

# Farmland Working Group

*Striving to protect food, families & farmland. Since 1999.*

## ON THE BALLOT



**The Stamp Out Sprawl- Modesto Citizens' Initiative will get a public vote in November 2015! Nearly 10,000 registered voters signed the petition and the Modesto City Council (MCC) unanimously placed it on their next general election ballot.**

The issue of sprawl is nothing new to the MCC. In 1979, citizens voted for and have since voted upon sewer-trunk-expansion (sprawl) advisory measures under Measure A. In 1997, voters approved Measure M, which strengthened Measure A, but remained advisory – twenty-six separate areas have been considered for advisory votes (14 with yes votes, 12 with no votes) – only three times, to-date, has the MCC ignored the public advisory vote. For more: [http://www.ci.modesto.ca.us/ced/documents/planning\\_urban-area.asp](http://www.ci.modesto.ca.us/ced/documents/planning_urban-area.asp)

[ci.modesto.ca.us/ced/documents/planning\\_urban-area.asp](http://www.ci.modesto.ca.us/ced/documents/planning_urban-area.asp)

In September 2010, Farmland Working Group won support for an urban limit initiative with a unanimous (3-0) vote of the MCC Economic Development Committee (EDC). However, in November 2010, the Council had a change of members and the action to advance the urban limit initiative to the full Council was not taken. Several times over the next three years FWG was told that land-use issues would be taken up through the General Plan (GP) update process. Eventually, in 2013, the Planning Commission and the EDC held public hearings and advanced their recommendations to the full Council. Their proposal was to remove the Salida portion (north of Kiernan Road) and expand west of Freeway 99 with Business Park acreage. The council's recommendation was a considerable reduction of planned urban expansion for the City over the existing GP.

In January 2014, when word got out to the folks that live in the Wood Colony area that Modesto was planning to urbanize their homesteads, whoa! People packed the January 28, 2014 MCC meeting and spoke passionately against the

advancement of Modesto into Wood Colony. Despite the outcry, the MCC not only voted to expand westward, it retained all of the existing GP. Nearly 1,600 acres was added to the massive 50,000 acres that was already in the city's urbanizing plan. The westward expansion plan designations have been pared down to a 211-acre (Regional Commercial) triangle north of Beckwith Road and a 941-acre (Business Park) rectangle (Woodland/Dakota/Maze/city limit).

The Modesto City Council chose to expand their plan for urbanization, while public sentiment and outcry was for a smaller footprint. The politics of the time meant that if farmland were to be preserved, the public, not their representatives, would have to do it.

Stamp Out Sprawl – Modesto will not be an advisory vote. It is an amendment of the Modesto General Plan that requires the MCC has ballot approval for urban expansion outside the boundaries of the initiative. Those boundaries are (as specifically described in the qualified petition):

*“bound on the west by Sisk Road north of freeway 99, freeway 99 and an extension of Morse Road; on the north by Pirrone Road from Sisk Road to Dale Road; on the east by Dale Road from Pirrone to Kiernan Road; and, on the north by Kiernan and Claribel roads east to Claus Road; on the south by Whitmore Avenue west of freeway 99, the Tuolumne River east of freeway 99; and, on the east as Church Street ending at Dry Creek.” The RUL would be “the same as the UL except bound on the north by Pelandale Road to Dale Road, on the east by Dale Road north to Kiernan/Claribel Road, then east to Claus Road.” The initiative defines “residential development” as residential development with a density of less than 100 dwelling units per 10 gross acres. As written, the initiative would not require voter approval for residential projects outside of the RUL with a density higher than 100 dwelling units per 10 gross acres. The policy as a whole would “not apply east of Claus Road north of Dry Creek.”*



## **Edward Thompson Jr.: Directing growth actually helps cities grow – smartly**

**Re “Urban limit sent to ballot” (Page A1, Nov. 6):** The proposed urban growth boundary for Modesto is a good idea that American Farmland Trust heartily endorses.

