Integrating Conservation and Development: The Role of Our Agricultural Land Base

Photo by Clint Musgrove

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Non-profit 501 (c) 3, established 1980

Mission:
Protect farmland, promote sound farming practices, and keep farmers on the land.
Long-Term Thinking for California Agriculture
Farmland for Resilient Communities

- National security
- Economic contribution
- Cultural heritage and identity

- Multiple public and environmental benefits:
  - Healthy people, healthy communities
  - Maintaining ecosystems
  - Aquifer recharge areas
  - Climate change mitigation and resilience
CALIFORNIA CLIMATE STRATEGY

An Integrated Plan for Addressing Climate Change

VISION

Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions to 40% Below 1990 Levels by 2030

GOALS

- 50% reduction in petroleum use in vehicles
- Carbon sequestration in the land base
- Safeguard California
- 50% renewable electricity
- Double energy efficiency savings at existing buildings
- Reduce short-lived climate pollutants
Agriculture is Important to Climate Change Mitigation

Stabilizing farmland with efficient land use patterns means:

*carbon sequestration*

Source: CA Department of Food and Agriculture, 2015
Agriculture is Important to Climate Change Mitigation

Stabilizing farmland with efficient land use patterns means:

prevention of GHG emissions
reduced VMT

Source: Louis Jackson, UC Davis, 2012
Farmland Conservation = GHG Savings

Reducing farmland conversion by 50% by 2030 and 75% by 2050 means GHG savings comparable to:

✓ Taking 1.9 million cars off the road
✓ Reducing VMT by 767 billion miles
✓ Saving 700,000 acres of farmland

Source: American Farmland Trust, 2016
What’s the Real Risk?
California Farmland 1984 - 2014

• Over ¼ of land in California is farmland

• 1.4 million acres have been removed from farming uses

• 78% of farmland conversions were to urban uses (1.1 million new urban acres)

• 49% of conversion were from PRIME Farmland

Source: CA Department of Conservation, 2015
The Reality of the San Joaquin Valley
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The Reality of the San Joaquin Valley
What Should We Do?

1. AVOID
2. MINIMIZE
3. MITIGATE

In that order!
Farmland Conservation Objectives

1. Avoid development of best farmland by guiding development away from it
2. Stabilize urban edges to avoid land speculation and agricultural destabilization
3. Avoid rural residential and other types of development
4. Minimize farmland loss with more efficient urban development
5. Provide equity redemption opportunity for landowners who do not wish to sell land
6. Provide stable agribusiness climate
How Can LAFCOs Lead?
LAFCOs Can Lead by...

• Keeping existing boundaries tight – make it very difficult to annex land when need is not demonstrated!

• Requiring infill assessment for annexation proposals

• Reducing size of spheres

• Adopting a LAFCo agricultural policy

• Requiring agricultural preservation programs (including policies that avoid, minimize, and mitigate)

• Requiring cities, county, and LAFCO to communicate!
What are the consequences?

- Uncertainty
- Land speculation & price inflation
- Disinvestment in agriculture
- Decline in easement participation
- Decreased regional resiliency to climate change
- Decrease in ecosystem services
- Missed opportunities to invest in our great cities and towns
“The nation that destroys its soil, destroys itself.”
– Franklin Delano Roosevelt

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