

THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF THE COUNTY OF STANISLAUS  
ACTION AGENDA SUMMARY

DEPT: Planning & Community Development

BOARD AGENDA # D-4

Urgent \_\_\_\_\_ Routine X

AGENDA DATE: July 10, 2001

CEO Concurs with Recommendation YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_  
(Information Attached)

4/5 Vote Required YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO X

**SUBJECT:**

ADOPTION OF A POLICY STATEMENT FOR THE GREAT VALLEY CENTER'S AGRICULTURAL LANDS TRANSACTION PROGRAM AND THE ADOPTION OF A RESOLUTION APPROVING THE SUBMITTAL OF AN APPLICATION FOR GRANT FUNDS FROM THE CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION'S CALIFORNIA FARMLAND CONSERVANCY PROGRAM FOR THE "WENDT FARM".

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:**

1. ADOPT POLICY STATEMENT FOR THE GREAT VALLEY CENTER'S AGRICULTURAL LANDS TRANSACTION PROGRAM; AND,
2. ADOPT THE RESOLUTION APPROVING THE SUBMITTAL OF AN APPLICATION FOR GRANT FUNDS FROM THE CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION'S CALIFORNIA FARMLAND CONSERVANCY PROGRAM BY THE STANISLAUS FARMLAND TRUST AND AMERICAN FARMLAND TRUST FOR THE "WENDT FARM".

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

There will be no fiscal impact to the County.

**BOARD ACTION AS FOLLOWS:**

No. 2001-536

On motion of Supervisor Caruso, Seconded by Supervisor Simon

and approved by the following vote,

Ayes: Supervisors: Mayfield, Blom, Simon, Caruso, and Chair Paul

Noes: Supervisors: None

Excused or Absent: Supervisors: None

Abstaining: Supervisor: None

1) X Approved as recommended

2) \_\_\_\_\_ Denied

3) \_\_\_\_\_ Approved as amended

Motion:

**SUBJECT:** ADOPTION OF A POLICY STATEMENT FOR THE GREAT VALLEY CENTER'S AGRICULTURAL LANDS TRANSACTION PROGRAM AND THE ADOPTION OF A RESOLUTION APPROVING THE SUBMITTAL OF AN APPLICATION FOR GRANT FUNDS FROM THE CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION'S CALIFORNIA FARMLAND CONSERVANCY PROGRAM FOR THE "WENDT FARM".

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**DISCUSSION:** The Stanislaus Farmland Trust was formed in June 2000. The Stanislaus Trust is a local non-profit formed for the purpose of advancing educational information and policies regarding agricultural land. The trust has the ability to purchase agricultural lands and easements that will result in the protection of significant agricultural parcels. Shortly after the formation of the Stanislaus Farmland Trust, we submitted an application to the Great Valley Center under their Agricultural Transaction Program. Stanislaus County was one of three counties (Yolo and Merced Counties were the others) selected for funding of projects. As the Board may recall, 5 million dollars is to be shared (not necessarily equally) between the three counties for the purposes of conserving agricultural lands.

The President of the Stanislaus Farmland Trust and staff of the American Farmland Trust have been approached by and working with a landowner to secure an agricultural land conservation easement on a 764 acre parcel. The subject site consists of two Assessor's parcels - 74-02-01 (299.4 ac.) and 74-03-01 (464.5 ac.). In order to implement the Agricultural Transaction Program and enable the Stanislaus Farmland Trust to acquire the easement on the subject site, the Board of Supervisors needs to adopt a policy regarding selection of lands for conservation easements. In addition, the Board will need to approve a resolution approving an application for grant funds to the California Department of Conservation's Farmland Conservancy Program by the American Farmland Trust and Stanislaus Farmland Trust. The approval of the policy and resolution will enable the Stanislaus Farmland Trust to access funds from the Great Valley Center Agricultural Transaction Program and the Farmland Conservancy Program.

The Policy Statement which is attached (Attachment 1) sets forth the policies and criteria for focusing transactions to protect farmland in Stanislaus County. The criteria are based on policies already contained in the Stanislaus County General Plan, including the Agriculture Element and "Vision Statement" adopted by the cities and County. These documents provide the framework for establishing policies for transactions that will ensure a healthy and viable agricultural industry in the County. In addition, the policy will ensure that easement transactions will be eligible for funding from the California Farmland Conservancy Program and Great Valley Center's Agricultural Transaction Program.