**There are quite a few cities in California that have already adopted UGBs to conserve farmland while encouraging growth that costs cities less to service. No city that we are aware of has suffered as a result. Most are thriving precisely because the rules are clear about where development should occur, so approval takes less time and costs less money, where farming should continue to be the mainstay of the local economy.**

**As Jake Wenger pointed out, it is the absence of such certainty that discourages farmers from selling conservation easements to protect their land in perpetuity. And it certainly doesn't give residents and voters confidence about the future of their community if every parcel of land around the city is up for grabs.**

**Edward Thompson Jr.,  
California Director, American Farmland Trust, Davis**

- The Modesto Bee/Letter to the editor 11/18/2014

**WE'RE STRIVING TO PROTECT FOOD, FAMILIES AND FARMLAND  
SUPPORT OUR WORK - BECOME A MEMBER!**



## Message from the Chair LIFE WITHOUT WATER?

**Life requires water. Good life depends on reliable water**

**supplies. And fresh water is shrinking locally and globally. Increased and unprecedented pressure on renewable yet finite water resources has resulted from unconstrained water use at rates twice the rate of population increase.**

**Water scarcity, namely excess water demand over available water supply, can not be ignored.**

Fortunately, we can improve water management by supply enhancement strategies and better informed and more efficient demand management policies.

Typically, 70% of freshwater withdrawals are for agriculture. In California, irrigation accounts for about 41% of water use. Experts advise that even more water is needed to satisfy growing food demand. But three years of drought in California has resulted in the "greatest water loss ever seen in California agriculture." According to a recent impact study reported by UC Davis, California drought effects in 2014 alone include:

- \$ 2.2 billion in economic costs state-wide.
- Loss of 17,000 seasonal and part time jobs.
- 5% ( 428,000 acres ) of irrigated cropland in California going out of production.

- Over draft of groundwater causing wells to become dry.
- Projected crop loss of \$800 million plus \$447 million in additional pumping costs Every Californian must help by:
  - Reducing water consumption; for example, an average family of four in Sacramento uses more than 415 gallons of water per day while Californians in the Monterey area consume only 60 gallons a day.
  - Voting to pass the \$7.5 billion water bond measure addressing our water crisis.
  - Working to capture, store and reuse otherwise wasted drainage water.
  - Saving water by reducing food waste.
  - Helping improve our water management culture by:
    - Supporting public awareness campaigns.
    - Participating in educational programs focused on water scarcity.
    - Organizing water user groups via social media.

No action is not an option. Information and knowledge about water must be collected and widely shared. A detailed accounting of water supply and demand can improve policy alignment between water, agriculture and food security. Competing interests must be balanced but require subscription by all to make do with less water. The increasing scarcity of water also requires robust decision making and adaptive management prepared to explore and implement new strategies. When it comes to water, everyone has a vested interest because life without water is impossible.

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**"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."**

**- Margaret Mead**





## WE ARE WATCHING...

### **Stanislaus Council of Governments/StanCOG**

[www.stancog.org](http://www.stancog.org)

Water use continues to be a hot topic for California and our area in particular. It is likely to be a test of wills when actions by water districts may appear not to be in the best interest of the general public. The Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors approved all water districts in the county, when formed; could they be disapproved? If the BOS found that actions by a water district were injurious to health and public safety, could they use that authority? When it comes to groundwater, local representatives will need to find clear solutions.

The Wood Colony urbanization issue is not just a conflict for the City of Modesto, it also begs the question, "Why should anybody be urbanizing our best farmland?" Over the last decade, the County has approved urban uses throughout the county. But that piecemeal action is of particular angst to cities when parcels just outside the cities are converted from farm to urban uses. Most often the urban conversion occurs at the Stanislaus Planning Commission level. Then, if necessary, urbanization requests are considered by the BOS, yet often as consent items.

Unfortunately, this process, over the long run, creates urban sprawl, particularly along busy roadways like McHenry Avenue near Modesto or West Main near Turlock. However, there is hope that more certainty will come to continue our farmland for farms heritage. Ag zoning may get some extra attention soon. If Stanislaus County were to make more certain that only direct farming related businesses (those that would not easily fit into business and industrial parks) were allowed on ag zoned land, we may see improvement in relations between city and county government.

### **City of Hughson**

[www.hughson.org](http://www.hughson.org)

Hughson's 2-1 mitigation for conversion of farmland to urban uses is a strong disincentive for development on their surrounding prime farmland.

### **City of Modesto**

[www.modestogov.com](http://www.modestogov.com)

An urban limit measure will be on the next general election, November 2015. State law requires city councils to deal with qualifying citizen initiatives in specific ways. Because the Stamp Out Sprawl – Modesto petition drive collected over the required 10% of registered Modesto voters, the city council chose to

send it to the ballot. It could have studied its impacts and adopted it as law by ordinance.

### **City of Oakdale**

[www.oakdalegov.com](http://www.oakdalegov.com)

The North County Corridor is a redo of Highway 108, it is expected to replace the through-town route with one south of the city. Final determination for that route is likely to change, considerably, land-use planning for the City of Oakdale. That region of the county has seen "highway promises" before, having experienced the never-to-be-completed "120 By-pass" for decades.

