

FARMLAND WORKING GROUP

Fall 2009

STRIVING TO PROTECT FOOD, FAMILIES AND FARMLAND

Two Stories of Farmland Protection in Stanislaus County

Supervisors Vote No On Development In Ag Buffer

Local farmland advocates are often labeled dreamers and told, "This valley is destined to become another Los Angeles Basin." Farmland Working Group has been spreading the word about our amazing resource – the most productive agricultural region in the world – for a decade.

Often our speech making and letter writing falls on deaf ears as poor land use policies move forward. Occasionally, the outcome is different, as was the appeal made to the Board of Supervisors in Stanislaus County on May 19, 2009.

In April, FWG member Jeani Ferrari spoke before the Turlock City Council, reminding members that plans to develop a golf driving range in the "greenbelt" north of Taylor Road were moving forward, stating, "Recently, the Stanislaus County Planning Commission approved a golf driving range in the agricultural buffer. The planning commissioners were not informed of the agreement between the City of Turlock and Stanislaus County. Over the years, commissioners have changed, as have supervisors and council members. In recent years, the document has been overlooked by staff, council, commissioners and supervisors."

Ferrari told the council, "I recently attended a General Plan Update for the City of Turlock... The meeting room was at capacity. Each table of eight was asked to describe a 'Dream Turlock' – fifty years forward. Every table indicated that it wanted Turlock to grow compactly and be surrounded by agricultural land... A general theme of the Turlock General Plan is to maintain

see Ag Buffer page 2

Our Mission: To preserve the agricultural foundation of our region and promote smart growth in our urban communities through education, outreach and action.

Modesto Farm Family Places First Conservation Easement in County

On a sunny August day, the Peter and Kathy Menghetti family gathered to celebrate the placement of an agricultural conservation easement on their family farm. The family was surrounded by friends, neighbors, local politicians and individuals who helped make the transaction a reality. The Central Valley Farmland Trust is the land trust that holds the agricultural conservation easement and arranged for funding. Funding came from California Farmland Conservancy Program, the Great Valley Center and Vance Kennedy.

As Peter and Kathy spoke to the gathering, it was evident that conserving the farmland was an easy decision. This ranch, its location, the quality water that serves it and the rich soil that nurtures it, should be conserved. And there was more, there was a history that should be built upon. The Menghetti family's partnership with the land began at the turn of the Twentieth Century.

Brothers Charles and Peter Menghetti purchased a 160 acre ranch on Maze Road, about three miles west of Modesto in 1918. The brothers were very astute farmers and purchased this particular ranch because of its excellent soils.

About half the ranch was planted in grapes and the other half was planted in row crops. Peter bought his brother's interest in about 1919. Charles' son Peter was born there and, with his wife Kathy, raised their four children, Charlie, Andrea, Anita and Paul on the ranch.

During the 1930's, Charles sold grapes back east, includ-

see Menghetti Easement page 2

Ag Buffer from page 1

Turlock, Keyes and Denair as free-standing communities surrounded by productive farms and orchards...

If the farmland between Turlock and Keyes is to remain, the agreement must be honored. The agricultural buffer is small. If every few years a parcel is allowed to be urbanized, soon there will be no real buffer... There will be a tipping point at which the exception becomes the rule... I hope that the City of Turlock and the county will work together to maintain this important buffer."

Ferrari followed through with a call to the City of Turlock Planning Department asking for a copy of the agreement. It wasn't anywhere to be found.

Staff asked, "When was it written?" Credit for coming up with a date for the original document can be given to Garth Stapley at The Modesto Bee – it was 1987.

On May 13, Ferrari sent a letter to the Board of Supervisors, Stanislaus County, asking to grant the Appeal for Condition Use Permit 2008-10 (thereby denying the project). The letter was read aloud by Ferrari at the hearing on May 19, 2009. Denny Jackman, Chair of Farmland Working Group, stated that farmland advocates frequently pointed to the official agreement as an example of "things that go right in Stanislaus County."

