



March 1, 2010

The Honorable Arnold Schwarzenegger
State Capitol Building
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Greenhouse Gas Benefits of Williamson Act Subventions

Dear Governor Schwarzenegger:

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Sacramento Area Council of Governments, I strongly encourage you to restore subventions for the California Land Conservation (Williamson) Act in your May Budget Revise—to not fund them threatens AB 32 and SB 375 implementation. For \$30 million annually, 16.5 million acres of farmland statewide (740,000 acres in our six-county region) are protected from urban sprawl. As you know, transportation is the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in our state, and extending our urban footprint onto agricultural lands will cause increases in vehicle miles traveled. In many respects, funding the Williamson Act is really a proxy for funding AB 32 and SB 375 implementation.

SACOG has analyzed how urban growth and related vehicle movement and carbon emissions would change if Williamson Act lands were converted to urban uses. The results show significant negative impacts on our region's Blueprint plan to slow urban sprawl and reduce emissions. As much as 22 percent of the population that would have otherwise locate in Blueprint growth areas could end up in low-density rural development. One day's worth of carbon emissions from vehicle miles alone from new households would roughly equal one year's worth of carbon emissions from agricultural vehicles.

We looked at the *daily* impacts of development at 1 and 5 housing units per acre. According to our analysis of just the six-county region alone:

- if 20,000 acres of Williamson Act land were developed at 1 unit per acre, daily vehicle emissions for those households would increase by 508 tons of carbon, and at 5 units per acre, vehicle emissions would increase by 2,543 tons; and
- if 60,000 acres of Williamson Act land were developed—less than 10 percent of the lands currently protected in the SACOG region—*daily* carbon emissions from resulting households would range from 1,526 to 7,631 tons.

How does this compare to current emissions from agricultural uses? These lands are currently in agriculture—about half of which is pasture—where vehicle and equipment use occurs in terms of hours per year rather than miles per day. Using University of California Cooperative Extension data, we estimate that agricultural vehicles emit 455 tons of carbon *per year* on 20,000 acres, and 1,365 tons *per year* on 60,000 acres. Even if vehicle activity on pasture acreage was at the average level for agriculture, the emissions would range from 2,300 to 6,901 tons *per year*—still around the *daily* average for urban uses. While we did not include farm-to-market truck activity, we still content that carbon emissions from agriculture vehicles are considerably lower.

In addition to the greenhouse gas benefits, subventions protect agricultural lands, support agriculturally based economies, and provide environmental services such as flood control, carbon sequestration, and habitat conservation. Without subventions and a healthy agriculture industry, many counties may look to develop these lands to address budget shortfalls that affect emergency, health, and other services.

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Tax relief is required for many agricultural producers to stay in business. Unable to afford property taxes, many would be forced to sell their land for development. The California Farm Bureau Federation recently polled Williamson Act participants and found that one in three could not continue farming or ranching without the program. Preventing the conversion of these farmlands to urban uses is critical.

Williamson Act subventions are one of the most broad-reaching and effective programs to achieve economic and environmental sustainability in the state. Considering the multi-billion dollar return from a roughly \$30 million annual investment, we strongly encourage you to restore the Williamson Act subventions.

Sincerely,



Mike McKeever
Executive Director

MM:DS:ef

cc: Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg
Assembly Speaker Perez
Senator Sam Aanestad
Senator Dave Cox
Senator Lois Wolk
Assemblymember Joan Buchanan
Assemblymember Ted Gaines
Assemblymember Alyson Huber
Assemblymember Dave Jones
Assemblymember Roger Niello
Assemblymember Jim Nielsen
Assemblymember Mariko Yamada