### **City of Patterson**

[www.ci.patterson.ca.us](http://www.ci.patterson.ca.us)

The city staff has recommended a farmland mitigation of \$2,000 per acre for conversion to urban uses. The Building Industry Association calls the amount a reasonable mitigation for the negative impact to the community for the farmland taken for urbanization. The record for the average cost to purchase and protect farmland from development is nearly \$9,000 per acre. It would be difficult to agree that the \$2k figure would stand up to any legal or administrative challenge of nexus for 1-1 mitigation.

### **City of Newman**

[www.cityofnewman.com](http://www.cityofnewman.com)

Nearly 2/3 of voters approved the urban growth boundary on the ballot, Measure Z. Based on a Ventura County growth boundary, Newman voters restricted urban development to a plan using their existing Sphere of Influence. <http://www.cityofnewman.com/news-and-information.html>



From left: Michael Holland-City Manager, Allen Gammon, Timothy Parker, Denny Jackman, and Ana Ringsted (FWG Board Members)

# Bingo!

It was just another ordinary, hectic day as a member of the Buhach Colony FFA agricultural leadership class. It was the chapter's annual "Cow Chip Bingo" fundraiser, which as the name applies, involves a cow, graciously lent by a local dairyman, pooping on a spray painted bingo board on the back lawn of the school campus. I had to leave class a few minutes early in order to ensure that the meeting was set up,

**If upcoming generations are not fully aware of the scale and importance of agriculture and how it plays into our everyday lives, we agriculturally minded folks are in big trouble.**

and as I stood up, one of my classmates asked where I was going. I told him, and invited him to come check it out.

Later, amidst all the chaos, I saw him and a group of my peers who were not involved in the FFA flock out to the field. I couldn't help but overhear their excited conversations..... about the cow. I walked up to them and found that they had never seen a dairy cow up close before, and this was a completely new experience for them. It was amazing to see a high school student so thrilled to

see a cow! I realized, that even though we live in the Central Valley, one of the world's most productive agricultural regions, there were many, many people my age, younger, and older, that are completely unaware of what most of us agriculturists take for granted as part of daily life.

According to the United States Geological Survey, "The Central Valley of California, produces about 25 percent of the nation's table food on only 1 percent of the country's farmland." The numbers are staggering, and many of us wonder how anyone with eyes to see could be so oblivious to the industry that we interact with on a daily basis. This problem is a paramount one. If upcoming generations are not fully aware of

the scale and importance of agriculture and how it plays into our everyday lives, we agriculturally minded folks are in big trouble. With voters and lawmakers that aren't ag literate, we can expect to see even more harmful regulations and decisions that encroach on farmland and make productive, efficient farming difficult.



The solution lies in visible public education and awareness. Agriculturists need to make an effort to publicize where the food is coming from! Just a thought- organizations, producers, and distributors could certainly use their shelf space to educate through informational labeling, or even by using well placed QR code boxes in stores, directly linking smartphone users to information about the produce, cheeses or other products, that they will be purchasing. This information could include facts on how the products are grown or produced, and even grower spotlights to foster a healthy grower to consumer relationship. I believe marketing techniques such as these will make a huge difference in developing customers who are more ag literate. Well informed consumers who truly understand how food is produced are important to the future success of California agriculture.

Let's make a change for the better and give support to learning programs already in place in schools about agriculture and continue that education with a broader spectrum of marketing and informational tools that will allow those from the outside looking in to appreciate what is truly, the most important industry, not only here in California, but in the nation and the world.

Erica Stewart  
Ag Communication major  
Modesto Junior College

Farmland Working Group is *Working* every day to preserve our world class farmland, discourage urban sprawl and support farmland mitigation

**CONSIDER AN END OF YEAR DONATION!**



# Farmland Working Group

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 [www.farmlandworkinggroup.org](http://www.farmlandworkinggroup.org)

Planning Commissioners  
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Modesto, CA 95354

***SUPPORT FWG WITH AN END OF YEAR DONATION!***

## Our Wish for 2015

The statutory goals of LAFCO  
(Local Agency Formation Commission)...  
encourage the preservation of agricultural land and open space  
or conversely, to discourage urban sprawl.

Commissioners should be selected, solely,  
based on their commitment to the mission of the agency.

The Farmland Working Group hopes that  
the mayors and supervisors  
who appoint LAFCO commissioners, select members  
who are committed to LAFCO's intent and purpose.