Supervisor Chiese, whose district includes Turlock, concluded that air-tight agreements on buffers between communities would help future decision makers to avoid such struggles. The vote was 3-2 with Chiesa, Grover and De-Martini voting to uphold the buffer.

"(The greenbelt) was very clear at the time. Everyone understood and agreed. But one of the realities of governance is that you can't obligate future policy-makers.

So, if there is no binding agreement, there is no mechanism for enforcement."

-- Carol Whiteside,
Great Valley Center
Founder

Farmland Working Group wasn't the only voice objecting to the project. Teri Nascimiento, whose family farms land adjacent to the proposed golf driving range, told the supervisors that their farming family didn't want conflicts with urban development. "We feel if this is allowed it would just open the door to the future growth in this area." The Stanislaus County Farm Bureau urged the supervisors to keep urban development out of the agricultural buffer. Neighbors in the Barnhart Road area between Keyes and Turlock signed a protest petition.

Supervisor Grover concluded, I couldn't agree more that the city of Turlock needs a golf practice facility. But I don't think it needs it here."

"We always felt (the greenbelt) was one of Turlock's literally defining features. Nobody ever wins with hopscotch planning."

-- Curt Andre, former Turlock mayor

Menghetti Easement from page 1

ing New York. In 1938, he converted the farm to a dairy, only to sell the cows nine years later. Charles converted the dairy to production farmland in 1947 and again planted grapes and row crops. He passed away in 1957.

Charles' son, Peter, first planted almonds in 1958 when there were only a few hundred acres of almonds in the entire state (currently there about 800,000 acres of almonds in California). Peter correctly anticipated that almond farming and production would enjoy unprecedented technological innovation and that there would be growing consumer demand for almonds.

The entire Menghetti ranch was planted to almonds by the mid-1960s. Peter has always been one of the most innovative farmers in the area: he was an early adopter of sprinkler irrigation; and he was one of the first almond growers in northern San Joaquin Valley to plant trees on berms. About twenty years ago Peter started planting walnuts on the ranch. About half of the ranch is now in walnuts, and the other half is almonds.

Jennifer Ray 2009 Scholarship Recipient



California's Central Valley has an obligation to continue utilizing its fertile soil and long growing seasons in order to provide a stable supply of agricultural products. It is one of the most productive agricultural regions in the world with four counties ranked in the top five for U.S. agricultural sales. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, California's population is expected to increase by 12 million people between 2000 and 2030. Much of that growth will occur in the Central Valley as land is less expensive compared to areas like Los Angeles and the Bay Area.

Development poses a threat to our farming and to the future of our state; farmland is a valuable resource lost forever. Though the perks urbanization offers may seem beneficial to our society – they are not tantamount to the importance of agriculture in accommodating for a growing population. We need to conserve and mitigate Central Valley farmland to preserve our agriculture industry and protect our future.

Agriculture is the key component of the valley economy, heritage and lifestyle. Central Valley agriculture feeds not only our fellow Californians, but our fellow Americans, even people of other world nations. With a growing world population, the need for agriculture is increasing. However, so is the amount of land lost to urban sprawl. More than 3 million acres of the best American farmland is lost every year – 50 acres every hour (American Farmland Trust). This needs to stop. We need to protect our farmland through conservation and mitigation in order to secure a bright future for the world.

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FWG Board Extends Scholarship Applications to Merced County

In 2008 the board voted to provide scholarship applications to all high school seniors attending public schools in Merced as well as Stanislaus County. Since 2005, the Farmland Working Group High School Scholarship has been offered only in Stanislaus County. Scholarships are given on a merit basis, chosen on the clarity illustrated by the author/artist in a written or visual response to a given topic or question. In 2009, FWG granted one scholarship to Jennifer Ray from Buhach Colony High School in Atwater, California.

Past recipients: 2005 – Christopher Hooten, Ceres High School; 2006 – Lance Azevedo, Theresa Melton, Ceres

High School and Elizabeth Allison, Beyer High School, Modesto, CA; 2007 – Garland Castaneda, Beyer High School, Modesto CA; 2008 – Victoria Kennedy, Modesto High School.

