



DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION

Managing California's Working Lands

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

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Contacts: Don Drysdale, Dept. of Conservation, (916) 323-1886
Scott Spear, Sequoia Riverlands Trust, (559) 738-0211
Jonathan Groveman, USDA-FRPP, (530) 792-5692 ext. 110

SEQUOIA RIVERLANDS TRUST TEAMS WITH STATE, FEDERAL AGENCIES TO SHIELD FAMILY FARM IN FRESNO, TULARE COUNTIES FROM DEVELOPMENT

It's a long haul from Germany to Brazil to Kingsburg, California. But that's the road Fred Schnitzler took to find a piece of ground of his own. Now, after a decade of effort, he and his wife Lydia have entered into an agreement to permanently preserve one of their farms for agriculture.

"My dad started this process a long time ago and he was very passionate about putting the property into an easement," said Gary Schnitzler, Fred's son. "We have some of the best farm soil in the world in this valley, and everyone seems to be in a big hurry to pave it over. It makes him sick to see beautiful orchards and crops torn out.

"When my dad turned 70 a couple of years ago, he retired and now I run the farm with help from my son (Blake). I share dad's passion for preserving this land. We're going to run out of good farmland someday and then wonder how we're going to feed people."

Fred Schnitzler began discussions about creating an agricultural conservation easement on his 89-acre property with the American Farmland Trust (AFT) several years ago, and an application went forward in 2009. Although AFT remained as the applicant and later as the grant recipient, the Sequoia Riverlands Trust will hold the easement on the farm, which produces plums, peaches and nectarines on prime soil.

"We have worked side by side with AFT for the last several years and are pleased to have played a role in helping the Schnitzler family finally reach their dream," Sequoia Riverlands Trust Board President Scott Spear said.

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).

Fred Schnitzler bought the property in 1969. His parents fled Germany for Brazil at the outbreak of World War II, and Fred immigrated to California in 1961.

“He picked peaches and nectarines, worked as a mechanic, and saved enough money to buy a farm in 1961,” Gary Schnitzler said. “He’s lived the American dream, and making sure this property remained a viable, productive farm is part of that dream.”

According to the state’s Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program, farm and grazing lands decreased by 33,178 acres in Fresno County and by 10,363 acres in Tulare County from 2000-2008. The Schnitzler Farm’s western edge is located approximately 300 feet west of the City of Kingsburg’s sphere of influence. There are ranchettes, golf courses and rural subdivision development nearby.

“Were very pleased that the Schnitzler family kept pursuing the effort to set the land aside for agriculture and congratulate them and the other partners who brought this project to fruition,” California Department of Conservation (DOC) Acting Director Derek Chernow said. “This is the first project we’ve been a part of in Tulare County, and only the second in Fresno County, so this is special for our program.”

Added Ed Burton, NRCS California state conservationist: “NRCS is committed to helping preserve healthy and productive farmland for future generations, and we are proud to have worked with our partners and this great farm family to make this easement a reality.”

About the Department of Conservation’s California Farmland Conservancy Program: Begun in 1996, the CFCP has provided \$76.6 million in funding to permanently shield 51,250 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.

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.

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 Trust has protected more than 10,000 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 19 properties, totaling 3,226 more acres of protected land, all of them working farms and ranches. SRT has also collaborated with agencies, other non-profit conservation organizations and landowners to protect 3,811 additional acres often owning them during the transition to new ownership. For more information, visit <http://www.sequoiariverlands.org/index.html>.