to see the property go the way of some of the nearby farmland, which was turned into an industrial park. We wanted to see it preserved for agriculture and for our children and future grandchildren. My hope is, now that we’ve planted it in almonds and pistachios, that we’ll see some wildlife come back in. We used to see pheasants and quail everywhere on the farm, but I haven’t seen a pheasant there in 20 years.”

Funding for the project was provided by the California Department of Conservation’s California Farmland Conservancy Program (CFCP) and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP).

“This easement is historic in many ways,” said Scott Spear, president of the Sequoia Riverlands Trust board. “It is the first agricultural conservation easement in the history of Kings County. In addition, it protects two treasures of our region – San Joaquin Valley prime farmland and the Clark Center for Japanese

Art and Culture. Having farmed for 40 years, I recognized the value of farmland as a natural resource that is disappearing. Now I can play a role in protecting this resource and at the same time bring an economic benefit to farmers.”

The 153-acre Howe Ranch is located on 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue, approximately one mile south of Hanford’s city limits and half a mile from the Sphere of Influence. Although Hanford’s population growth has slowed over the last two years, future expansion of its industrial and commercial uses along 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue as the economy rebounded loomed as a serious threat to Howe Ranch before the development rights were removed.

“The Sequoia Riverlands Trust has identified this area as one of its highest priorities, due to both the high quality of farmland, dependable water sources and a relatively high degree of development threat,” California Department of Conservation Acting Director Derek Chernow said. “We’re very pleased that this land will remain in agriculture. We congratulate the Clark family and our partners on the creation of this conservation easement and encourage other Kings County landowners to explore the easement option for their property.”

Added NRCS California State Conservationist Ed Burton: “We are proud to help this multi-generational farming family preserve their historic property for generations to come. Equally as important is that this land will provide productive and healthy wildlife habitat for a number of species in Kings County.”

The Howe Ranch surrounds a 17-acre parcel where Stuart’s parents -- Willard G. "Bill" and Elizabeth Clark -- live and have established one of the premier Japanese art museums in the United States, the Clark Center for Japanese Art and Culture. Open to the public, the Clark Center has four major exhibitions a year, and also has a noted educational program. Several former interns, from eight different countries, now work in major museums or universities around the world.

“Creating this easement will preserve the natural state around my parents’ property and the Center,” Stuart Clark said. “The thought of urban encroachment pushing south toward them was a bit scary. They like the idea of having that blanket of agriculture around them.”

**About the Department of Conservation’s California Farmland Conservancy Program:** Begun in 1996, the CFCP has provided \$77.9 million in funding to permanently shield 52,102 acres of the state’s best and most vulnerable agricultural land from development. Landowners and trusts are encouraged to contact the Division of Land Resource Protection for information about the program and potential funding. For details, visit [www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp](http://www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp).

**About the Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP):** The federal FRPP is a voluntary easement program that protects productive agricultural land by providing funds for the purchase of conservation easements to limit conversion of farm and ranch lands to non-agricultural uses. NRCS partners with state, tribal or local governments, and non-governmental

organizations to fund the acquisition of conservation easements or other interests in land from landowners. More information is available at [www.ca.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ca.nrcs.usda.gov).

**About the Sequoia Riverlands Trust** – SRT is a regional, non-profit land trust dedicated to conserving the natural and agricultural legacy of the southern Sierra Nevada and San Joaquin Valley. To date, SRT has protected more than 11,343 acres. SRT owns and manages six nature preserves that protect 4,069 acres of remnant landscapes, woodland communities and wildlife habitat, all grazed by cattle. SRT holds conservation easements on 25 properties, totaling 3,664 more acres of protected land, all of them working farms and ranches. SRT also has collaborated with agencies, other non-profit conservation organizations, and landowners to protect additional acres often owning them during the transition to new ownership. For more information, visit <http://www.sequoiariverlands.org/index.html>.

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