Scholarship applications can be downloaded from our website www.farmlandworkinggroup.org or obtained at all public high schools in Merced and Stanislaus counties through the counseling departments. New applications are available October 1 – completed applications are due March 28.



WE ARE WATCHING...

Stanislaus County www.co.stanislaus.ca.us

On May 19, 2009 the supervisors voted to appeal the proposed driving range at Taylor Road north of Turlock. In March, the county planning commissioners voted 5-1 to allow the driving range. County planning staff had recommended that the driving range be rejected. The action stops the 39-acre project scheduled to provide chipping and putting greens, a 53-space parking lot, 30-foot netting and 20-foot lights. For more than two decades, Stanislaus County has had an agreement with the City of Turlock to maintain a formal greenbelt protecting farmland between Keyes and Turlock.

The California Department of Transportation is expected to unveil a draft environmental document for the **North County Corridor**, kicking off a 45-day public comment period. Town hall meeting: Oakdale, October 13 from 5:30 – 8 p.m., Gene Bianchi Community Center, 110 S. Second Avenue; Riverbank, Oct 22 in the Riverbank Community Center, 3600 Santa Fe St., 5:30 – 8 p.m. The North County Corridor Authority begins meeting at a new time and place – 4:30 p.m. on the second Wednesday of each month in the boardroom of the Stanislaus Council of Governments office, 111 I St., Suite 308, Modesto – first meeting is Oct. 14.

City of Modesto www.modestogov.com

On November 3rd, the City of Modesto has five annexation areas on the ballot for advisory votes by Modesto voters. The five areas are separated into five measures: Measure A – The Kiernan Avenue Corridor, Measure B – College West (near Hwy 99 and Shoemake Avenue), Measure C – Upper McHenry Ave., Measure D – Tivoli North, and Measure E – Hetch-Hetchy (added at the last minute by the city council).

During this economic downturn it should be the time to practice smart growth. It isn't a time to practice old habits of sprawling out onto prime farmland, spreading city services ever more thinly. Modesto's elected officials should be looking inward where there is infrastructure in place, where jobs need to be created. Modesto needs to fill the storefronts and homes already built.

City of Turlock www.ci.turlock.ca.us

The city council unanimously empowered Mayor John Lazar to lobby county Supervisor Vito Chiese for clarification of the 1987 agreement to maintain an agricultural buffer between Turlock and the unincorporated community of Keyes.

Councilwoman Mary Jackson is working with volunteers to develop a plan to reintroduce a farmers market in Turlock in spring/summer 2010. The group meets monthly and participating are various city departments.

CSU Stanislaus professors, managers and graduate students, business owners, farmers and interested community members.

The group is developing a mission statement, goals and objectives, as well as determining a time, place and dates for the new market. If you are interested in joining the committee, please call or e-mail Mary Jackson, 585-7372 or mary4turlock@sbcglobal.net. The next meeting will be Monday, October 12, 1:00 pm at the Turlock Downtown Property Association office, 300 E. Main Street, Turlock.

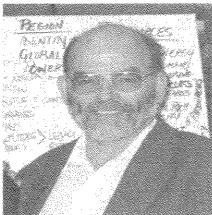
California High-Speed Rail www.cahighspeedrail.com

San Jose to Merced Section High Speed Train Public Meetings on Alternative Analysis

Attend a public meeting to learn about next steps in the environmental review High-Speed train project. The CHSR Authority will review alignment alternatives that may be studied in detail.

Merced – Tuesday, Oct. 6, 2009
6:00 - 8:00 p.m.
Merced Community Senior Center
755 West 15th Street

