

SEQUOIA RIVERLANDS TRUST TEAMS WITH STATE, FEDERAL AGENCIES TO PROTECT TREASURED NATIONAL RESOURCE: FOOD PRODUCTION

WASCO, Calif. – After serving one term in the White House, Herbert Hoover decided to farm. He hired experts to find the best agricultural land available. They selected two spots, near Wasco and Pasadena.

The way Keith Gardiner sees it, who's he to argue with the nation's 31st president and his team of agronomists?

“Hoover told them to find the best combination of soil, water and climate, and they didn't let him down,” Gardiner said. “We're on some of the best ground in the world. If you can't make it as a farmer here, you can't make it anywhere.”

Gardiner, Holly King and members of their extended families formed a partnership that two years ago created the first agricultural conservation easement in Kern County, permanently shielding the 472-acre Wasco I farm from development. Today, the partnership and Sequoia Riverlands Trust announced that the adjoining 571-acre Wasco II property likewise has been set aside for agriculture.

President Hoover would be proud.

“I don't have a lot of history on this particular property – we only bought it four years ago – but my history has been to try to find this kind of land,” Gardiner said. “I've been farming for 40 years, and this is exactly what I've always wanted. We want to keep it in farming, with no outside pressure for development. There's no better calling for this kind of land than what we're doing with it.”

Funding for the creation of the Wasco II easement 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).

“The state and national significance of this property was recognized so many years ago by President Hoover and his team of experts,” said Scott Spear, Board President of Sequoia Riverlands Trust. “Crop and food needs change over time, but this easement will ensure this property will remain in food production in perpetuity.”

Wasco II is primarily planted in almond orchards that will come into production next year; Wasco I also is in almonds. While the nearest concentrated urban development is approximately 2½ miles to the south in Shafter and five miles northwest in Wasco, the property could have been split into 20-acre “ranchettes” for folks working in Bakersfield but desiring a rural homestead. Numerous estate-size lots, 10 to 20 acres in size, are evident south of Wasco’s sphere of influence boundary and north of Shafter’s sphere boundary.

“It’s hard to overstate just how good this land is for growing things, and it’s ideally situated to help ensure the continuity of agriculture in the area,” said Brian Leahy, chief of the Department of Conservation’s Division of Land Resource Protection, which administers the CFCP. “We congratulate the landowners and the Sequoia Riverlands Trust, on the creation of this conservation easement and encourage other Kern County landowners to explore the easement option for their property.”

Said NRCS California State Conservationist Ed Burton: “We are pleased to work with these farming families to preserve this land for agricultural production and protect it for future generations.”

About the Department of Conservation’s California Farmland Conservancy

Program: Begun in 1996, the CFCP has provided \$77.4 million in funding to permanently shield 52,293 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 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. 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. 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. For more information, visit <http://www.sequoiariverlands.org/index.html>.

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