

# **The Sustainability Council of Ventura County**

Equitable Society, Sound Economy, Healthy Environment

2465 Hall Cyn. Rd. Ventura, CA 93001 (805) 653-2520

April 24, 1997

Dear Stakeholders:

Subject: **STRATEGIES TO SUSTAIN A VIABLE AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY**

**The Sustainability Council of Ventura County** is devoted to discovering creative and sustainable strategies for the well-being of the environment, society and the economy. Of significant importance to the health of Ventura County is the preservation of an economically viable agricultural industry. The Sustainability Council hopes to promote thoughtful public discussion of this issue through the attached materials. They consist of eight strategies followed by specific actions that could be implemented, and a survey form to assess support for the strategies. The strategies and actions for consideration are not formal recommendations by the Council or its individual members.

The importance of agriculture to the local economy has been systematically evaluated in a recent study sponsored by the Hansen Trust and the University of California Agricultural Extension Service. "The Value of Agriculture to Ventura County: An Economic Analysis" not only highlights the significant economic contribution made by this industry, but it also outlines how it is jeopardized by a steady loss of both agricultural land and essential support industries. It notes that a "critical mass" of land and support services must exist for the various segments of the industry if they are to prosper.

Fortunately, the study indicates there is still time to act to keep the industry viable and adaptable to new markets and conditions. For this reason the Sustainability Council is advancing the accompanying package of strategies in order to stimulate discussion, elicit additional strategies, and promote consensual solutions that key decision makers will implement to safeguard the county's agricultural industry.

We ask the stakeholders (and others who wish to participate) to rate their level of agreement with the proposals, provide supporting comments and suggestions, and forward this information to the above address by June 1, 1997. We will then tabulate and publish the results of the survey in hopes that they will promote community dialogue on sustaining our agricultural industry. All comments and suggestions are welcomed. Those responding will receive copies of the survey results. Any one wishing a copy of the Eight Strategies should send a self addressed stamped envelope to the Sustainability Council.

**The Sustainability Council Steering Committee**

**Sustainability Council Steering Committee:** Roma Armbrust, Jerry Beckerman, Ron Bottorff, Robert Chianese, Todd Collart, Janet Dillon, Scott Ellinwood, Harry Gaskill, Steve Kinney, Paul Mattson, Gail Pringle, David Sargent, Jon Sharkey, Debbie West

## STAKEHOLDERS LIST

Ventura County Farm Bureau  
Hansen Trust  
California Planning and Development Report  
City Councils  
Board of Supervisors  
Ventura County Agricultural Policy Advisory Committee  
Save Open Space and Agricultural Resources (SOAR)  
Ventura County Taxpayers Association  
Ventura County Agricultural Land Trust and Conservancy  
Planning Commissions  
Ojai Valley Land Conservancy  
Light House Farm Group  
Coastal Conservancy  
Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO)  
University of California Cooperative Extension  
League of Women Voters  
Ventura County Agricultural Commissioner  
Ventura Council of Governments (VCOG)  
Newspaper Editors  
Ventura County Economic Development Association (VCEDA)  
Ventura County Alliance of Taxpayers  
American Institute of Architects (local AIA chapter)  
Save Open Space  
American Association of Planners (local APA chapter)  
Building Industry Association (BIA)  
Chambers of Commerce  
Cattlemens Association  
California State University Northridge (CSUN - Ventura Center)  
Association of Water Agencies  
Environmental Coalition  
Sierra Club  
University of California Santa Barbara (UCSB - Ventura Center)  
California State University Channel Islands (CSUCI)  
California Lutheran University  
Pacific Agribusiness Alliance  
Ventura County Community College District  
Building Trades Union  
United Farm Workers of America  
Port of Hueneme-Oxnard Harbor District  
Ventura Production Credit Association



# **EIGHT STRATEGIES TO SUSTAIN A VIABLE AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY IN VENTURA COUNTY**

The Sustainability Council of Ventura County hopes to promote thoughtful public discussion of this issue through the eight strategies that follow. They are not formal recommendations by the Council or its individual members, but are advanced in order to stimulate discussion, elicit additional strategies, and promote consensual solutions that key decision makers will implement to foster a sustainable agricultural industry in Ventura County.

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**STRATEGY #1. COMPLETE THE GREENBELT SYSTEM** - The proposed Newhall development in Los Angeles County will inevitably impact Ventura County. Ironically, the only prime agricultural land in the County not covered by a Greenbelt Agreement is adjacent to this proposed development and partially owned by the Newhall corporation. No greenbelt exists from Fillmore east. This land is no less valuable than other farmland and, absent a greenbelt designation, may be an implicit invitation for development.

## **SPECIFIC ACTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:**

1. Petition the Board of Supervisors to establish a greenbelt throughout the Piru Area of Interest.
2. Petition The Board of Supervisors, the City of Fillmore and LAFCO to establish a greenbelt in the Fillmore Area of Interest.
3. Evaluate existing greenbelt agreements and revise them if necessary to ensure they function as an integrated farmland protection program with common provisions, amendment procedures and expiration dates.

