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The Sustainability Council of Ventura County

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Sustainability Council Survey Reveals Broad Consensus on Strategies to Save Agriculture Industry in Ventura County

The results of a survey of those with a direct stake in preserving agriculture show that there is already broad consensus in Ventura County about methods to support and save agriculture, a \$1.23 billion dollar per year industry.

The Sustainability Council of Ventura County surveyed 200 organizations and individuals, asking them to rate their agreement with eight strategies that, taken together, would curtail the conversion of agricultural land and preserve this vital industry.

On seven of the eight strategies, the vast majority of those responding -- over 80% in almost each case-- agreed they should be pursued. Only the strategy that would postpone the filing of the S. O. A. R. initiative, which would allow the development of agricultural land only by vote of the people, received deep disagreement, with 23% definitely disagreeing with the postponement and an equal 23% definitely agreeing, while 6% somewhat disagreed, 14% were neutral, and 29% somewhat agreed with postponing it.

On seven of the eight strategies surveyed, the consensus was very strong:

--97% somewhat or definitely agreed that the County Board of Supervisors should complete the Greenbelt system (by extending it east from Fillmore to the county line, which is adjacent to the proposed Newhall project in L. A. county);

--90% somewhat or definitely agreed that funding should be sought to enable the Ventura County Agricultural Land Trust to pay farmers for the loss of the right to develop their lands;

--90% somewhat or definitely agreed that inappropriate , non-farm uses for agricultural land should be eliminated;

--93% somewhat or definitely agreed that the county should adopt a "Right to Farm" ordinance, giving farmers certain rights that discourage nuisance complaints from nearby neighbors;

--74% somewhat or definitely agreed that cities need to delay expanding their spheres of influence, which can result in the seizure of agricultural land;

--83% somewhat or definitely agreed that "livable" community plans should be adopted that save space by infilling existing developed areas and by increasing housing densities in any new developments, designed as neighborhoods;

--73% somewhat or definitely agreed that cities ought to share sales tax revenues, in order to reduce competition to build new commercial complexes.

The Sustainability Council conducted this survey to sample what agreement already exists in the county among those familiar with agriculture issues. We sent surveys to farm groups, elected officials, county-wide environmental groups, professional planners, development interests, business groups, and others. The number of responses was typical of such an instrument-- 15% (with professional planners responding in the greatest numbers). The sampling of opinion was modest and the results not representative of the general population of the county. Nevertheless, we believe it clearly demonstrates the strong direction of local opinion. We therefore believe that farming groups, policy makers, and advocacy groups should devise a plan for systematically preserving agriculture that incorporates the strategies receiving broad support in the Sustainability Council survey.

The Sustainability Council bases its evaluation of issues on the principle that physical, social and economic systems are interconnected and that changes to one inevitably affect the others. We therefore urge that any plan devised be comprehensive and include the interdependent aspects of the issue, from sales tax policy to community design. Only then does the Council believe we will devise a sustainable plan that enables agriculture to remain an active component in an environmentally healthy, socially just, and economically viable region.