

## **Dixon/Davis greenbelt expands**

*By Barry Eberling*

FAIRFIELD - A greenbelt of preserved farmland separating Dixon and Davis continues to grow.

It started with the 300-acre McConeghy farm last year. Now the 146-acre Ebey-Laughtin farm is part of the greenbelt. This is a key piece, because it is north of Interstate 80 near the Kidwell Road exit.

"Permanently shielding this farmland from development is a critical part of establishing an agricultural buffer, something the people in these communities desire," state Secretary for Resources Mike Chrisman said in a press release.

The state Department of Conservation late last week announced the \$2 million deal to retire the development rights for Ebey-Laughtin farm. The state is contributing \$971,500, Davis \$810,000, the Solano Land Trust \$115,000 and Dixon \$20,000.

This money goes not to buy the land itself, but only development rights. This is called a conservation easement. A private party has bought the land and can use it for farming, but not development.

A similar method was used with the McConeghy farm. The state and local agencies bought the development rights for \$3.7 million in that case. Private parties then bought the land, getting a cheaper-than-usual price because they didn't get development rights.

The Leatherby family bought the southern portion of the McConeghy farm. The Leatherbys plan to grow nuts there for their ice cream business.

Rich and Shelly Collins bought the northern portion of the McConeghy farm and the Ebey-Laughtin farm. They plan to work with other farmers to create a commercial farming venture that markets produce directly to the public, the press release said.

Rich Collins is president of California Vegetable Specialties in Rio Vista, a company that produces endive, which comes from chicory roots.

Meanwhile, the Solano Land Trust is working on preserving two other properties in the north county to become part of the Dixon/Davis greenbelt. It is seeking grant money from the state.

One property is called the Miles Ranch and is 292 acres. The land is located along I-80 near Pedrick Road, near the McConeghy and Ebey-Laughtin properties. Crops such as tomatoes and sunflower seeds are grown there, a county report said.

The other is along Putah Creek near Stevenson Bridge and is 593 acres. The land is owned by the Catholic Diocese of Sacramento and is leased to grow such crops as tomatoes and wheat, the report said.