The criteria in the policy cover four (4) general areas which are: 1) agricultural land conservation efforts must be on the best soils..."prime farmland" or "farmland of statewide importance"; 2) eligible property must be close to urban boundaries and subject to urbanization pressure, but not substantially surrounded by urban development and not within the urban boundary of any incorporated city; 3) the properties must be large enough to sustain commercial agricultural production; and, 4) the property has access to water resources. The attached policy statement (Attachment 1) further describes each of the general criteria.

**SUBJECT:** ADOPTION OF A POLICY STATEMENT FOR THE GREAT VALLEY CENTER'S AGRICULTURAL LANDS TRANSACTION PROGRAM AND THE ADOPTION OF A RESOLUTION APPROVING THE SUBMITTAL OF AN APPLICATION FOR GRANT FUNDS FROM THE CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION'S CALIFORNIA FARMLAND CONSERVANCY PROGRAM FOR THE "WENDT FARM".

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**DISCUSSION  
CONTINUED:**

It needs to be stated that conservation easement programs are voluntary. Additionally, the easements provide a framework for ensuring that agricultural land conservation efforts over time will provide for sustainable agriculture and allow for continued urban and economic development in Stanislaus County and its nine cities.

**POLICY  
ISSUES:**

The voluntary sale and acquisition of an agricultural lands easement as discussed in this report is consistent with the goals and policies contained in the General Plan.

**STAFFING  
IMPACT:**

There will be no staff impact as the easement will be maintained by the Stanislaus Farmland Trust.

## **POLICY REGARDING AGRICULTURAL LANDS TRANSACTIONS**

This policy statement sets forth the policies and criteria within Stanislaus County for focusing transactions to protect farmland in Stanislaus County. In 1992, the Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors adopted a General Plan Agricultural Element ("Agricultural Element"), and in 1999 adopted the "Cities/County Vision" ("Vision Statement") in collaboration with the nine cities within Stanislaus County. These documents provide Stanislaus County's policy framework for establishing the criteria for areas to target for transactions that will ensure a healthy and viable agricultural industry in the County. This policy will ensure that easement transactions will be eligible for funding from the California Farmland Conservancy Program ("CFCP") and from the Great Valley Center's Agricultural Transaction Program ("ATP").

### **GENERAL CRITERIA**

A. Ag Land Conservation Efforts Must be on the Best Soils --- Prime Farmland or Farmland of Statewide Importance.

The Agricultural Element provides that:

1. "New development should be directed away from our most productive agricultural areas and guided instead to less productive farmlands and grazing lands, which generally are located on the western and eastern sides of the County"; and,
2. "Remote development in less productive agricultural areas offers a better alternative to the unlimited expansion of established cities and towns into our most productive agricultural areas."

Consistent with these directives, the Stanislaus Farmland Trust's first criterion for conservation easement projects is to give the highest priority to soils that are either "prime farmland" or "farmland of statewide significance" on the Valley floor. These are the top two soil classifications under the California Department of Conservation ("DOC") Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program.

B. Eligible Property Must be Close to Urban Boundaries and Subject to Urbanization Pressure, But Not Substantially Surrounded by Urban Development and Not Within the Urban Boundary of Any Incorporated City.

The ATP program requires matching funds from other sources, which will include grants from the California Department of Conservation's California Farmland Conservancy Program ("CFCP"). The CFCP requires that the property is likely to be converted to non-agricultural use in the foreseeable future.

Moreover, the Vision Statement includes the following vision and actions that call for urban limit lines near existing urban boundaries, and infilling within existing urban areas:

"Vision: We will demonstrate our resolve to produce a world class example of "DOING IT RIGHT" so that Stanislaus County remains blessed with a bounty of fertile land for agriculture. Population growth will be accommodated in communities of varying sizes ranging from larger metropolitan areas to mid-sized cities, to small rural towns and enclaves. Communities will plan, grow and evolve in a compact, efficient fashion. Large expanses of agricultural land and other open space will secure buffers between urban areas and preserve the beauty of views and vistas throughout the County.

"Actions: The cities and County of Stanislaus will adopt general plans, policies and agreements that will achieve the following:

1. More compact and clearly defined urban boundaries that avoid unnecessary conversion of farmlands.
2. Protection of farmland outside the urban boundaries.
3. Expansion of city limits to include urbanized unincorporated areas that are substantially surrounded by a city.
4. Compact urban development which encourages redevelopment of blighted areas, "in fill" development of vacant and underutilized land, and a variety of affordable housing.
5. Urban limit lines, providing for areas of open space, agriculture, very low density, rural development, or green belts in which urban development cannot occur.