**STRATEGY #2. SEEK FUNDING FOR THE VENTURA COUNTY AGRICULTURAL LAND TRUST** - The creation of greenbelts, general plans, and zoning which designate farmland for agricultural purposes has left the owners of such lands feeling deprived of their development "rights." Land trusts have been created to address this concern. One exists in Ventura County, but it has not had a ready way to secure land or development rights from farmers. A serious study needs to be made of ways to fund the land trust so that farmers who wish to participate in the program can be accommodated.

## **SPECIFIC ACTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:**

1. Study and implement new methods of funding the Land Trust, such as the following:
  - A. Private contributions.
  - B. Publicly approved taxes on property, purchases, land transfers , etc.
  - C. Development credits that are transferable and marketable such as air pollution credits.
2. Petition entities such as the Coastal Conservancy and Hansen Trust to sponsor studies of funding alternatives.



**STRATEGY #3. ELIMINATE INAPPROPRIATE USES IN AGRICULTURAL AREAS -**

While the cities have confined urban development to areas within their Spheres of Influence, some non-agricultural development has occurred on farmland in unincorporated areas. If the cities are being asked to address the continuing loss of farmland, the County should assess the appropriateness of non-farming uses in agricultural areas.

SPECIFIC ACTION FOR CONSIDERATION: Petition the Board of Supervisors to direct a review of the uses allowed in agricultural areas with the aim of reducing the number of potential uses that may take farmland, and thereafter amend the Zoning Ordinance accordingly.

**STRATEGY #4. ADOPT A RIGHT TO FARM ORDINANCE COUNTY WIDE -**

The County has a "right to farm ordinance" that protects farmers from nuisance actions if they are farming in a customary and accepted manner. The problem is that people affected by farming operations usually live within cities and are not aware of this ordinance. If farming is to remain viable, farmers must be able to work their land with minimal interference. The adoption of a right to farm ordinance that notified city dwellers of neighboring farming activities would help reduce conflicts between farmers and residents who support the preservation of farmland and enjoy it as open space.

SPECIFIC ACTION FOR CONSIDERATION: Petition the city councils and the Board of Supervisors to support the development and adoption of a constructive county-wide right to farm ordinance that would reduce the nuisance burdens borne by farmers near cities.

**STRATEGY #5. DELAY CITY SPHERE OF INFLUENCE EXPANSIONS -** There are several cities currently considering expansions to their Spheres of Influence. Such expansions would give them the right to annex new land, often agricultural land, with virtually no restrictions. Ventura County is unique among all counties for its Guidelines for Orderly Development and the cities and the County should be applauded for abiding by these Guidelines over the past 25 years. Doing so has saved much agricultural land while accommodating new development. The 1996 Value of Agriculture Study notes that critical amounts of farmland are still being lost even though the cities and the County have adhered to the forward-thinking Guidelines. The role of Spheres of Interest around cities should be assessed in light of the recent findings on agricultural viability and LAFCO's legal mandate to safeguard farmland.



**SPECIFIC ACTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:**

1. Petition LAFCO and the cities to study existing Sphere boundaries and the parameters by which they are established to determine if they should be altered in order to secure the threshold acreages of farmland necessary to keep agriculture viable. Such adjustments might include:
  - A. more compact city Sphere boundaries of the same acreage.
  - B. trade-offs for additions to Sphere boundaries so there is no net increase in the Sphere's area.
  - C. require conditions on developments on newly annexed land to protect adjacent agricultural lands, e.g. buffers areas, fences, run-off protection, etc.
2. Petition the cities to delay requests for net expansions of their Spheres pending the outcome and implementation of the above LAFCO Sphere study.

**STRATEGY #6. DELAY FILING FURTHER S.O.A.R. INITIATIVES** - In 1995

residents of the City of Ventura adopted an initiative that precluded urban development on lands designated "agriculture" in the City's general plan without majority approval by the electorate. Citizens in other communities are considering the adoption of similar measures in an effort to control development and prevent the conversion of more farmland. Such measures do slow (or stop) farmland conversion, but they are cumbersome alternatives to landuse policies that otherwise preserve farmland. If other measures such as those discussed above were implemented in a timely manner new S.O.A.R. measures may not be necessary.

**SPECIFIC ACTION FOR CONSIDERATION:** Petition the S.O.A.R. sponsors to delay filing their initiatives in order to see if a sufficient number of the recommendations contained herein are implemented to the degree that would make further S.O.A.R. initiatives unnecessary.

