Agricultural Resources and Conservation in California

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Why Conserve Farmland in California?

- Economy: $43 billion in farm gate revenue, multiplier effects
- More than 50% of the fruits and vegetables produced in the nation
- More than 400 specialty crops
- Farmland can provide co-benefits – floodplain, open space, habitat
Department of Conservation
Division of Land Resources Protection*

Our mission:

To provide leadership in the conservation of land necessary to ensure the sustainability of California’s agricultural productivity and the state’s soil, watershed, and open space resources.
Services Provided by DLRP

- Financial assistance -- property tax reduction, conservation easements, planning grants
- GIS mapping and statistics
- Technical assistance – 1:1 consulting

emphasis on voluntary programs
Land Conservation Act* of 1965

- Voluntary, self-renewing contracts (10- or 20-year) are enforceable restrictions on property
- Local jurisdiction gains land use certainty, landowner receives property tax benefit (20% to 75%)
- 16 million acres or 30% of CA’s private lands enrolled in 52 counties

*AKA the Williamson Act
Status of the Land Conservation Act

- Subventions to counties no longer in effect
- Imperial County nonrenewal of all contracts (117,000 acres)
- 11 counties opted for reduced term* (9 or 18 year) contracts
- 19 counties accepted new contracts in 2013

*AB 1265 (Nielsen, Chapter 90, Statutes of 2011)
California Farmland Conservancy Program

- About 57,000 acres of permanent conservation easements* secured since 1996
- Average easement cost of $2,585/acre, CFCP contribution of $1,450/acre
- CFCP can provide transaction costs
- 36 planning grants to increase land trust capacity
- Mitigation Guidebook (CA Council of Land Trusts)

*Defined under California Civil Code 815
What’s in it for the Landowner?

• Farm families can conserve their legacy – the property is protected forever
• Fees paid to them for the easement – can be invested in equipment, farm expansion
• Tax and estate planning benefits
What’s in it for the Community?

- Creates stability for agricultural support industries
- Provides open space buffers between cities
- Ensures locally produced food and fiber
- Can mitigate for lost farmland when done as part of the planning process
Ag Conservation Easement Trends

- Case law supporting easements as partial mitigation for farmland loss
- ‘Affirmative’ easements to increase co-benefits
- Cap and trade
Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program

- Used in the CEQA process to evaluate Farmland impacts
- 1.4 million farmland acres converted since 1984
- 80% of conversions were for urban use
- 47% of the loss was Prime Farmland (more than 662,000 acres)
- Recession trends: Infrastructure for tomorrow – solar, water, transportation
Urbanization in the Bakersfield Area
NET CHANGE IN LAND USE 1984-2010

- Prime Farmland
- Additional Irrigated Land
- Dryland Crops & Grazing
- Urban
- Other Land & Water

1984-1990: 250,000
1990-1994: 150,000
1994-1998: 50,000
1998-2002: 150,000
2002-2006: 250,000
2006-2010: 350,000
But wait...there’s more!

- Watershed Coordinator Grants
- SGC Planning Incentive Grants (round 3 just awarded)
- Resource Conservation District support
Thank you for your interest!

More information is available at:

www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp