

AGP 16: AGRICULTURAL LAND CONSERVATION PROGRAMS.

April, 2009

Policy Statement:

It is the policy of the Agricultural Commissioner and the Planning Director through the county's Agricultural and Open Space Element to encourage and support efforts by non-profit and other conservation organizations to protect agricultural lands and maintain agricultural production.

Further, the policy directs the county to consider establishing a limited county program to acquire conservation easements or development rights from willing land owners. Such programs should encourage maximum flexibility for agricultural operations.

Implementation:

The policy directs the following activities:

1. a. *The Department of Planning and Building, in cooperation with the county Agriculture Department and the U.C. Cooperative Extension, should assist agricultural and conservation organizations in developing and implementing programs to conserve agricultural land.*

Discussion: The county Department of Planning and Building, county Agriculture Department and the U.C. Cooperative Extension continue to work with agricultural and conservation organizations to make prospective willing sellers and purchasers aware of the various strategies and programs that are available to protect agricultural lands and maintain agricultural production.

- b. *The agencies should prepare a public information brochure for distribution to the agricultural community making them aware of the advantages of participating in such programs.*

Discussion: The county Agriculture Department informs the agricultural community and others about agricultural land conservation programs on its website at www.slocounty.ca.gov/agcomm. The information contains links to organizations actively participating in farmland protection programs and examples of local conservation easements. The website is updated and maintained by the Agriculture Department, in lieu of the creation of a brochure.

2. *In cooperation and coordination with conservation organizations and other jurisdictions, the county should explore the possibility of establishing a program to protect agricultural lands by purchasing development rights and conservation easements from willing sellers, by offering long-term conservation easements, or through other innovative programs.*

Discussion: The county Agriculture Department explored the possibility of establishing a limited county program with the Agricultural Liaison Advisory Board (ALAB) during several ALAB meetings in 2008. At that time, ALAB members recommended against a program that would allow the county to acquire conservation easements or development rights from willing land owners. ALAB supported the continued reliance upon conservation organizations and others outside County Government to purchase or acquire through donations, easements from willing land owners to ensure long-term protection of agricultural resources. Farmland protection programs that seek non-regulatory, voluntary participation are desired over the county holding and administering easements.

3. *The County should actively pursue grant funds under provisions of the Agricultural Land Stewardship Program Act of 1995, to assist with the implementation measures contained in this Agricultural and Open Space Element.*

Discussion: The county is not currently pursuing grant funds under the Agricultural Land Stewardship Program Act of 1995, (California Farmland Conservancy Program) but continues to monitor available funding sources. There currently is no county program to administer grant funds.