
**FRESNO LOCAL AGENCY FORMATION COMMISSION (LAFCo)
EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT**

AGENDA ITEM No. 11B

DATE: June 4, 2008
TO: Local Agency Formation Commission
FROM: Rick Ballantyne, Executive Officer
Darrel Schmidt, Deputy Executive Officer
SUBJECT: Report on LAFCo/American Farmland Trust Workshop/Discussion on
Desired Future Actions Related to Agricultural Preservation Policies

Workshop Summary:

On May 9, 2008, Fresno LAFCo and American Farmland Trust co-hosted an Agricultural Land Preservation Workshop. The Workshop was attended by 72 persons representing public agencies, non-profit organizations, and local land developers. The Workshop's overall goal was to educate participants as to the state of agriculture land preservation within Fresno County and other parts of California and make them aware of current trends.

Information presented by agricultural experts and local elected governmental officials denoted that Fresno County's practice of urbanizing agricultural lands at low densities will have a substantial negative impact to the County's agricultural resources over time. The Workshop identified various methods to preserve agricultural lands that are presently used in other parts of California. LAFCo's legal liabilities and limitations to preserving agricultural lands were also discussed.

The Workshop highlights included:

- A presentation by Don Weden, retired Principal Planner for Santa Clara County. Mr. Weden's presentation identified "significant" land use and environmental changes that will take place within the next several decades resulting in significant impacts upon our living environment. He described how increased energy costs and greenhouse gases will affect our lifestyles. He discussed how State Assembly Bill No. 32 and its compliance will necessitate changes in how we deal with our land and transportation facilities. He concluded that California will have to provide housing opportunities at much greater densities as well as increased opportunities for public transit if we are to create livable communities and reduce greenhouse gas production that is resulting in "global warming".
- Ed Thompson of The American Farmland Trust identified agricultural land preservation techniques being used throughout the country. Such techniques include the creation of agricultural preserves and easements and more strategic approaches to land use planning.

- Jerry Prieto, Fresno County Agricultural Commissioner, discussed the present state of Fresno County agriculture and the effect that unplanned urbanization patterns are having upon our agriculture, especially on the County's east side (Golden Triangle Area).
- Kenneth Price, Fresno LAFCo Counsel, provided a perspective related to LAFCOs' abilities/limitations related to preserving agricultural land as per State law.
- LAFCo Executive Officers representing Monterey, Sacramento, Ventura, and Yolo Counties discussed their County's experiences (i.e. challenges and successes) with implementing agricultural land preservation policies.
- The Workshop concluded with presentations from four local governmental officials: Fresno LAFCo (Susan Anderson); Fresno County Board of Supervisors (Henry Perea); Cities Representative (Rico B. Aguayo, Fowler City Councilman); and the Council of Fresno County Governments (Nathan Magsig). These individuals shared their perspectives related to agricultural land preservation.

Discussion:

The recent "Agricultural Land Preservation Workshop" is but a small part of a larger effort currently taking place within Fresno County and the San Joaquin Valley. The Council of Fresno County Governments (Fresno COG) "Regional Blue Print" planning effort presently being funded by the State of California includes a "Model Farmland Conservation Program" component (directed by Edward Thompson, State Director of the American Farmland Trust) and a "Land Buffers" Task Force formed to investigate opportunities for greater individual City identity.

It is anticipated that through the Valley Blueprint effort that its growth concepts will be considered and approved by the 15 Cities and County in May, and that the Council of Fresno County Governments recommendations will then be forwarded on to become a part of the larger Valley-wide (eight counties) Blueprint Plan in June. Fresno County recommendations will likely include encouraging higher density development and higher capacity multi-modal transportation networks.

Staff believes that this is a significant endeavor that may well have a great influence on LAFCO's eventual agricultural preservation policies. If the cities and County (through the Blue Print planning process) voluntarily agree to adopt policies aimed at creating higher density living environments resulting in greater amounts of agricultural land preservation, it may very well make LAFCO's challenge that much easier.

It has been reported by Fresno COG that a final "Model Farmland Conservation Program Report" is expected in September or October. This report will likely identify a variety of agricultural land preservation "tools" which would be available for use by Fresno County and the 15 Cities. These may include higher density development that facilitates and supports viable public transit systems, and establishment of conservation easements and other acceptable preservation techniques.

Also of importance is consideration for adoption of a "Strategic Farmland Map" that has been prepared as a part of the Blue Print effort and will be considered by Fresno COG and its member agencies (Fresno County and the 15 Cities).

Recommendations:

Staff recommends that:

1. LAFCo not take any action at this time towards adoption of specific agricultural preservation policies until the Blue Print Regional Planning process has been completed and local agencies and the County have taken their action to adopt the Regional Plan and its policies. Once this process has been completed, staff will return back to the Commission and provide recommendations about the possibility of LAFCo considering and adopting a specific agriculture preservation policy.
2. The Commission direct its staff to continue its participation on the Steering Committees for the Valley Blue Print and the Model Farmland Conservation Program. Staff believes that it is important for the County and 15 Cities to be able to consider and adopt the Regional Plan that will address future growth patterns.