Pursuant to the CFCP and the Vision Statement, the properties eligible for the ATP should be close to existing urban areas but not substantially surrounded by existing urban development.

C. The Properties Must be Large Enough to Sustain Commercial Agricultural Production.

The CFCP requires that the properties be large enough to sustain commercial agricultural production. The required property size must be determined on a case by case basis, taking into account: (1) the quality of soil of the property (a smaller property with highly productive soil might merit more protection than a larger property with less productive soils); (2) the prospect of combining several parcels to achieve a critical mass of protected land, thereby avoiding isolated islands of protected lands (such protected islands would be inconsistent with the Vision Statement's mandate for urbanization of lands surrounded by a city); and (3) the strategic value of placing an easement on the property because of its location (the easement is likely to direct urban sprawl into less productive areas).

D. The Property Has Access to Water Resources.

Conservation easements would protect the land in perpetuity. Therefore, the property must have access to high quality and economical water resources that would ensure its continued agricultural productivity. Properties within irrigation districts with excellent water rights and high quality and inexpensive water would satisfy this criterion.

Conservation easements are voluntary transactions. This policy guideline provides a framework for ensuring that land conservation efforts over time will provide for sustainable agriculture and allow for continuing urban growth and economic development in Stanislaus County and its nine cities.

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**THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF THE COUNTY OF STANISLAUS  
STATE OF CALIFORNIA**

Date: July 10, 2001

No. 2001-536

On motion of Supervisor Caruso, Seconded by Supervisor Simon,  
and approved by the following vote,  
Ayes: Supervisors: Mayfield, Blom, Simon, Caruso, and Chair Paul  
Noes: Supervisors: None  
Excused or Absent: Supervisors: None  
Abstaining: Supervisor: None

D-4

THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTION WAS ADOPTED:

**RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF THE COUNTY OF STANISLAUS  
SUPPORTING GRANT FUNDS FROM THE CALIFORNIA FARMLAND CONSERVANCY  
PROGRAM FOR A CONSERVATION EASEMENT TO THE WENDT FARM**

WHEREAS, the Legislature has established the California Farmland Conservancy Program within the Department of Conservation, and through a grant program is providing assistance to conserve important agricultural land resources that are subject to conversion pressures; and,

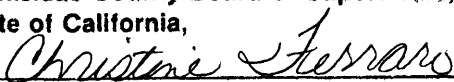
WHEREAS, Stanislaus Farmland Trust proposes to acquire agricultural conservation easements from willing sellers on the west side of Riverbank between Patterson Road and the Stanislaus River east of McHenry Road.

WHEREAS, John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Company intends to sell agricultural conservation easements on 763.90 acre of farmland known as the Wendt Farm for the purpose of conserving priority agricultural land resources in perpetuity. The Assessor's Parcel Numbers of this property is: 074-02-01 and 074-03-01.

WHEREAS, the Board of Supervisors finds that the properties to be placed under easement meet the eligibility criteria set forth in Public Resources Code Section 10251 (except for Section 10251.c), to wit:

- (a) The parcels proposed for conservation are expected to continue to be used for, and are large enough to sustain, commercial agricultural production. The land is also in an area that possesses the necessary market, infrastructure, and agricultural support services, and surrounding parcel sizes and land uses will support long-term commercial agricultural production.
- (b) The County of Stanislaus has a general plan that demonstrates a long-term commitment to agricultural land conservation. This commitment reflected in goals, objectives, policies, and implementation measures of the plan identified in Agricultural Element of said General Plan.

ATTEST: CHRISTINE FERRARO TALLMAN, Clerk  
Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors,  
State of California,

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Bv: Rv: Deputy

File No.

(c) The grant proposal is consistent with the County of Stanislaus General Plan, and the governing body of the County of Stanislaus by this resolution, approves the grant proposal.

(d) Without conservation, the land proposed for protection is likely to be converted to nonagricultural use in the foreseeable future.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors hereby:

1. Approves the purchase of an agricultural conservation easement on the Wendt Farm by the Stanislaus Farmland Trust with funding from the California Department of Conservation, California Farmland Security Program.

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