



Santa Lucia Chapter
P.O. Box 15755
San Luis Obispo, CA 93406
(805) 543-8717
www.santalucia.sierraclub.org

April 19, 2013

TO: Coastal Commissioners

RE: Your May 2013 ag policy workshop

In San Luis Obispo County, the implementation of policies that could be put in place to ensure the viability of agriculture is something we are keenly aware of by virtue of its absence. Because such policies are not in place, farmers and ranchers are being forced to fight over a claim to income from activities that are not related to the direct marketing of that agriculture and are out of scale to the site; events that would be allowed in such high numbers they would not be secondary to agriculture and would cause the term “incidental and secondary” in our existing Agricultural Policy to lose its meaning.

Policies that should be implemented to ensure the viability of our agriculture should realize the goal of aiding small and midsize producers by helping to provide the infrastructure they need for storing, packing, processing, shipping and distribution. We need support for local food stores -- help with the permit process, mini grants, and helping farmers establish relationships with service providers.

Our farmers need policies that improve their ability to provide food to farm-to-school programs. With the school districts as major purchasers, farmers would have significant incentive to expand existing operations. We would actually see new farms, and new opportunities for service providers like processors and distributors. Part of making that happen means helping small farmers get access to processing facilities. Processing value-added products is something we should do before we consider vastly expanding ag tourism and permitting non-agricultural uses of ag land.

The adoption by Organics Conversion Policies and Local Food Purchase Policies would enhance the value of agricultural operations and forestall their loss to development, as well as enhance the local economy by keeping food purchase dollars local. As recounted on the W.K. Kellogg Foundation’s “Food and Society” website:

In June 2005, Woodbury County, Iowa, passed an [“Organics Conversion Policy”](#), offering up to \$50,000 annually in property tax rebates for those who convert from conventional to organic farming practices. The policy is intended to address a growing problem in Iowa—rural population decline resulting from the growth of large commodity farms. Because the average age of a farmer in Woodbury County is 57—over half of the county’s farmland will need to change hands in the next 10-15 years. The County needs new farmers to continue its agricultural tradition. “We want to make it economically possible for young families to enter farming—our next generation of farmers,” said George Boykin, Chairman of the [Woodbury County Board of Supervisors](#).

On January 10, 2006, the County also became the first in the United States to mandate the purchase of locally grown, organic food. The [“Local Food Purchase Policy”](#) requires Woodbury County departments to purchase locally grown, organic food from within a 100 mile radius for regular city use. The policy has the potential to shift \$281,000 in annual food purchases to a local farmer-operated cooperative, increasing local demand and spurring increased production and processing.

The policy also helps build connections between area farmers. Since the county must work with a contractor and broker, the farmers must network to aggregate supply. Together they are building an infrastructure that supports a locally-owned and controlled food system.

The “Local Food Purchase Policy” supports the “Organic Conversion Policy,” providing a market for the farmers who convert to organic production. “In the end, we anticipate a quality local food brand emerging from the increased economic activity in our area,” says Rob Marquese, the Director of [Rural Economic Development](#) for Woodbury County.

Successful farmland protection programs combine substantial financial incentives to landowners with effective land use regulation. The American Farmland Trust wrote: “we all know we need our farms for the food and fiber they grow. But now, in addition, it is becoming clear that our farms can also provide critical environmental services like sequestering carbon, filtering water and providing wildlife habitat. So it is not a choice! Saving economically viable farms and securing their help in maintaining environmental quality for our communities are both vital to the survival of countless species as well as to our health, economy, and quality of life.”

In emerging carbon markets, farmers and ranchers should be paid for adopting practices that reduce greenhouse gases, such as grass and tree plantings, conservation tillage, and producing low-carbon renewable energy.

Policies should encourage the use of agricultural conservation easements that can cover an entire parcel or a portion. The farmer doesn’t have to keep farming, but agrees to maintain the land such that farming could resume in the future, ensuring that other farmers know the critical land mass will always be there. Policies that secure the above results also meet our obligation to cut greenhouse gas emissions: food is transported a shorter distance, reducing the fuel needed to ship it, and the energy needed to cool it, package, and transport it.

We have attached two articles as they appeared in the October and November 2009 issues of our newsletter, the *Santa Lucian*, reprinted from the *Santa Ynez Valley News*. They represent the clearest illustration we have ever seen of the reasons why non-agricultural uses of ag land must be accessory and incidental to the agricultural use of the land. We concur with the conclusion of the authors:

“Our rural landscape is protected by supporting the evolution of agriculture — but converting agricultural lands to commercial entertainment venues is contrary to achieving the goal.”

Thank you for your attention to these matters,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "GJM", is written over a light blue horizontal line. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Greg McMillan
Chapter Chair