**Vote Smart
November 3**



Message from the Chair

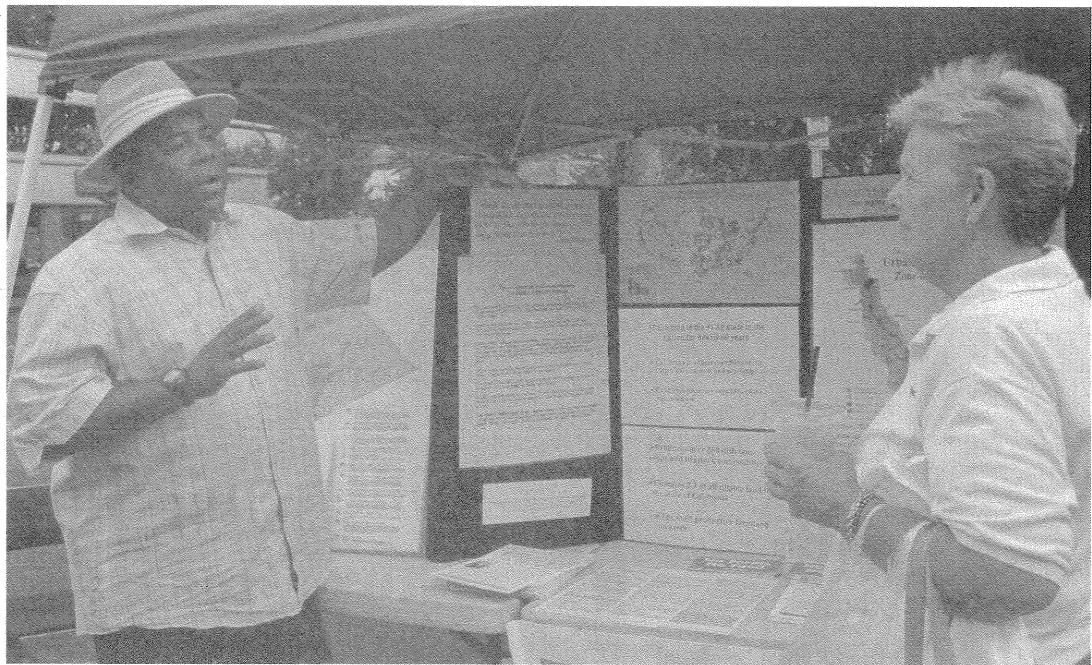
It seems appropriate that as the Farmland Working Group celebrates its tenth anniversary, its board is busier than ever. It's good to report two success stories for farmland protection and smart growth in this issue. For the residents of Stanislaus County, the appeal of the golf driving range and the placement of an agricultural conservation easement are good examples of "things that go right in Stanislaus County."

I hope that our members, as well as the general public, recognize the efforts, planning and energy required to help things "go right." The Farmland Working Group is a volunteer organization. Our board stays on top of land use issues, at city as well as county levels.

Since 2001, our newsletter has been a voice that inspires city and county leadership to move to its highest aspirations. Our newsletter empowers voters to help shape a future with farmland, locally grown food, compact and vibrant urban centers and food security for California as well as the entire nation.

We depend upon donations to help us get the word out through our newsletter. Since 2001, we have had three corporate sponsors: Bank of America, Dave Wilson Nursery and E. & J. Gallo Winery. This year we are honored to add a fourth sponsor, Garton Tractor. FWG realizes that each of these sponsors support their local and regional community on many levels. The Farmland Working Group is grateful for their support!

MODESTO SATURDAY FARMER'S MARKET



E. Timothy Parker at Farmland Working Group booth

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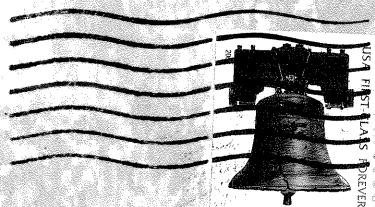
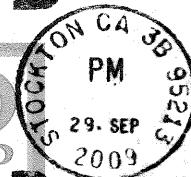
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Vote Smart

FARMLAND WORKING GROUP

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www.farmlandworkinggroup.org



The Farmland Working Group is celebrating a decade of promoting smart growth and farmland protection in our local region of the Great Central Valley of California – the most productive agricultural region the world has ever known.

*Planning Commissioners
Stanislaus County
1010 10th St #3400
Modesto, CA 95354

“We fought very hard to preserve that agricultural buffer. If Turlock as a community still has that vision, they need to make it known to the county Board of Supervisors. They don’t have all the history and understand the importance of what historically happened to make that boundary.”

-- Carolyn Lott, former Turlock city councilwoman