**STRATEGY #7. ADOPT DEVELOPMENT POLICIES THAT PRESERVE AGRICULTURAL LAND AND FOSTER LIVABLE COMMUNITIES** - Cities will continue to expand as long as population increases. Often the new development occurs on farmland. While generally true, this is not a necessity. Numerous studies, including ones recently authored by the Bank of America and the local "Value of Agriculture Study", show that traditional patterns of development are often inefficient and costly for local government. Additionally, they do not always lead to safe, quality environments in which to live. In response to such studies, concepts embodied in the Livable Communities movement are being explored locally at the behest of the Ventura County Council of Governments (VCOG). Alternative development patterns need to be honestly explored which allow cities to meet population demands in ways that will minimize unnecessary development of farmland.



SPECIFIC ACTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

1. Urge all segments of the development community, local government and citizens to participate in the Livable Communities program sponsored by VCOG to learn of alternative development patterns.
2. Petition each jurisdiction to adopt the "Awahnee" principles of development which reduce impacts on farmland, while providing for quality living environments that are more economical for cities to maintain.
3. Petition each jurisdiction to adopt policies in their general plans and zoning ordinances, based on the findings of the "Value of Agriculture Study," which promote the preservation of agricultural land.

**8. SHARE SALES TAX DOLLARS** - Local government lacks sensible funding mechanisms to provide needed public services. As a result sales taxes have become a major source of revenue, particularly for cities. "Zoning for dollars" has become a common practice that pits jurisdictions against one another for desperately needed revenue. The quest for increased sales tax revenue is often at the expense of farmland.

A drive along HWY 101 from Ventura to Thousand Oaks will illustrate the point. As long as cities must chase sales taxes they will be in competition with one another to build more commercial centers in an attempt to capture the purchases (and sales taxes) of their residents and those of the neighboring cities. Often these attempts to install the latest retail center comes at the expense of the city itself because of subsidies that it must pay the retail developer. The net gain in revenue is certainly speculative and there are ample examples where such efforts have failed to deliver an improved bottom line.

The addition of more retail space has not always been accompanied by a commensurate increase in the area's purchasing power. In effect if butterflies were retail dollars, each city has simply sent more collectors into the fields with very expensive nets to chase after the same number of butterflies. Would it not be better to agree on a limited number of collectors who share their catch on some equitable basis? Wouldn't a sales tax sharing formula make more sense than further loss of farmland and more subsidies for more retail centers competing for marginal increases in consumer spending?

SPECIFIC ACTION FOR CONSIDERATION: Challenge the taxpayer groups and educational institutions to work with the cities and the County to devise and implement a sales tax sharing formula that is fair, avoids "zoning for dollars" at the expense of sound land use decisions, and provides predictable revenue sources which local government desperately needs.

## ASSESSING SUPPORT FOR THE PROPOSED EIGHT STRATEGIES

Please indicate your level of agreement with the need to pursue the eight strategies discussed above by circling a 1 to 5 value as outlined below. Add any comments in the spaces provided.

Please return this assessment and any comments by June 1st to the:

Sustainability Council of Ventura County, 2465 Hall Cyn. Rd., Ventura, CA 93001

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### **STRATEGY #1. Complete the Greenbelt System**

1 Definitely Disagree; 2 Somewhat Disagree; 3 Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 Somewhat Agree; 5 Definitely Agree

### **STRATEGY #2. Seek Funding for the county Agricultural Land Trust**

1 Definitely Disagree; 2 Somewhat Disagree; 3 Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 Somewhat Agree; 5 Definitely Agree

### **STRATEGY #3. Eliminate Inappropriate Uses in Agricultural Areas**

1 Definitely Disagree; 2 Somewhat Disagree; 3 Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 Somewhat Agree; 5 Definitely Agree

### **STRATEGY #4. Adopt a Right to Farm Ordinance County Wide**

1 Definitely Disagree; 2 Somewhat Disagree; 3 Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 Somewhat Agree; 5 Definitely Agree

### **STRATEGY #5. Delay the Expansion of City Spheres of Influence**

1 Definitely Disagree; 2 Somewhat Disagree; 3 Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 Somewhat Agree; 5 Definitely Agree



**STRATEGY #6. Delay Filing Further S.O.A.R. Initiatives**

1 Definitely Disagree; 2 Somewhat Disagree; 3 Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 Somewhat Agree; 5 Definitely Agree

**STRATEGY #7. Adopt Development Policies that Preserve Agricultural Land and Foster Livable Communities**

1 Definitely Disagree; 2 Somewhat Disagree; 3 Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 Somewhat Agree; 5 Definitely Agree

**STRATEGY #8. Share Sales Tax Dollars**

1 Definitely Disagree; 2 Somewhat Disagree; 3 Neither Agree or Disagree; 4 Somewhat Agree; 5 Definitely Agree

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Name	Stakeholder Group	Date
Address	City	Zip
Phone Number	FAX Number	email

**I wish to be contacted about assisting in (check the applicable choices):**

- ☐ tabulating the results
- ☐ publishing the results
- ☐ hosting a community dialogue on ways to save agricultural land
- ☐ working with the Sustainability Council on the preservation of the agricultural industry