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STATE GRANT ASSISTS SOLANO LAND TRUST, FARMER IN PERMANENTLY PROTECTING PRIME FARMLAND

Easement Adds to Greenbelt Between Cities of Vacaville and Dixon

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SACRAMENTO – A newly completed project in Solano County will permanently shield 237 acres of prime farmland from development and expand a greenbelt between two growing communities. Grants from the California Department of Conservation and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service made it possible for the Solano Land Trust to create an agricultural conservation easement on the acreage, which adjoins the Vacaville-Dixon Greenbelt.

“We’re pleased that this family farm will always remain in agricultural use,” said California Secretary for Resources Mike Chrisman. “Protecting valuable agricultural land helps communities plan effectively for local development, keeps wildlife habitat available, and contributes to a strong economy.”

The Escano family farmed the acreage until retiring in the early 1990s, at which time the property was leased to tenant farmer Tom Galindo. The Solano Land Trust (SLT) purchased the first 152 acres of land from the Escanos in 2003. SLT purchased the remaining 85 acres and sold the farm to the Galindo family in July 2006 with an agricultural conservation easement in place. With the development potential removed, Tom Galindo and his wife Joy were able to purchase the farm based on its agricultural value. The transaction further reduces pressure from rural ranchette development in the Dixon Ridge area.

“As the state’s population continues to grow, it becomes increasingly important to preserve our top-quality farmland such as this acreage in Dixon Ridge,” Department of Conservation Director Bridgett Luther said.

The state and federal government each contributed \$462,500 towards the purchase of the easement.

The California Department of Conservation’s contribution came from the bond-funded California Farmland Conservancy Program (CFCP), designed to support local efforts to shield the state’s most

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Solano County farmland protected 2-2-2

valuable farmland from development. Local governments and non-profit organizations can receive CFCP grants to purchase development rights from willing landowners, thus creating permanent conservation easements. To date, the CFCP has provided more than \$46 million to permanently preserve more than 33,000 acres for agricultural usage.

The federal funding came from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program (FRPP). The FRPP provides matching funds to help purchase conservation easements to keep productive farm and ranchlands in agriculture. Working through existing programs, NRCS partners with state, tribal, or local governments and non-governmental organizations to acquire conservation easements or other interests in land from landowners.

"We should never forget that some of our healthiest lands are also our 'working lands,' those in the caring hands of farmers and ranchers." said NRCS State Conservationist Lincoln "Ed" Burton. "The Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program provides one tool for helping the stewards of these lands keep them productive and protected."

Founded in 1986, Solano Land Trust (SLT) is a pioneering collaboration between farmers, environmentalists, developers, and local government with the goal of preserving the county's agricultural legacy and natural landscapes. SLT's mission is to permanently preserve and protect farmlands, open space, wetlands, and wildlife habitat. The trust (www.solanolandtrust.org) owns 10 properties comprising more than 10,500 acres, valued in excess of \$16 million, and holds easements on 14 properties comprising 5,800 acres, valued at about \$11 million.

"We're very pleased to have permanently preserved this prime farmland while making it possible for longtime tenant Tom Galindo and his wife Joy to purchase the property," said Marilyn Farley, Executive Director of the Solano Land Trust. "The farm is located in a high-priority area in SLT's strategic plan for agricultural protection because of its excellent soils."

California's agricultural production totaled nearly \$33 billion in 2004, by far the most in the nation. However, land is being urbanized throughout the state at an ever-increasing rate. According to the most recent Department of Conservation farmland conversion report, 93,000 acres — 29 percent of it irrigated farmland — were urbanized between 2000 and 2002.

Landowners and trusts are encouraged to visit www.conservation.ca.gov/dlrp to learn more about the state's farmland protection programs. The NRCS has information available regarding soil surveys to assist farmers in making the best land use plans for the natural capabilities of their area soils. Visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/Programs.

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